Digital Inclusion for Roma Adults:

Gaining Knowledge and Skills in eServices (DIRA)

reference number: 2022-1-FI01-KA220-ADU-000086385

DIRA Project Report

"Digital skills in the Roma community"

Results of the survey implemented by DIRA Project in Finland, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia

Summary

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1.Introduction

This report is an outcome of the DIRA Project - Digital Inclusion for Roma Adults: Gaining Knowledge and Skills in eServices (DIRA) - reference number: 2022-1-FI01-KA220-ADU-000086385 funded under the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The DIRA project intends to achieve inclusive societies in which Roma adults enjoy equal rights and access to services and knowledge. Roma adults will benefit from increased knowledge and skills in using digital tools and eServices. Moreover, the project will impact policies on the Roma, establishing cooperation to build a model of good practice for Roma adult education and eServices at local, regional, national and international levels.

The main objective of the project is the improvement of the socio-economic state of Roma adults through IT education and development of digital skills. The project focuses on competences to enable the adult population and socially excluded people to start using electronic services available in their surroundings and to become better included in their communities and societies. To achieve its objectives, the project implements activities which strengthen Roma adults' digital skills and use of eServices. These include developing the DIRA learning platform and training material, training of trainers and training the Roma on using the learning platform and eServices. All activities are conducive to the transversal objective of increasing Romas adults' language skills. A baseline study was carried out to better understand the needs and skills of Roma adults. Networking, information, dissemination and policy recommendations are also part of the project.

Project results consist of the developed DIRA learning platform, training material and trainings supporting Roma adults' capacity to use digital tools for eServices and in education. It is expected that the project will positively impact the transfer of knowledge within the Roma communities and that it will encourage them to participate in adult education also in future. DIRA project influences policies and practical work of different stakeholders. It also increases knowledge and skills of the participating partner organizations. These are all connected to the goals and activities of the DIRA projects.

The project offers open access to the developed DIRA learning platform and material supporting adult education.

DIRA is a project that involves five international partners - in Italy (Romni-APS), Serbia (Udruzenje Gradjana Djurdjevdan), North Macedonia (University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola Faculty of Information and Communication Technologies), North Macedonia (Sumnal) and Finland (Helsinki Deaconess Institute Foundation).

Funded by the Erasmus+ program through the Key Action 2, the program offers different countries opportunities to upgrade their knowledge in improvement of the socio-economic state of Roma adults via non-formal education.

2. Methodology

Objectives of the baseline study

The development of this baseline study was possible thanks to the answers provided by the Roma participants to the survey based on a common set of questionnaires developed by the project partners. The questionnaire comprises a transnational part, common to the baseline study in all partner countries and an additional section with questions adapted to the national context and needs. The questionnaire was developed through joint work of all partners as part of the project.

The baseline study is a tool of fundamental importance to:

1. Identify the situation of the Roma in the various countries as regards the level of digital education and access to local, national and international digital services

2. Identify (as a consequence of point 1) the concrete needs of the Roma for the development of digitization

3. Clarify the objectives of the project after identifying the main difficulties of the Roma in the development of digital skills

This survey evaluates digital competences, online behavior, and the employment training needs of the Roma communities present in Finland, Italy, Macedonia and Serbia. The results of the questionnaires constitute the average of each response given by the interviewees, coming from the four different countries.

The research examined the use of IT devices by the Roma, including aspects such as the type of devices used, the intensity of use, the main platforms/websites that are accessed, the main activities carried out online, the possibility of using the e-services and the Microsoft Office package, the critical reading ability, the ability to identify fake news and the incitement to hatred, knowing how to use basic online applications and services. The questionnaire was designed to probe the training needs of this group, as to the necessity to improve digital skills and to be able to successfully access online training, services, job search and social services.

Quantitative Survey: Transnational and National Reports

The research design, implementation, analyses and reporting were performed by DIRA project partners, all Roma-led civil society organizations active in and for Roma communities, without external professional help.

The analyses presented in this report are based on the average of quantitative data collected by the 201 general questionnaires (equal for all participants) carried out in Finland, Italy, Macedonia and Serbia. The quantitative data were obtained through a survey based on 16 questions administered online or live: each country has carried out the survey according to the specific needs of the Roma population of its country. Most of the questions were closed.

The transnational part of the questionnaire, the same for all partner countries, was complemented by project partners with additional country- and context- specific questions.

Each country has carried out the survey according to the specific needs of the Roma population of its country. Methodologies for the field work necessary to grant adequate and diverse samples of the respondents for the survey are described in the National Reports.

Data were collected through the Google Form tool and analysed in SPSS or Excell. For the presentation of the results, the quantitative data were then transformed in the form of graphs.

The results of the transnational survey are presented cumulatively here in the section "Results". The results analysed in detail for every project country are presented in the DIRA Project National Reports for Finland, Italy, Serbia and Macedonia.

Methodology: Finland

This analysis is based on a mix between quantitative and qualitative data collected by the Deaconess Foundation in Finland in the period of October – November 2022. The quantitative data was obtained through a survey based on 25 questions administered online via google forms, which collected 49 responses from Roma people living in Helsinki. The majority of questions were closed, while a few of them were open, allowing respondents to explain their chosen answer. The quantitative data was then analyzed in SPSS and presented in the form of graphs, as well as a list of responses to the open questions.

Methodology: Italy

The transnational and the national survey were carried out by Romni APS in Italy in the period of October – November 2022. Given the critical situation of marginalization, of poor schooling and digital education of the Roma residing in Italy and thanks to previous experiences in field research with Roma community, Romni association adopted a methodology based on personal encounters. This was deemed the most adequate way to convince people to participate, obtain truthful answers and register them correctly.

The questionnaires were printed on paper. Subsequently, the personnel in charge went directly to some Roma camps in Rome and helped the Roma participants to fill in the paper questionnaires. All participants were assisted and interviewed by two professionals, a Roma girl of Slavic origin able to speak several Roma dialects and languages of the former Yugoslavia and a girl of Italian origin. Once the questionnaires have been completed, the

answers of each questionnaire were inserted on the Google Drive form where the questionnaire in digital format was present.

Based on these facts and the local situation of the Roma mentioned in the introduction, we can consequently summarize the responses to the polls.

Our methodology, to receive accurate answers on the polls, was based on:

1. *Explain:* some questions, words, phrases are difficult to understand for the interviewees and also the explanation of why they have to respond to the polls was rather intense.

2. *Direct and guide* the interviewees to answer questions - many of them are illiterate in reading and writing, but they also have difficulty understanding

3. *Help* the interviewees to think of possible answers and, finally,

4. *Find* the solutions and the final answers in respect of the participants.

Methodology: Macedonia

The transnational and the national survey were carried out by the association SUMNAL in Macedonia. The survey was conducted from 14-18 November 2022 in Bitola with 50 adult Roma by 2 staff members of Sumnal. The staff members interviewed the Roma in person doing field work and also interviewing some of the beneficiaries of our services that came in our Center. Afterwards, their responses were entered in the digital version of Google Forms.

The majority of questions were closed, while a few of them were open, allowing respondents to explain their chosen answer. The quantitative data was then analyzed in SPSS and presented in the form of graphs, as well as a list of responses to the open questions.

Methodology: Serbia

The transnational and the national survey were carried out by the association of citizens- Udruzenje gradjana DJURDJEVDAN in SERBIA. One of the first activities on the project implied conducting a survey among the Roma population, age 18 and older, living on the territory of Municipality of Bela Palanka. Based on the latest census (2022), more than 2500 inhabitants have declared themselves as members of Roma national minority; 1100 of them adults (registered in Special Electoral Roll of National Minorities) who live in 12 villages, 4 in suburban settlements and in the town. Before going to the field and initiating the survey, our team made a visit plan in order to include all villages, settlements and streets within the town, making sure that the survey covered equal percentage of participants in terms of gender, age structure, place of residence and social-economic status.

The questionnaire was filled out by 50 survey participants, who were visited by the team "door-to-door" and were presented with modest food parcels as a token of appreciation for participating in the survey. During the implementation of this activity from October till December 2022, which lasted for four days, our team members visited 4 villages, 2 suburban settlements and three streets within the town.

After all the survey participants have filled out the questionnaires, our team members used Google Drive model to record the answers online.

Qualitative research

The quantitative baseline study was complemented by a qualitative piece of research developed by the project partner The Deaconess Foundation in Finland.

To contextualize and develop the information obtained through the survey, qualitative data was also obtained from five semi-structured interviews with Roma people (2) and experts working with Roma (4), and one group discussion with professionals who provide counseling, information, and other services to Roma people in Helsinki. These professionals work with the Deaconess Foundation and other organizations and have had a direct contact with the target group for at least 4-5 years, except for one of the professionals who had one year of experience in the field. All the professionals interviewed have a Romanian or Bulgarian background, just like the target group, and communicate with the members of the Roma community from Finland in Romanian and Bulgarian language.

The interviews were conducted in Romanian. The interview guide and the guide for the group discussion followed the topics and structure of the questionnaire used in the survey but the questions were adapted. The interviews were held online, via platforms such as Teams, Zoom and Messenger, while the group discussion took place at Romaniportti[1] project office in Pietarsaari. The participants to the group discussion were primarily professionals working with Roma people. The information obtained from the group discussion and from the interviews was corroborated with the data from the survey and analyzed though qualitative means.

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[1] Romaniportti translates as "the Roma Gate"

3. Transnational Report - Results

Here we present briefly the results of the transnational part of the questionnaire, through which we surveyed 201 respondents from five different countries on basic characteristics of digital use.

Results: Target group

Our DIRA project survey on digital skills involved 201 Roma adults in total, 91 males and 110 females.

It is important to note that research has placed a particular emphasis on gender equality. Women and men participated in the questionnaire more or less with the same turnout, with an advantage of women compared to men (plus 9.9% of total respondents). This has allowed us not only to analyse the level of digital education of Roma women more in detail, but also to understand more deeply what the social obstacles that the Roma, especially women, have to face. In fact, most of the studies, interviews and academic articles on the Roma communities say that women constitute the most marginal and disadvantaged group within the Roma communities, due to the patriarchal structure of most of the Roma families.

Taking a gender perspective in all measures tackling Roma communities is prominent also in "Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on Roma equality, inclusion and participation (2021/C 93/01) and in the everyday work of project partners.

Roma women undergo discrimination in all walks of life, including vital aspects regarding access to health and education. This impacts on both economic and social security, striking examples being when reaching out to the police to seek help in a physically violent relationship). Although there are organizations to help Roma women within their communities, it is not enough. On a more general level, in fact, the legal status of the Roma, especially refugees (for example from Balkan States not belonging to the EU such as Serbia or Macedonia) is precarious and limits their rights to the same resources as the non-Roma. Without birth certificates, identity cards, passports and other documents, fundamental rights such as education, health care, social assistance and voting rights are often denied.

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Figure 1: Gender

1. Gender:

201 responses

- Male
- Female
- I prefer not to specify It

54.7%

44.8%

Figure 2: Age

2. Age:

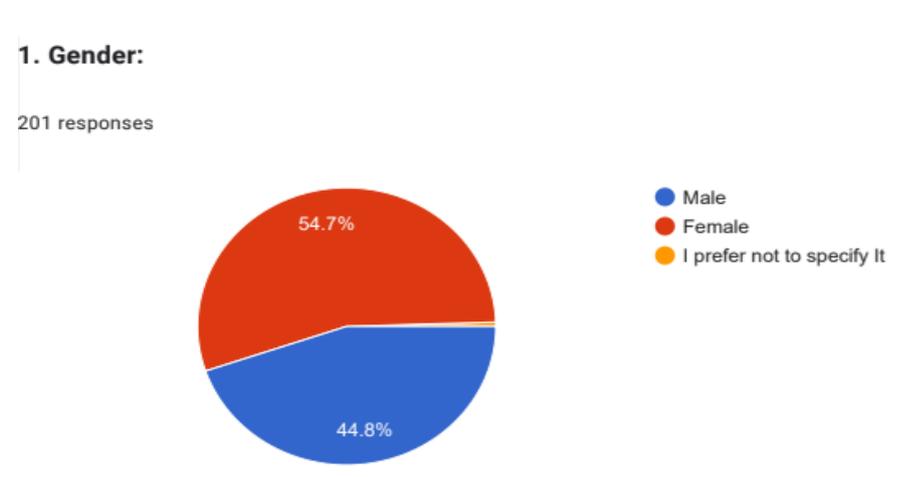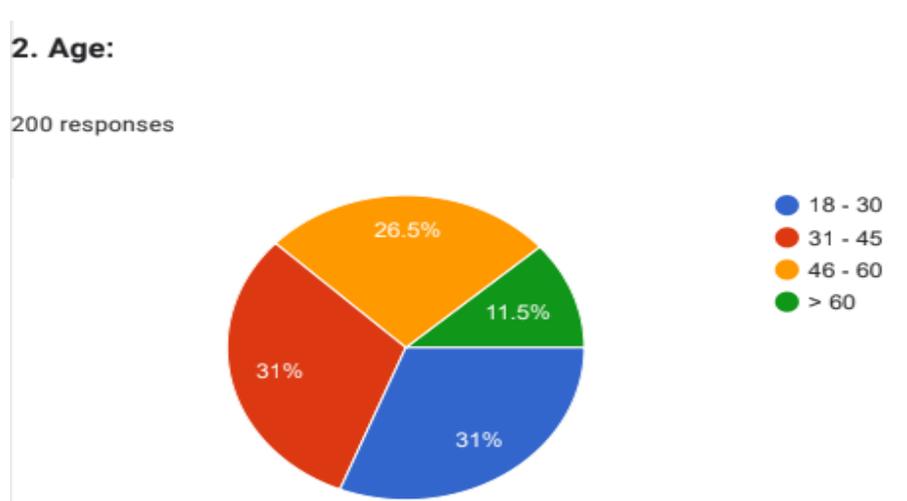200 responses

- 18 - 30
- 31 - 45
- 46 - 60
- > 60

26.5%

11.5%

31%

31%

The age composition of the respondents to the survey reflects the ordinary demographics of the Roma communities, who are much younger than national averages of the European countries; most notably in the case of Italy.

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• 31% of interviewees are aged between 18 and 30;

• 31% of interviewees are aged between 31 and 45;

• 26.5% of interviewees are aged between 46 and 60;

• 11.5 % of interviewees have an age over 60 years.

Figure 3: Place of residence

Notwithstanding the fact that the data collection on this item was to a certain extent flawed, the direct knowledge of the project partners of the territorial units where the survey was conducted, permits to interpret the data without equivocation.

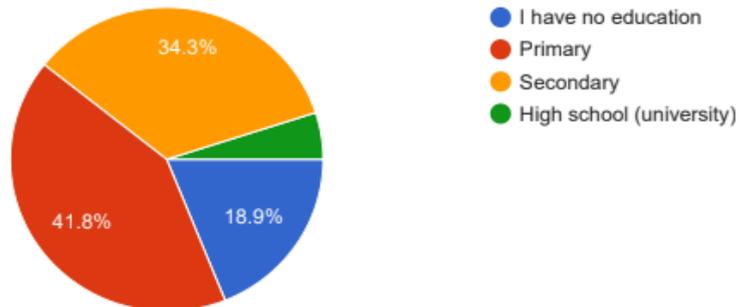**3. Place of residence:** Copy

198 responses
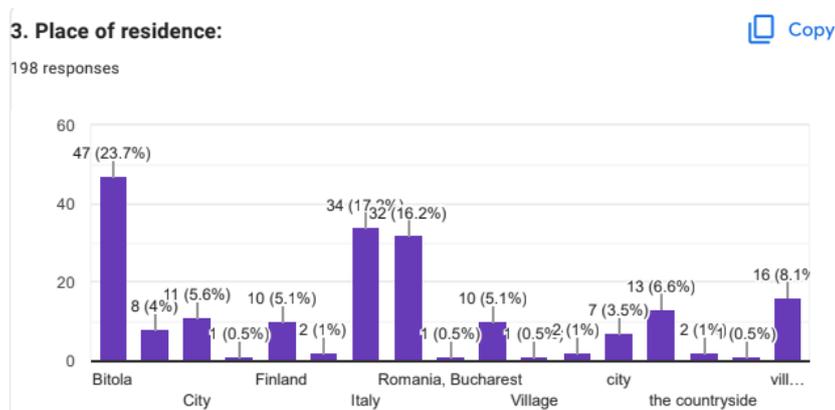
As expected, participants' place of residence was a very important factor for the survey. Roma from towns and suburban settlements were more informed about all benefits that were offered to their population, while Roma living in rural areas had insufficient or no information at all.

Figure 4: Educational level

4. Education:

201 responses

- I have no education
- Primary
- Secondary
- High school (university)

Secondary: 34.3%
Primary: 41.8%
No education: 18.9%

41.8% of respondents said they had only completed primary school and 18.9% have no education at all. This shows that two thirds (60.7% of respondents of the survey) are below the threshold of basic literacy.

This makes for a core result of the baseline survey which significantly orients all interventions in the field of digital skills and opportunities, including further developments of the DIRA project.

Roma children often abandon school at an early age. For girls, the reasons given to abandon school include early marriage or pregnancy, the believing to be sufficiently educated and the need to work. The lack of education can negatively affect women: if they want to keep after having come out of a situation of abuse or want to help their families, they do not have qualifications to find a job.

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Figure 5: Marital status

5. Marital status:

199 responses
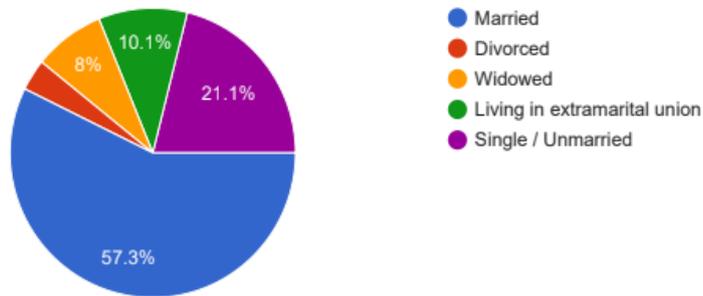
The concept of family union is of fundamental importance in Roma communities, as is marriage, which often takes place before the age of eighteen under the decision of the family members. In fact, it can be seen that the percentage of divorcees is truly ephemeral (3.5%). Also the single/unmarried are by large majority under 30 years of age. Also in this case, the gender differentiation is evident: among female single/unmarried respondents to the survey, only 10% are older than 30.

Figure 6: Employment status

The DIRA survey results confirm the harsh reality which spares no country: less than a third of adult Roma work. 71.9% of the respondents declared they are unemployed.

6. Are you employed?

199 responses

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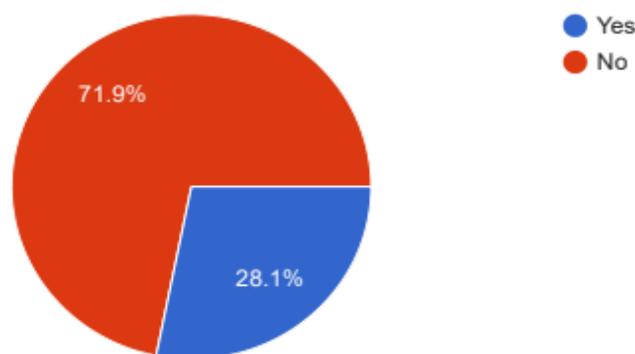
In general, the lack of sufficient education causes the impossibility of acquiring the tools and skills spent in the world of work, in which manual works are disappearing more and more and are now replaced by works in which specific digital skills are needed. The lack of education, or the low level of education prevents them from finding a job and providing themselves with good living conditions that affects their housing. Thus, the high number of unemployed Roma (71,9%), the poor use of internet and IT devices for job searching is directly related to this.

The majority of the Roma population do seasonal work in agriculture, selling goods on the street or the market, collecting plastic bottles or iron. The ones that manage to get employment, usually work as garbage collectors or cleaners in the public, private institutions or different businesses.

There are also community members that have no personal identification documents or legalized housing which affects their ability to obtain health insurance, ID's, regular employment and education.

The theme of work and economic problems can be addressed considering in particular the following factors:

• the impact of discrimination and refusal suffered by the Roma over the centuries and the consequent problem of social exclusion;

• general discrimination against Roma in search of work;

• the feeling of non-identification of Roma with the institutions of traditional society and their lack of familiarity with the rules that regulate the labor market in particular;

• the disappearance of traditional occupations typical of the Roma People, such as boiler making, ironware, woodwork, basket weaving, sieve craft, soothsaying, playing music or herbal medicine - following the industrialization and urbanization of European societies;

• serious deficiencies in terms of education and professional training; lack of qualifications in an increasingly competitive labor market (loss of most unqualified jobs following the transition process).
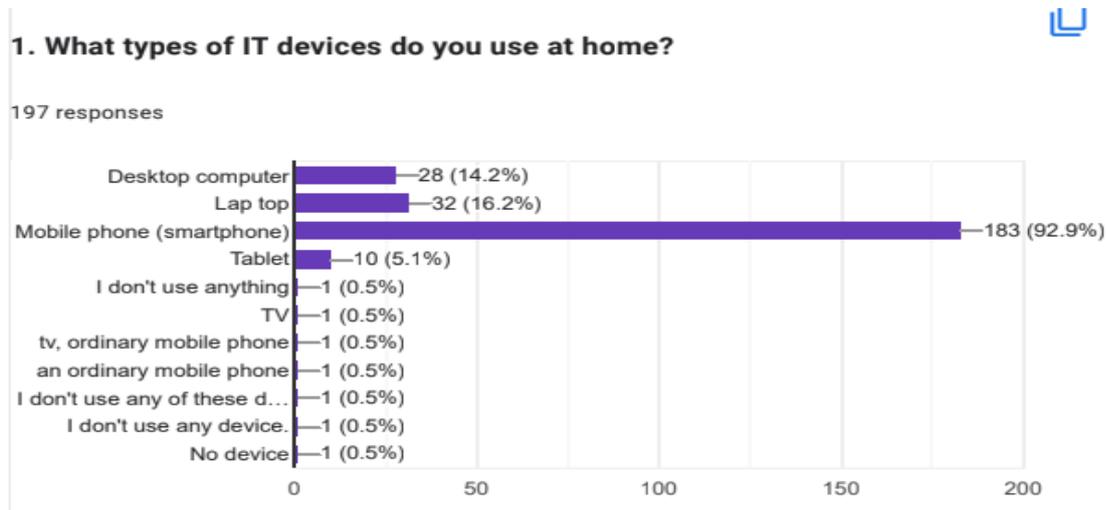
Results: Access to internet and IT devices

The survey included three questions probing the digital connectivity of adult Roma, enquiring the availability and use of different IT devices, personally and as home use.

The core result is that almost everybody uses the cell phone but very few has any confidence with the computer.

Figure 1: Use of IT devices

1. What types of IT devices do you use at home?

197 responses

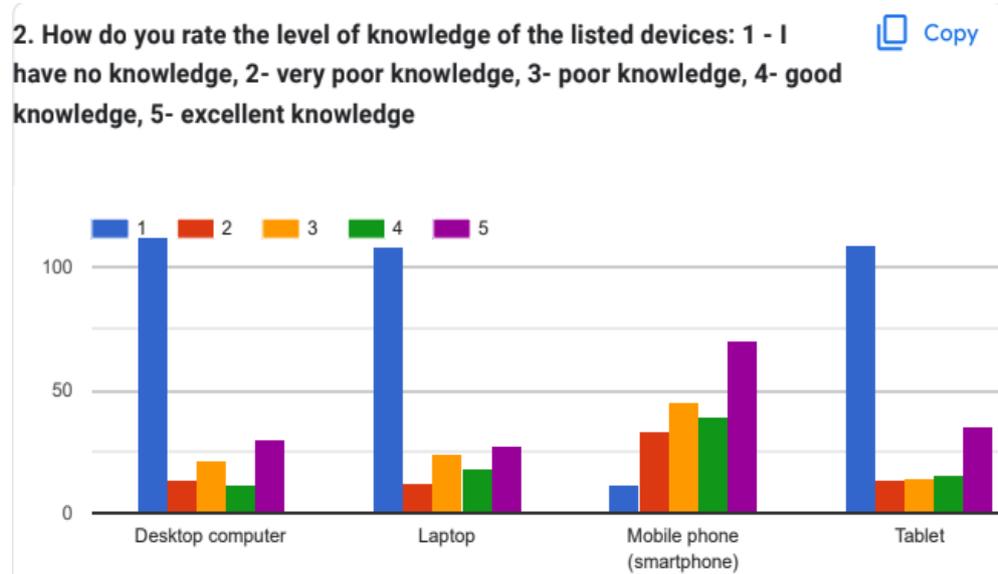| Device	Count
Desktop computer	28 (14.2%)
Lap top	32 (16.2%)
Mobile phone (smartphone)	183 (92.9%)
Tablet	10 (5.1%)
I don't use anything	1 (0.5%)
TV	1 (0.5%)
tv, ordinary mobile phone	1 (0.5%)
an ordinary mobile phone	1 (0.5%)
I don't use any of these d...	1 (0.5%)
I don't use any device.	1 (0.5%)
No device	1 (0.5%)

Most respondents (about 93%) state they use a smartphone. The smartphone is followed by the laptop (16.2%), the desktop computer (14.2%) and the tablet (5.1%). About 2% do not use any electronic devices.

The Smartphone is the most available tool among the devices listed in terms of costs. As seen above, in fact, 71.9% of Roma, not working, cannot afford expensive digital tools and therefore only resort to the Smartphone.

Another factor, after the economic one, which compromises the use of other more complex electronic devices - the laptop, the desktop computer and the tablet - is the lack of education. In fact, the Smartphone is mainly used to communicate, and remote communication has become a priority for society. It is also possible to communicate via other devices, but this would require longer times for communication, which instead with the Smartphone would be immediate. Therefore, the main reason why other devices are not used is due to lack of education, because if you can barely read and write, it is very difficult to perform digital activities, where you have to follow very precise instructions: these are most often used by the young members of this community who attend school and use it for homework.
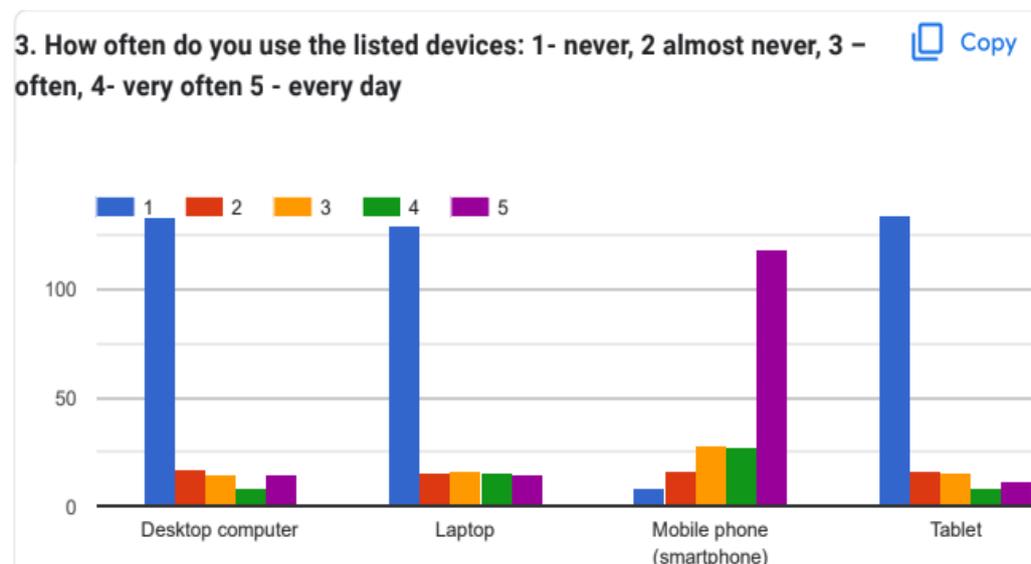
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Figure 2: What types of IT devices do you use?

2. How do you rate the level of knowledge of the listed devices: 1 - I have no knowledge, 2- very poor knowledge, 3- poor knowledge, 4- good knowledge, 5- excellent knowledge ☐ Copy

The level of confidence the respondents have with their smartphones is very good, while the majority has no knowledge or experience whatsoever with desktop computers, laptops or tablets.

Figure 3: Ability to use IT devices?

3. How often do you use the listed devices: 1- never, 2 almost never, 3 – often, 4- very often 5 - every day ☐ Copy

Most of the interviewees say that they almost never use desktop computers, laptops and tablets, because in fact only a few know how to use them. The device that is used the most every day is certainly the smartphone for communicating because it is easier to use and more accessible to everyone in terms of costs.

Results: Online activities

Figure 4: Activities performed using IT devices online

From the two questions enquiring into the objectives of the use of the digital devices, it emerges that the predominant use of the smartphone is for communication purposes. Half of the respondents use internet for viewing content and just below 40% for information on the outside world matters (37.1% use the smartphone for following news). Only a residual portion of the respondents (16%) use internet for job search.
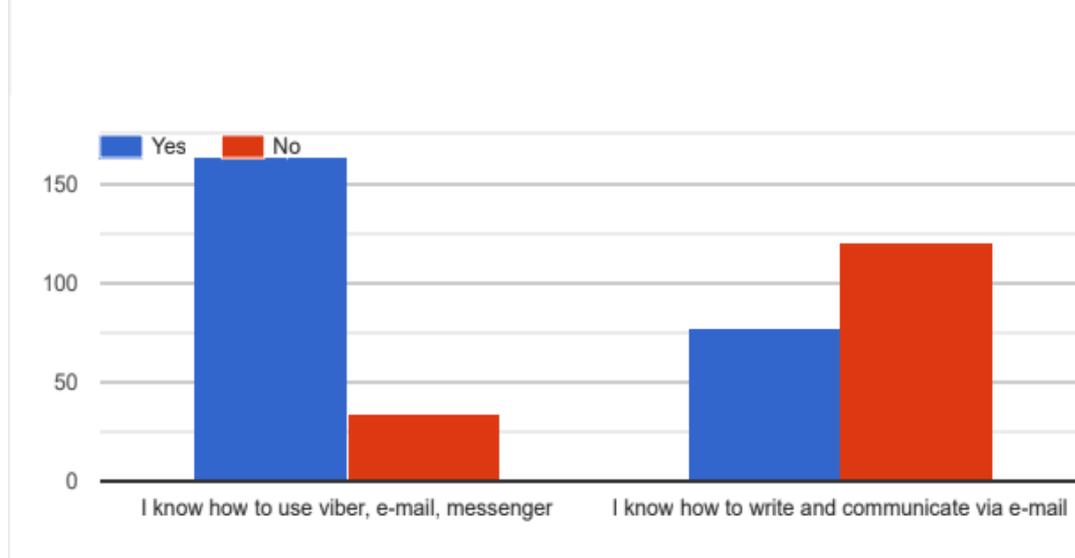
4. What do you use the above devices for:

194 responses
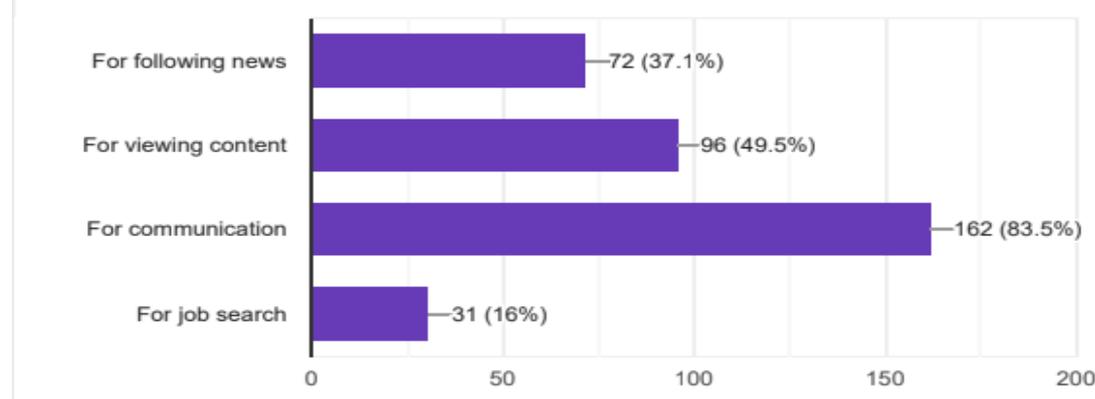
Figure 5: Ability to communicate

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COMMUNICATION:

It emerges that digital devices are mainly used to communicate and to view content. Indeed it can be seen in the COMMUNICATION graph, that many of the interviewees know how to use viber, messenger and email.

Many, however, do not know how to write and communicate via e-mail. The language of emails is formal compared to the language used for applications such as Whatsapp and Messenger. In fact, e-mails are considered "official" communication systems for bureaucratic, work-related matters, reservations, etc.

As we have seen, the Roma community is characterized by a low level of schooling and a high level of early school leaving, both characteristics which lead to the lack of a sufficient vocabulary to be able to communicate in a formal way.

Results: Access to information

A good part of those interviewed know how to search on the internet. As regards the understanding and validity of information, we can deduce that having an elementary or absent education does not allow you to have the tools to be able to understand the information well and be able to judge it reliable or not. Nevertheless, the results show a not irrelevant critical capacity of the self-appraisal: only a good third trust their ability to discern whether the information is reliable or not, a third is not sure and a third of respondents is outright negative of their capacity to assess the objective validity of the information.
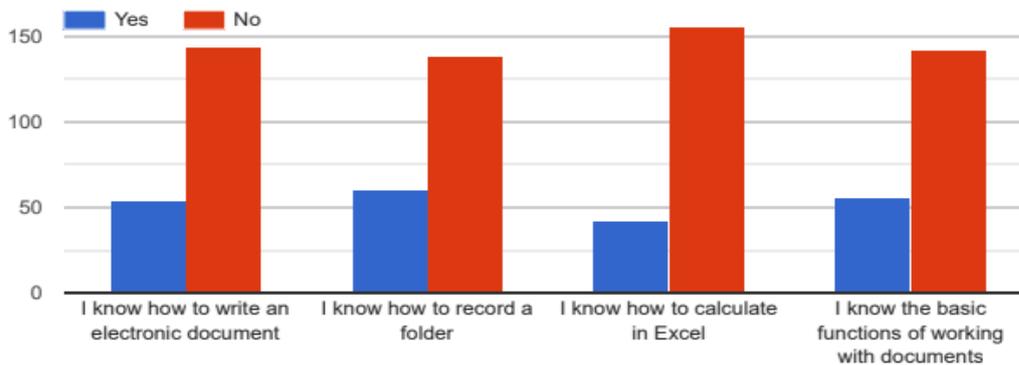
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INFORMATION:
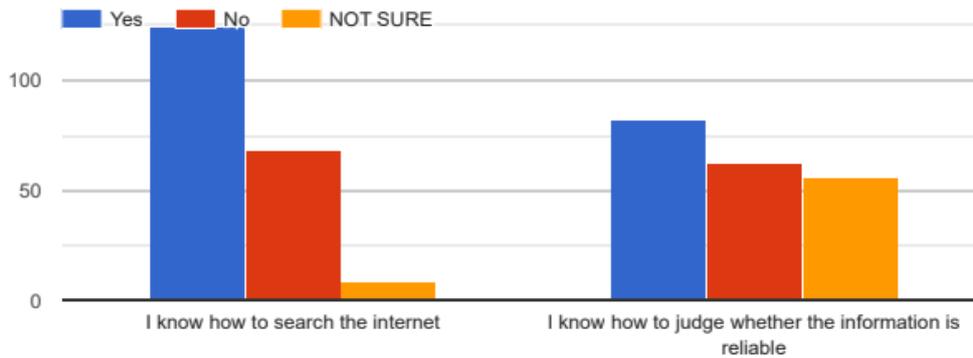
## Use of Office Packages:

OFFICE PACKAGES:

On average, only about 20% of respondents know how to use the Office package.

In order to use these applications, you must necessarily possess these skills: writing, reading, knowing how to use the applications and calculating. Even if the question is about the applications of the Office package, however, to be able to use it, skills related to literacy and schooling are needed. This corresponds to a very limited availability of computers in the homes of the Roma community.

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Use of social networks and ability to recognize and respond to hate speech

Social networks are platforms accessible also from smartphones and they are largely figurative and intuitive, so they are not difficult to use. This notwithstanding, the results of the questionnaire show that about 50% of those interviewed do not know how to use social networks in general.

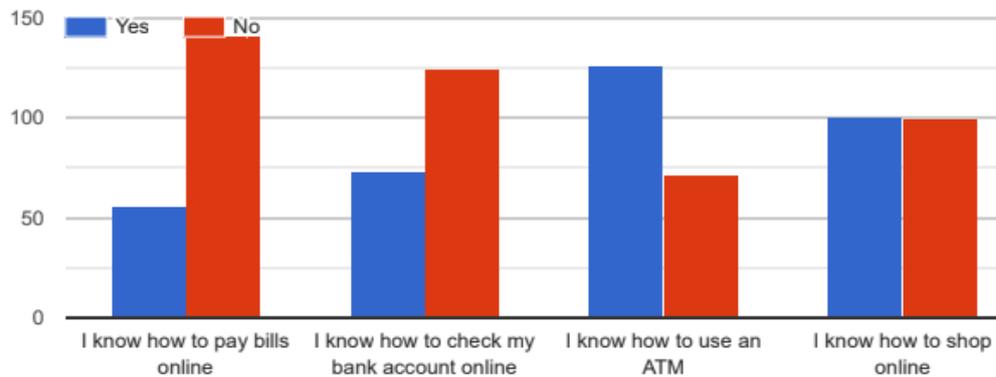**Figure 10: use of social networks and ability to recognize and respond to hate speech**
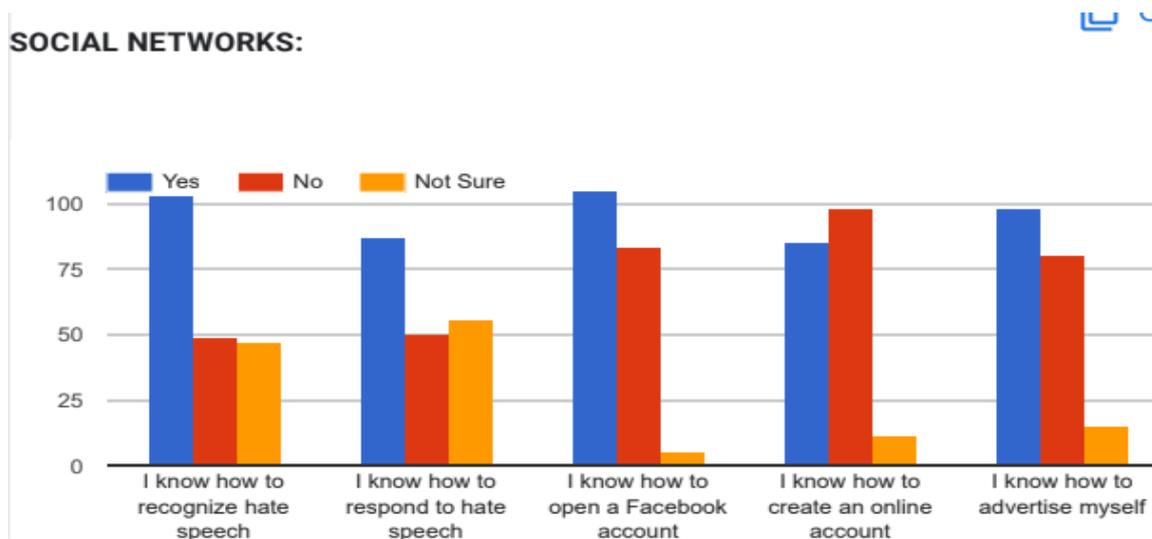
Some of the Roma people report that they are able to identify hate speech online (53%), generally if is spoken, not written. About 47% of them also consider that they know how to respond to it. Professionals assisting them consider that most Roma would recognize hate speech when expressed in their native language (due to the language barrier) and often in spoken (not in written form). Also, younger Roma are more likely to feel offended by such speech and to react to it, while the older generation is more likely to be used to it. Experts assisting them also believe the Roma migrants tend to be rather impulsive in their reaction to hate speech against them and are unlikely to know how to file a report.

An important direction should be made between hate speech targeting the Roma and hate speech against other minority groups, as Roma are more likely to recognize and react to insults targeting them than addressed to others. In some cases, they might be condoning hate speech against other groups.

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Ability to use E-services

USE OF E-SERVICES:

The last question of the transnational questionnaire concerns the use of electronic devices for simple activities of daily life, but carried out online. The results speak of widespread digital illiteracy:

● 75% are unable to make online payments;

● 62.5% are unable to check their bank account online;

● about 37.3% do not know how to use an ATM;

● 50% don't know how to shop online.

From the percentages it can be seen that more than half of the interviewees are unable to carry out these activities: this is a sign of backwardness on the part of Roma, in particular from the rural and segregated areas, who are unable to follow and adapt to the technological development that is leading to a radical change in habits.

4.National Report FINLAND

Digital Skills Among the Roma Migrant Community

Survey and results: DEACONESS FOUNDATION

DIRA Project Report

"Digital skills
in the Roma community"

in Finland

Results of the survey implemented by DIRA Project in

Finland, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia

Report on the Digital Skills Among the Roma migrant community in Finland

I. Introduction

This research report evaluates the digital skills, online behavior and the educational and employment training needs of the migrant Roma community from Finland. The research examined the use of IT devices among Roma migrants from Helsinki and Romaniportti (Pietarsaari), including aspects such as the type of devices used, the intensity of use, the main platforms/ websites accessed, main activities performed online, the ability to use eServices and the office package, as well as critical reading skills and the ability to identify fake news and hate speech online. Finally, the report also highlights the training needs of this group, in order to improve their digital skills and be able to successfully access online educational services, employment and social benefits.

The study has been performed by the Deaconess Foundation with the transnational ERASMUS+ project "Digital Inclusion for Roma Adults: Gaining Knowledge and Skills in eServices (DIRA)", KA220-ADU - Cooperation partnerships in adult education.

II. Methodology

This analysis is based on a mix between quantitative and qualitative data collected by the Deaconess Foundation in Finland in the period of October – November 2022. The quantitative data was obtained through a survey based on 25 questions administered online via google forms, which collected 49 responses from Roma people living in Helsinki. The majority of questions were closed, while a few of them were open, allowing respondents to explain their chosen answer. The quantitative data was then analyzed in SPSS and presented in the form of graphs, as well as a list of responses to the open questions.

In order to contextualize and develop the information obtained through the survey, qualitative data was also obtained from five semi-structured expert interviews and one group discussion with professionals who provide counseling, information and other services to Roma people in Helsinki. These professionals work with the Deaconess Foundation and other organizations and have had a direct contact with the target group for at least 4-5 years, with the exception of one of the professionals who had one year of experience in the field. All the professionals interviewed have a Romanian or Bulgarian background, just like the target group, and communicate with the members of the Roma community from Finland in their native language. The Interviews were conducted in Romanian. The interview guide and the guide for the group discussion followed the topics and structure of the questionnaire used in the survey but the questions were adapted. The interviews were held online, via platforms such as Teams, Zoom and Messenger, while the group discussion took place at Romaniportti in Pietarsaari. The

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participants to the group discussion were over 16 years old, the most active members of the being women, under 30 years of age. The majority of persons from the group are married and have several children. The information obtained from the group discussion and interviews were corroborated with the data from the survey and analyzed though qualitative means.

III. Analysis of the data

1. General description of the target group

The Roma community from Helsinki consists of approx. 2,000 Finnish Roma and about 300-400 Roma coming from Central Eastern Europe particularly from Romania and Bulgaria. Most of them have been practicing temporary mobility to Finland, particularly to Helsinki since 2008[2]. They face social exclusion and marginalization, including major obstacles in finding employment, accessing health services and housing.

The Deaconess foundation is providing them emergency night shelter (up to 200 spots for persons from this group) and with support services during office hours. These services include access to a computer and assistance in using the internet, support in creating a CV and sending it to potential employers, help in looking for a job etc.

According to the experts interviewed, the majority of persons from this group are illiterate or barely literate, which is also reflected in our survey, as 32% of respondents had no education, 39% had just primary education, 24% had secondary education and just 4% had completed high school or university. Many of these persons faced multiple and self-reinforcing inequalities throughout their life, such as poverty, discrimination, child marriages etc.

Figure 1: Educational level

[2] Kimmo Granqvist, Anca Enache, Maria Mihaela Dorofte, L*ocal engagement for Roma inclusion Locality study Helsinki (Finland), 2016,* https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/local-engagement-roma-finland-helsinki_en.pdf, accessed 25.11.2022.

4. Education:
- High school (university)
- I have no education
- Primary
- Secondary
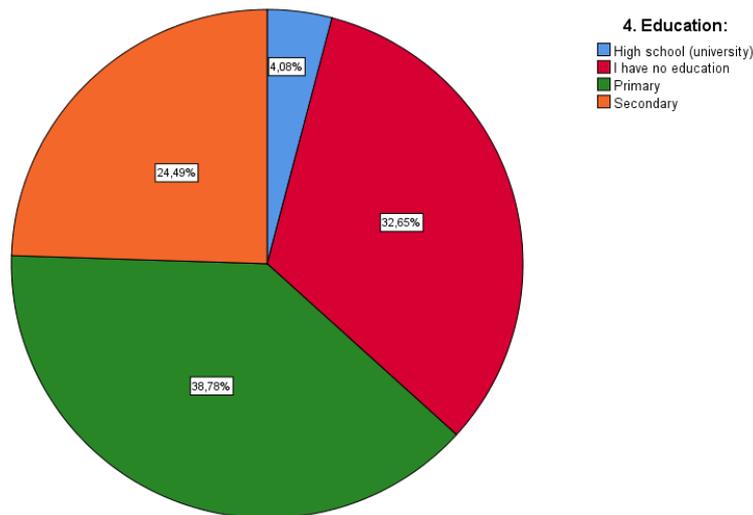
Members of this migrant Roma community also have little to no knowledge of English, Finnish or Swedish. Those who have some knowledge of these languages are few, their language skills are very limited and they sometimes speak of mix of the three languages. This represents a major challenge in finding a job, since they cannot properly communicate and perform basic tasks which would require them to be able to read and write. In some cases, local ONGs support them in finding cleaning work by acting as an intermediary between them and their employer. Their limited access to employment also hinders their access to adequate housing.

Finally, the majority of persons from this group also lack social security number in Finland, since this number can only be obtained by migrants who have a labor contract and a permanent address in this country. This is also confirmed by the results of the survey, as more than 85% respondents declared themselves to be unemployed and about 80% reported not being covered by the social security number.

Figure 2: Employment status
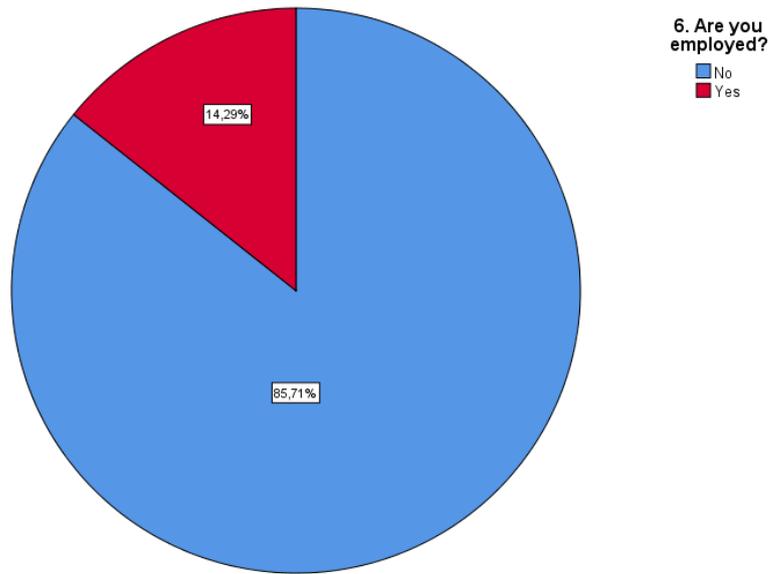
Figure 3: Social security coverage
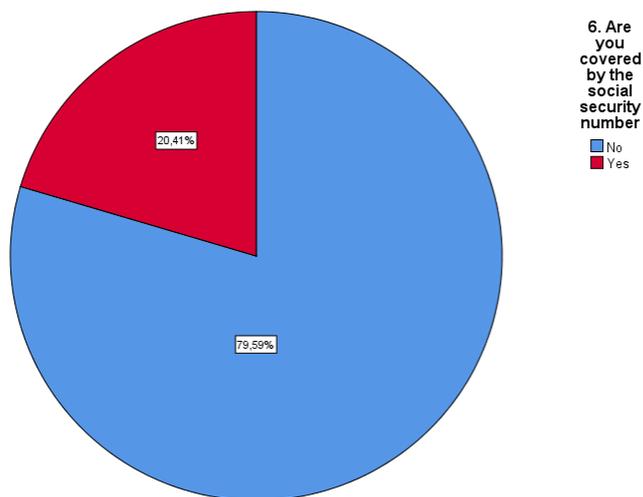
The social security number is essential for accessing free health services, opening a back account or renting an apartment. Access to language classes, which are being offered by the state, is also conditioned on having a social security number. Meanwhile, literacy classes are non-existent. All these factors perpetuate the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

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Another important characteristic of the majority of this group (approx. 70%) – which is also a consequence of their exclusion – is the temporary migration pattern, or "social tourism" behavior, as one of the interviewees named it. They generally live in Finland for about 4-5 months every year, then they return to their countries and they return again the next year. While in Finland, they typically engage in selling the local street magazine - Big Issue (Isso Numbero)- begging or collecting plastic bottles to be recycled. These temporary migrants generally lack social security number, employment and housing. They also do not receive any financial social benefits.

Meanwhile, a minority of the Roma community in Finland lives in this country on permanent basis, has managed to integrate and to secure employment (for ex. as cleaning personnel or construction workers) – particularly the younger ones and those who can speak English and have at least basic digital skills. This group has access to foreign language classes and social benefits (for example, unemployment compensation).
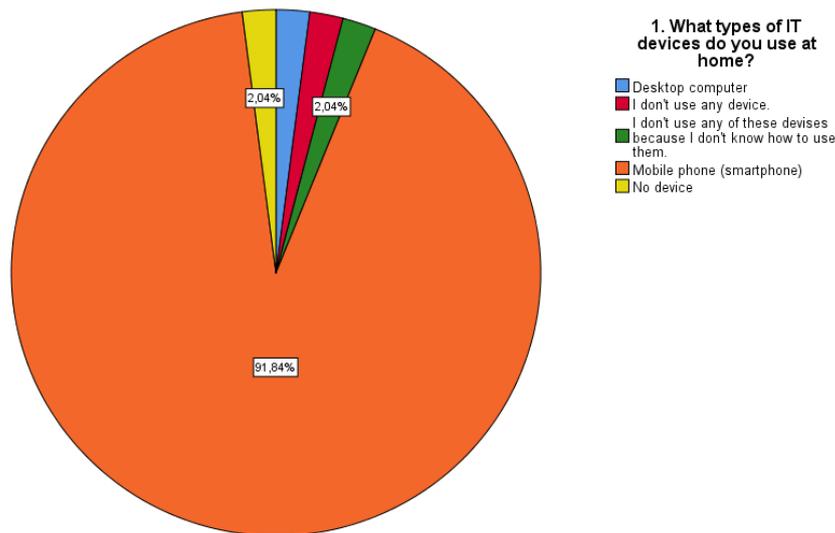
It must be underlined that children from the Roma community which lives in Finland permanently attend school there and that second-generation immigrants tend to be socially integrated, speak the local languages and have much better digital skills than their parents.

The local Roma community from Romaniportti (Pietarsaari) consists of about 200 people from Bulgaria and Romania, mostly Bulgarian. The Bulgarian community is concentrated in the same area and can be considered to be a cultural diaspora in Pietarsaari. Children from this community usually integrate by learning the Finnish language, while their parents integrate by learning the Swedish language.
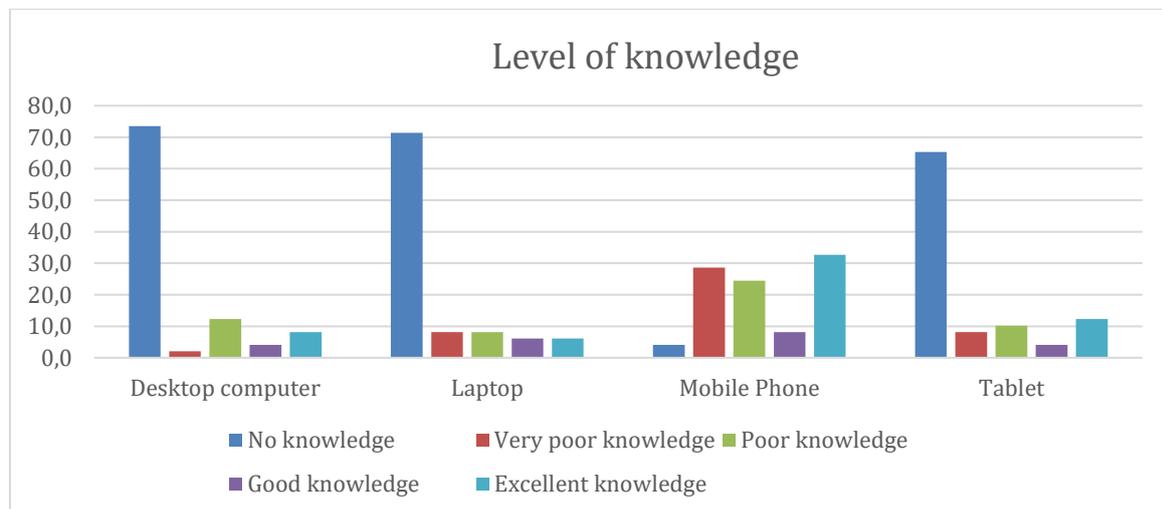
2. Access to internet and IT devices

The vast majority of Roma people in Finland have access to phones, particularly smartphones, which are connected to the internet, as well as smart TVs. This is confirmed by the survey results, in which more than 91% of the respondents said that they use smartphones to access the internet. The use of laptops and tablets is very rare – only 2% of survey respondents mentioned laptops – these are most often used by the young members of this community who attend school and use it for homework. Some of the participants to the survey declared that they cannot afford some of these IT devices.

Figure 4: Use of IT devices

1. What types of IT devices do you use at home?

- Desktop computer
- I don't use any device.
- I don't use any of these devises because I don't know how to use them.
- Mobile phone (smartphone)
- No device

2,04%   2,04%

91,84%

The vast majority of this groups reported no knowledge of operating a desktop, laptop or a tablet. Approx. 6% of respondents did not access internet at all, mostly due to lack of digital skills.
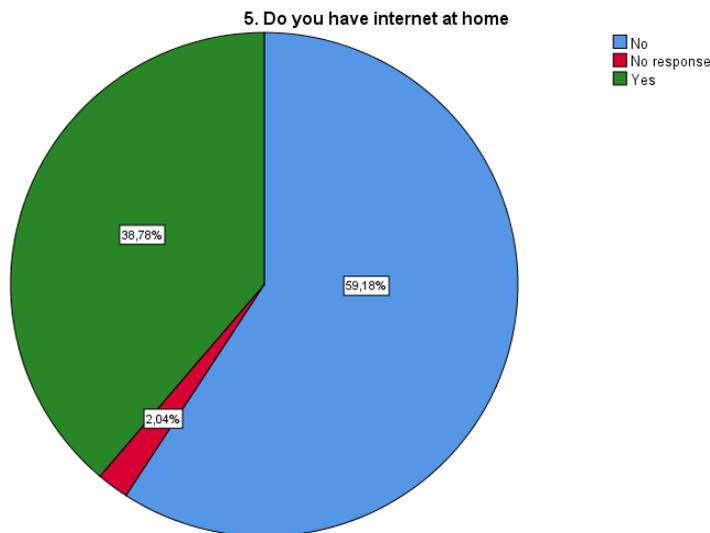
Figure 5: Ability to use IT devices

Level of knowledge

(bar chart with categories: Desktop computer, Laptop, Mobile Phone, Tablet)

Legend:
- No knowledge
- Very poor knowledge
- Poor knowledge
- Good knowledge
- Excellent knowledge

About 40% of the Roma people surveyed had an internet connection at home, including a wireless connection. Those who do not have such connection, generally access the internet via sim cards which grants them access to the internet. Some people do not access the internet at all, because they do not know how, but they are a small minority in this group.
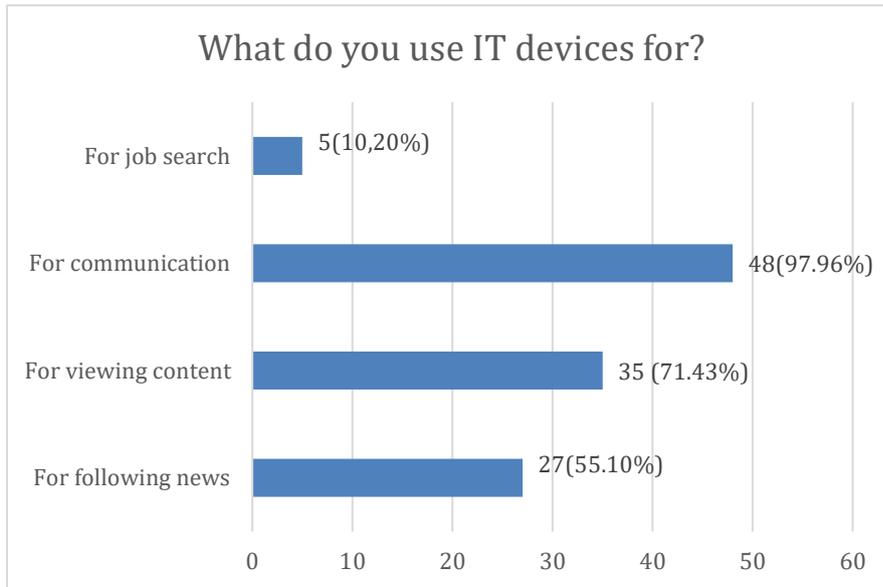
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Figure 6: Access to internet at home

5. Do you have internet at home

- No
- No response
- Yes

38,78%

59,18%

2,04%

3. Main online activities

Most of the persons from the Roma community use the IT devices (mostly smartphones) for communication (over 97% of respondents) or for viewing content (71%).

Figure 7: Activities performed using IT devices

What do you use IT devices for?

For job search — 5(10,20%)

For communication — 48(97.96%)

For viewing content — 35 (71.43%)

For following news — 27(55.10%)

(Horizontal axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60)

This content is often related to entertainment (movies, shows), videos of news – often from their country of origin, due to the language barriers – and pictures or videos from social networks. 55% also reported following the news online. However, news is mostly viewed, not read and they typically refer to events from the country of origin, due to the language barrier. The same applies to communication, which is mostly done orally and not in writing, regardless of the channel used (phone, messenger, WhatsApp etc.). Facebook is sometimes used as a translating tool, which allows Roma to understand what other users are posting in English or Finnish and then react by sending voice messages.

The Roma community from Romaniportti (Pietarsaari) also reported using IT devices for accessing social media, news, YouTube and some online shopping. The majority of them watch paid Bulgarian TV, where they follow the news from home and some Bulgarian tv-shows. They also reported accessing google to search for information regarding health problems, specific locations, or recipes. Members of this local community also have a good knowledge of using various communication channels, including messenger and WhatsApp.

4. The use of IT devices for educational and professional purposes

The use of IT devices for job search is very limited. This has been confirmed both by the interviews and the survey results, as only 10% of respondents declared performing this activity online. Moreover, this corroborates with the findings regarding the limited use of e-mail: almost 80% of respondents do not know how to write an email. The majority of migrant Roma people from Helsinki turn to support from NGOs for opening an email or social media account or for writing an e-mail.

Figure 8: Ability to communicate online

Communication
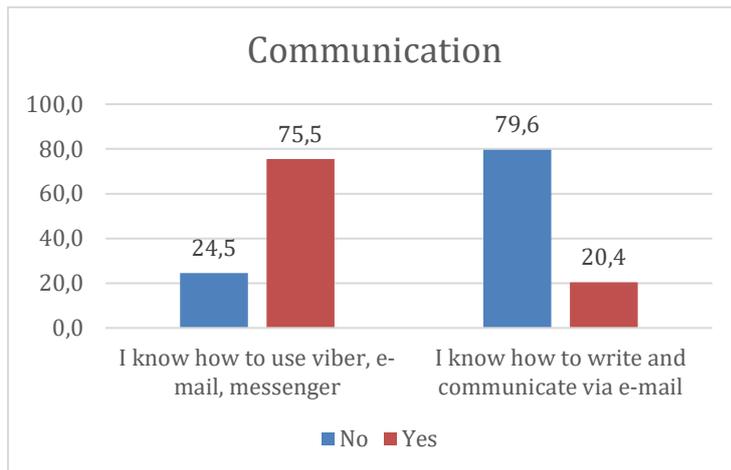
Younger Roma from Helsinki who currently attend school or who graduated school in Finland are an exception, as most often know how to draft an e-mail, open an e-mail or social media account and perform other similar tasks. Some of the Roma from Romaniportti community who have had to use e-mail in school or work also have some knowledge about this. Yet, those who do not usually write e-mails may not be proficient in this when the time comes, for example when they need for search for a job.

The same applies to the ability to use the Microsoft Office package. Only 14% of respondents can draft an electronic document and just 6% of them know the basic functions of working with such documents. The professionals interviewed for this study are often the ones creating a CV for members of the target group that they assist, on the basis of information provided by the beneficiary, and then printing or sending a CV to a potential employer. Some of the Roma from Romaniportti community reported knowing how to open, write and save a word-document, but most them never had to such tasks.

Figure 9: Ability to use Office package

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Office packages
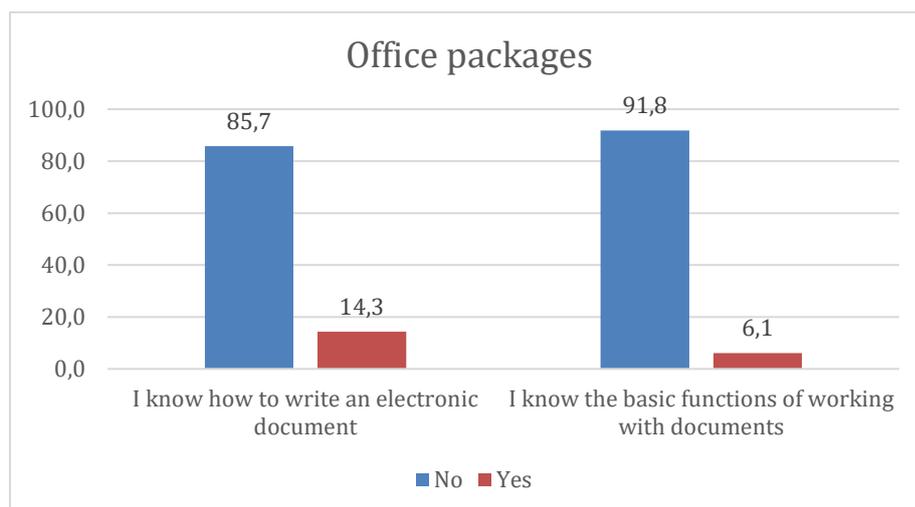
5. The use of social media

The most widely used social networks/ applications are Facebook, messenger and WhatsApp, especially as members of the migrant Roma communities need to communicate with their families from the country of origin, as well as Tik Tok. Although Facebook is widely used by members of the Roma community in Helsinki, few of them are able to create an account by themselves (approx. 36%) and they often seek external support for this. Among Roma from Romaniportti the skills vary a lot, but the solidarity among members for the community is central and they often help each other. Opening a social media account goes hand with language skills.

In terms of the ability to distinguish reliable from unreliable information online, professionals assisting the Roma community in Helsinki believe most members of this group do not have this skill. For example, many Roma believed the fake news that the war in Ukraine would extent to Finland and thus went back to their country of origin. The Roma from Romaniportti also generally do not think of the importance of distinguishing reliable from unreliable information.

Some of the Roma people report that they are able to identify hate speech online (32%), generally if is spoken, not written. About 47% of them also consider that they know how to respond to it. Professionals assisting them consider that most Roma would recognize hate speech when expressed in their native language (due to the language barrier) and often in spoken (not in written form). Also, younger Roma are more likely to feel offended by such speech and to react to it, while the older generation is more likely to be used to it. Experts assisting them also believe the Roma migrants tend to be rather impulsive in their reaction to hate speech against them and are unlikely to know how to file a report.

An important direction should be made between hate speech targeting the Roma and hate speech against other minority groups, as Roma are more likely to recognize and react to insults

targeting them than addressed to others. In some cases, they might be condoning hate speech against other groups.

Figure 10: use of social networks and ability to recognize and respond to hate speech

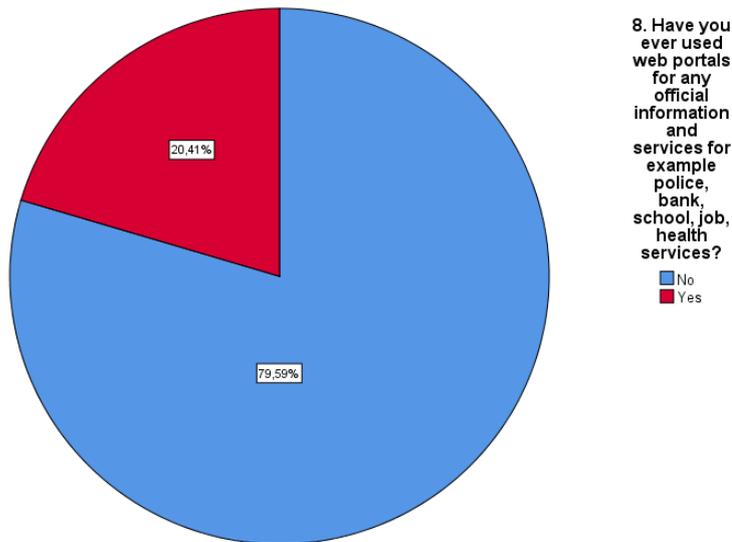*Social networks & hate speech*
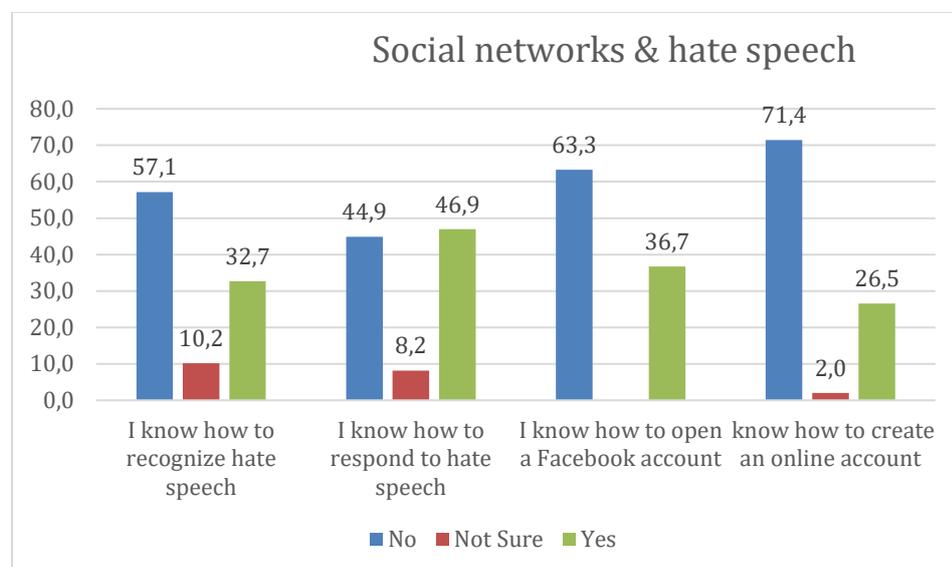
6. The use of online services

The vast majority of migrant Roma people from Finland cannot use online services and information on the websites of public or private entities. Therefore, they rely on assistance from professionals in doing so or opt for accessing those services face-to-face. Almost 80% of the Roma surveyed have never accessed websites for any official information, such as polices, bank, school, job or health services. This is primarily because they do not know to access these services, but even when they do, they face significant language barriers, since they do not speak the local languages. Those who do access e-services, usually seek information about bank services, police or schools.
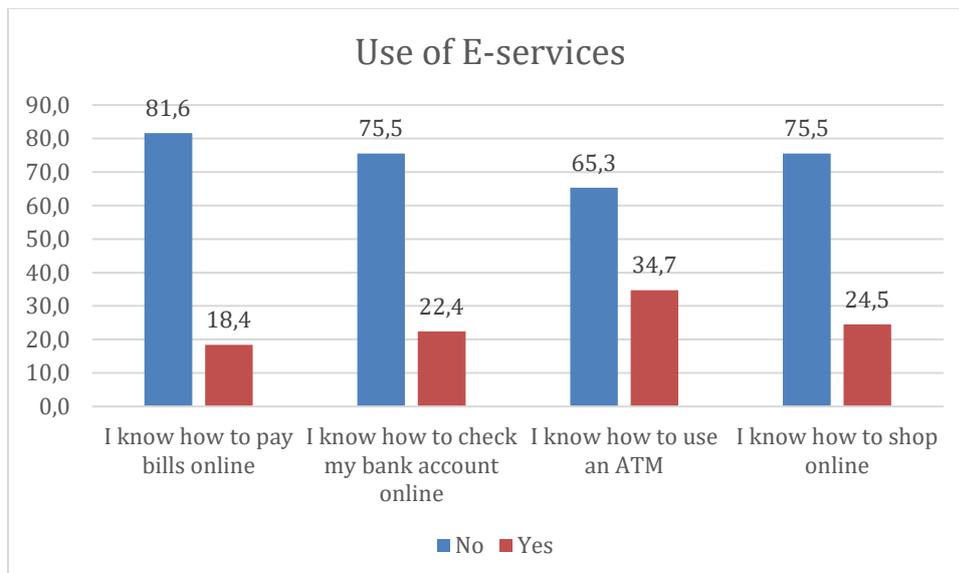
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Figure 11: Use of official websites

8. Have you ever used web portals for any official information and services for example police, bank, school, job, health services?
- No
- Yes

20,41%

79,59%

Only 18% of respondents reported knowing how to pay bills online, 22% were able to check their bank account, 34% knew how to use an ATM and 24% how to shop online.

Figure 12: Ability to use E-services

Use of E-services

	No	Yes
I know how to pay bills online	81,6	18,4
I know how to check my bank account online	75,5	22,4
I know how to use an ATM	65,3	34,7
I know how to shop online	75,5	24,5

This last activity proved to be problematic for some of those having limited digital skills. According to those interviewed, they sometimes placed orders by mistake or shopper from dubious websites and then turned to professional support in returning the products and/ or obtaining a refund. Few of the Roma from Romaniportti know how to use e-services independently, such as, employment services (such as Kela), bank services.

IV.   Conclusions and father need for training

While more than 63% of the respondents benefited from training or guidance on how to use IT devices, their ability to do so independently is still very limited. Such guidance has been provided by the Deaconess foundations to Roma migrants who requested support, independently, not as systematic training sessions.

There is still a major gap to be addressed in the digital skills of members of the Roma community from Finland and their ability to perform everyday tasks and to access basic e-services. Their inability to perform basic online tasks and to access e-services generally goes hand in hand with the inability (or limited ability) to read and write in their native language and with poor foreign languages skills. All these factors represent major obstacles in developing their digital skills and participating in the online sharing of knowledge and information.

The obstacles in reaching basic eServices pose significant barriers for their economic and social integration, by preventing them from fulfilling basic tasks, such as contacting an employer, day care services or schools. Moreover, the need for external assistance in accessing these services raises problems in terms of data protection and confidentiality of the beneficiary information. Finally, the ability of access these services only face-to-face requires more time and resources for both the beneficiary and the relevant public or private institutions, as this involves individual guidance provided during working hours and the use of a translator (for Romanian or Bulgarian language).

Therefore, future trainings addressed to the migrant Roma community from Finland should combine digital skills with language and literacy skills. They should be provided to all those interested, not just to those to reside there permanently and have a social security number, as the lack of such basic skills could prevent them from securing employment and residing there on permanent basis. Moreover, this migrant community also needs financial support in order to be able to participate in trainings, as its members often work/ beg for long hours in order to make ends meet.

5. National Report Italy

Digital Skills Among the Roma Migrant Community

Survey and results: Romni APS, Italy

DIRA Project Report

"Digital skills in the Roma community" in Italy

Results of the survey implemented by DIRA Project in

Finland, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia

The development of this baseline study was possible thanks to the answers provided by the Roma participants to the national questionnaire/survey, elaborated by Romni APS association.

The baseline study is a tool of fundamental importance to be able to:

1. identify the situation of Roma in Italy regarding the level of digital education and access to local, national and international digital services

2. identify (as a consequence of point 1), the concrete needs of the Roma for the development of digitalisation

3. make the project objectives even clearer after identifying the main difficulties of Roma in developing digital ski

METHODOLOGY FOR CONDUCTING THE SURVEY

Each partner organisation (corresponding to a different country) developed - first autonomously and then, if necessary, also in discussions with the other partners - a national digital questionnaire, with questions that therefore refer to national online services of the specific country.

Each country carried out the survey according to the specific needs of the Roma population in its country. Given the critical situation of marginalisation, poor schooling and digital education of Roma residing in Italy, the members of Romni APS association who joined the project agreed together on the decision to make the questionnaires filled out as follows: the questionnaires were printed on paper; subsequently, the personnel in charge went directly to some Roma camps in Rome and helped the Roma participants to fill out the paper questionnaires. All participants were assisted and interviewed by two professionals, a Roma girl of Slavic origin able to speak different Roma dialects and languages of the former Yugoslavia and a girl of Italian origin. Once the questionnaires have been filled in, the answers to each questionnaire are been inserted on the Google Drive form where the questionnaire was present in digital format.

Few Roma were able to fill out the digital questionnaire directly on Google Drive and by themselves.

50 people of Roma and Sinti ethnicity, men and women belonging to different age groups, took part in the survey.

TOTAL OF QUESTIONS PER QUESTIONNAIRE:16

referring to:

→ generality

→ ability to use local, national and international online services concerning different sectors

DESCRIPTION OF THE TARGET GROUP

The vast majority of Roma residing in Italy are sedentary, having never practiced any form of nomadism, despite the recurring stereotype. There are two most widespread groups: the Roma (resident in all Italian regions) and the Sinti (especially in the North and Centre); there is also a minority of Caminanti (mostly sedentary in Sicily, near Noto).

For example, as far as Italy is concerned, the Council of Europe estimated, in September 2010, the average presence of about 140,000 Roma, a figure to be understood as indicative of a presence between 110,000 and 180,000 units, corresponding to 0.23% of the total population. This data is also confirmed by the survey conducted by the Extraordinary Commission of the Senate for the protection and promotion of human rights[3]. In 2010, according to the Ministry of Labour, there were around 130,000/150,000 Roma and Sinti in Italy, of which around 70,000 were Italians[4]. According to a recent study, the comparative analysis of the data available in 2010 shows that: Roma, Sinti and Caminanti of all ages correspond to 0.22-0.25% of the total Italian population.

- The percentage of RSC minors under the age of 16 (45%) is three times higher than the national average (15%) for the same age group.

- The percentage of RSC over 60 (0.3%) corresponds to about one tenth of the national average for the same age group (25%).

As highlighted above, today an average of about 140,000 people live in Italy, including Roma, Sinti and Travelers (about 0.23% of the population), mostly minors and young people, of Italian citizenship and mostly stable residents. Roma and Sinti can be divided into three main groups in relation to citizenship and the period of immigration:

- a first group is made up of about 70,000 people (Italian citizens) who have been present in Italy for over 600 years and distributed throughout the national territory;

- a second group is made up of about 90,000 Roma from the Balkans (non-EU) who arrived in the 1990s, mainly following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and mainly settled in Northern Italy;

- a more recent migratory group is made up of Roma of Romanian and Bulgarian nationality (European citizens) who are present above all in the big cities (Milan, Turin, Rome, Naples, Bologna, Bari, Genoa).

The low level of digital education among Roma and Sinti is undermined by factors of exclusion, such as:

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[3] Strati F., "Italy- Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma - A Study of National Policies",Studio Ricerche Sociali (SRS), 2011.

[4] According to the Community of Sant'Egidio, ANCI, UNIRSI and Opera Nomadi (the latter Non-Governmental Organizations of the sector) there would be approximately 160,000 presences (2010).

- the scarce presence of services that deal with professional training for the employment and work of the most marginalized social groups (in addition to the Roma and Sinti, also migrants, the disabled, etc.);

- the weak ability to remain in the work circuit;

- lack of certifiable work experience;

- the difficulty of entering the normal personnel selection processes and official channels for job placement;

- low education determined by high dispersion and early school leaving, which therefore result in low levels of basic and specific training

- lack of skills, knowledge and skills necessary to access a contractually regulated and strictly regulated job;

- barriers or personal and family resistance to inclusion in training processes and jobs aimed at the female sphere that can come into contradiction with community social values;

- documentation and residence problems of a part of Roma that affect access to training, employment and positive actions put in place to fill the existing gap.

In the list we have included not only the lack of education as a cause of poor digital education, but also the difficult access to the world of work for Roma, since, nowadays, technology, in its various forms, is used and applied in almost all fields (education, work, entertainment, access to assistance and monitoring services (finance and marketing).

PROGRAMMING OF EUROPEAN ESI FUNDS AND ESF+

The new 2021-2027 programming of the **ESI Funds** (European Structural and Investment Funds) and **ESF+** (The European Social Fund Plus is the main instrument of the European Union for investing in people), makes it possible to economically support targeted actions to promote socio-economic inclusion of Roma and Sinti and of the most marginalized and/or fragile social groups. As part of the 2021-2027 programming, the ESF plus is called to implement the **Strategic Objective 4** "A more social and inclusive Europe through the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights" ensuring support in the intervention sectors of the employment and professional mobility, education and training, social inclusion also in relation to the eradication of poverty.

Within the thirteen specific objectives[5] aimed at achieving high levels of employment, fair social protection and a skilled and resilient workforce, the principles of the European Social Pillar include the specific objective j) expressly called to "promote socio-economic integration of marginalized communities such as the Roma". With this objective, the principles of desegregation and non-ghettoization can be promoted. In particular, actions based on an integrated approach may be supported which combine investments also in the field of employment, with integrated paths for work inclusion, consultancy, guidance and access to education and professional training, **digital skills**, mentoring and coaching, self-employment, entrepreneurship/business creation, awareness raising through engagement with key partners (local communities, NGOs, economic-productive sector, etc.), especially the ESF+, makes it possible to financially support targeted actions to promote inclusion of Roma and Sinti.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND PARTICIPATION OF ROMA AND SINTI 2021-2030

The Strategy[6] in the coming years will be aimed at implementing a series of activities, actions, devices and operational tools capable of promoting a support path in the territories with the aim of promoting the employment of Roma and Sinti, as an essential element for a positive and lasting process and integration.

The possibilities of access to work are expanded through a system of active policies which contemplate training and job support measures also in the forms of apprenticeship, traineeship and self-employment, specifically:

A. starting training activities for the purpose of professional qualification and retraining, self-employment and immediate job placement;

B. **inclusion in paths to improve the level of digital skills** (assessment of skills, provision of a tailor-made, flexible and quality training offer and validation and recognition of acquired skills).

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[5] Article 4, 1 letters from a) to m) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) n.1296/ 2013.)

[6] https://www.unar.it/portale/documents/20125/113907/Strategia_Nazionale_di_uguaglianza_inclusione_partecipazione_di_Rom_e_Sinti_2021-2030+%28ITA%29.pdf/1e4ccc9c-aeba-e7b2-864d-ee1eced7e4df?t=1653399043993

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C. the activation of internship, apprenticeship, dual training courses.

The development of digital skills must be a prerequisite for any intervention. In fact, a fundamental element to combat - both in carrying out the school path and in the transition to professional training and work - is digital exclusion. A sustainable development of self-employment initiatives also passes through the conscious and solid access to digital technologies, which can be favoured through ad hoc training courses or with guidance and accompaniment to the public training offer, also through distance learning opportunities.

RESULTS

Figure 1: Gender

- **Female: 65.3%**
- **Male: 34.7%**

Since our association was born to support Roma women and children, we always try to have a higher percentage of women in our surveys.

Figure 2: Age

- 18 - 30
- 31 - 45
- 46 - 60
- > 60

41
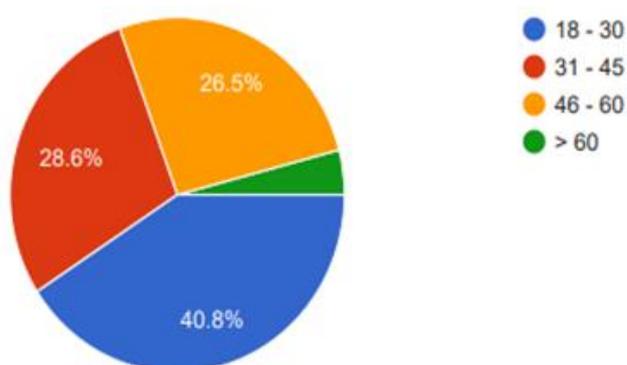
The Roma population in Italy is mainly made up of young people (considering that 60% of the Roma population is under the age of 18).

Figure 3: Place of residence
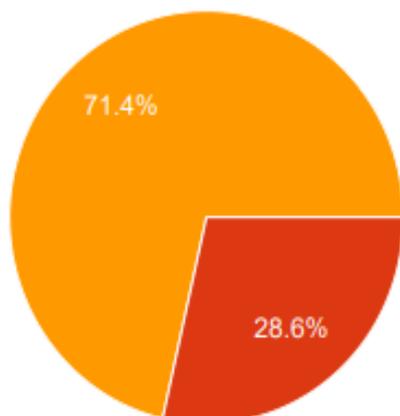
- **Suburban settlement: 71.4% (Roma camps in the outskirts of Rome)**

- **City: 28.6% (Roma living in apartments/houses/villas etc.)**

The data reflect the dramatic situation of territorial segregation of the Roma community in Italy, particularly severe in the area of the Metropolitan City of Roma: less than a third of Roma live in regular housing and almost three out of four in formal and informal "temporary" suburban settlements called "camps" (campi nomadi). This spatial ghettoization constitutes the strongest negative determinant of exclusion and difficulty of access to public services, education, job market and technology.

Figure 4: Education
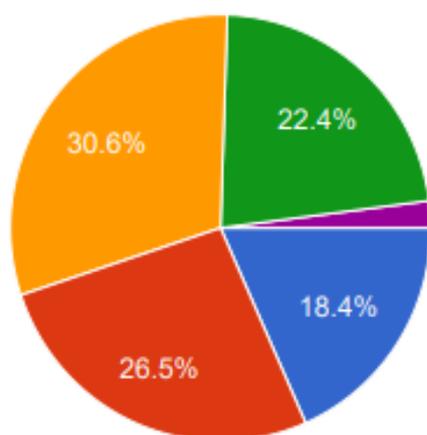
- **18.4% have no education**

- **26.5% have an elementary education (1st-5th grade)**

- **30.6% finished middle school**

- **22.4% finished high school**

- **1.75% university (only 1 in 50 people)**

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In Italy it is compulsory to attend school up to the age of 16.

The high percentage made up of people who have not attended school plus those who have only attended middle school (in total almost 50% of the people interviewed) is significant: it demonstrates the difficulty for Roma to find work and to use ICT and online services.

Figure 5: Marital Status

- **married: 44.9%**
- **single or not married: 30.6%**
- **divorced: 3.15%**
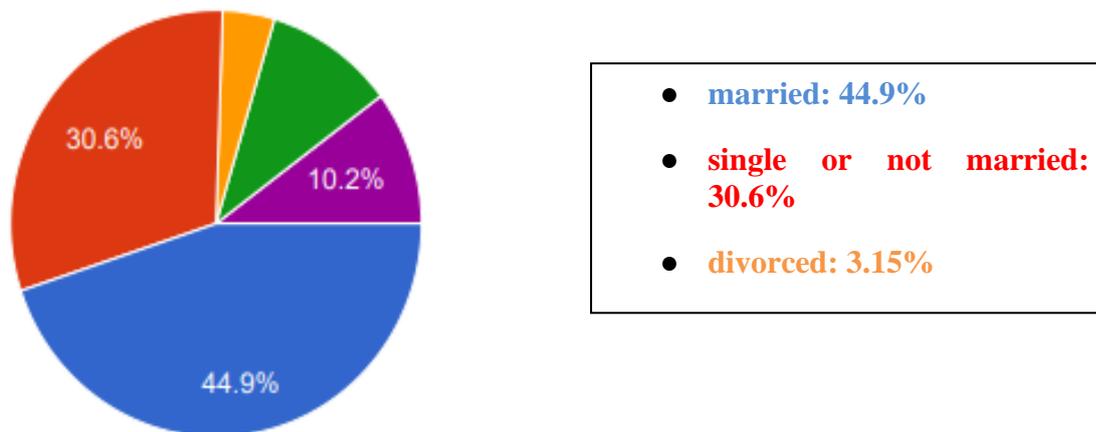
Marriage in the Roma community is important, and it can be seen that there is only a small percentage of divorced women: unfortunately patriarchy still persists in Italian Roma communities and around the world.

Figure 6: Do you have a job?

- **69.4% have no job**
- **30.6% work**

43
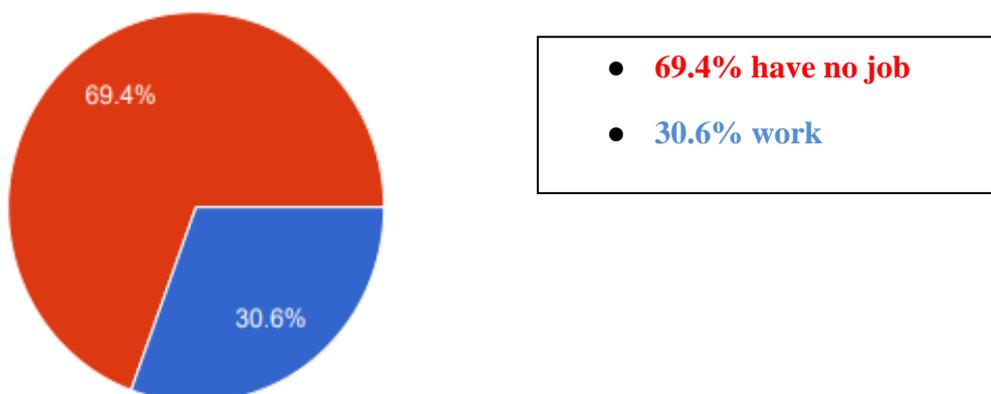
Having found that more than 50% of respondents have completed middle school at the latest, it is clear why unemployment is so high.

Figure 7: Have you got the SPID? If yes, who did you get help from to get it?
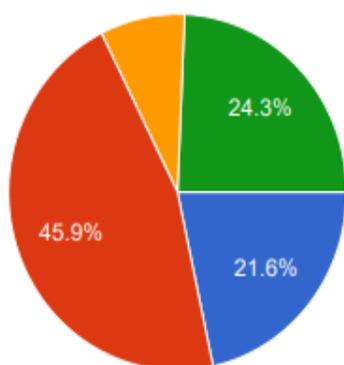
- **From no one 21.6%**

- **From a friend/relative 45.9%**

- **From an association 8.2%**

- **(answers from those who selected Other)**

- CAF 37.5%

-Post office 62.5%

SPID is the digital personal identifier of the public administration. As of 2022, in Italy, the SPID is indispensable and mandatory for most bureaucratic matters, institutional applications/sites, etc.

8.2% of the interviewees answered that they were helped by an association: this demonstrates how important the contact of the Roma community with the associations is.

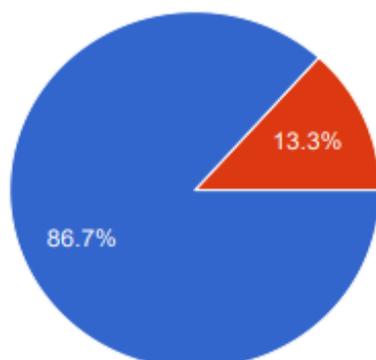**If not, why? 13 negative answers – participants responses:**

- Problems with the tax code: they won't release it to me.

- It never worked for me until now.

- No, because I've never tried to get it.

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D))RA

- No, I haven't been able to get it.

- No, because I haven't been able to download it.

- No, because I don't care.

- No, because I have recently obtained the documents.

- No, because I haven't requested it yet.

- I haven't downloaded it yet.

- No, because I don't have the documents.

- I do not know.

- No, because I'm not in order with the documents.

- I'm not in order with the documents.

Without having the documents in order (for foreigners the residence permit and passport, and for Italians the tax code, thanks to which it is possible to obtain the most important documents such as the identity card), immigrants from the former Yugoslavia have more difficulty in obtaining the document because the tax code entered in their identity card does not correspond to the tax code of the Italian identity card. For the issuance of the identity card, the municipality inserts Yugoslavia as the country of birth, but at the same time when you request the tax code, the office enters the country of residence. Thus the tax codes are double and different for the same person and the post office / caf (fiscal services) / special sites cannot issue the SPID.

Figure 8: Can you use the app provided by your bank on your mobile phone? If yes, who did you get help from for using the services of this app?
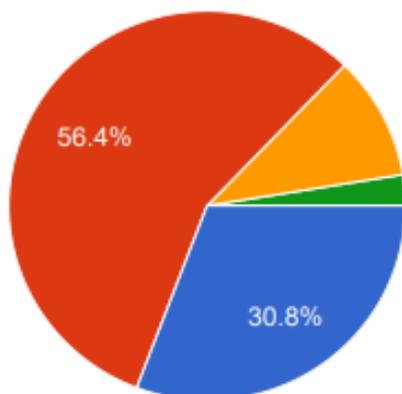
- **From no one 86.7%**
- **From a friend/relative 13.3%**

If not, why? 34 negative answers – participants responses:

- I don't know 2.1%
- I don't have an account 25%
- I don't have the app 72.9%

A large number of respondents answered that they do not have the app: having never downloaded it, they have never used it and, consequently, do not know how to use it. In fact, most Roma prefer the Italian post office as a point of their savings.

Figure 9: Can you book an appointment online for hospital office? If yes, who do you get help from?

- **From no one 30.8%**
- **From a friend/relative 56.4%**
- **From an association 10.4%**
- **Different answers 2,4%**

The analysis shows two thirds of those interviewed ask for help in making appointments for medical visits: an important data because it explains the difficulty of being treated.
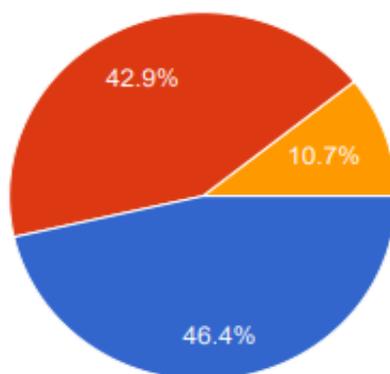
If not, why? 10 negative answers – participants responses:

- I do not know.

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- No, because my husband does it.

- No, because I've never tried it.

- No, because my relatives do it for me.

- No, because I've never tried it.

- No, because my daughter does everything.

- I'm not able to do it.

- I'll go get it there.

- I can't do it.

- I can't do it, my documents are not in order.

**Figure 10: Are you able to collect a medical report online? If yes, who do you get help from?**

- **From no one 46.4%**

- **From a friend/relative 42.9%**

- **From an association 10.7%**

If not, why? 20 negative answers – participants responses:

- I pick it up directly at the hospital 90%

- No, because my sister does everything 5%

- I can't do it 5%

The fact that 53.6% need to ask for help to collect the medical report is alarming.

Figure 11: Have you ever ordered food delivery through an app (for example Glovo, Just Eat etc.)? If yes, who did you get help from?
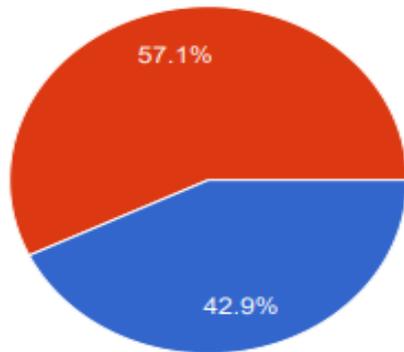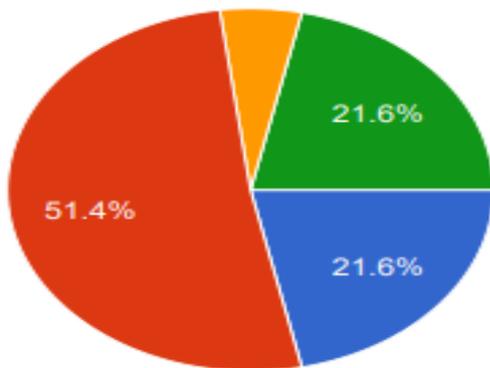
- **From no one 42.9%**
- **From a friend/relative 57.1%**

If not, why? 14 negative answers – participants responses:

- I cook by myself 37.5%

- I don't know 21.4%

- I don't use the app 7.1%

- I can't do it 7.1%

- Because I don't care 26.9%

The data shows that home-made food is still preferred in the Roma community.

Figure 12: Have you ever used the online services present on the INPS website? If yes, who did you get help from?

- **From no one 21.6%**
- **From a friend/relative 51.4%**
- **From an association 5.4%**
- **From no one 42.9%**
- **From a friend/relative 57.1%**

Responses from those who selected – Other 21.6%

- **Caf 87,5%**

- **Financial advisor 12,5%**

INPS (Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza Sociale) is the Italian public authority for pensions. From the 38 positive responses it can be seen that almost all the interviewees were helped by the CAF, a very important office for the Roma community, because the latter trust this center and know it as the only safe office for obtaining state benefits. But there is also a large percentage of those interviewed who, not having the documents in order, have no right to have benefits: consequently, the Roma are part of the most disadvantaged classes who need to receive legal assistance.

If not, why? 12 negative answers – participants responses:

- No, because my documents are not in order 33.2%

- No, because I go directly there 25.3%

- No, I don't know anything about it 8.3%

- No, because I don't care 24.9%

- No, because my husband takes care of it 8.3%

Figure 13: Do you usually read the latest news on Italian journalistic websites (e.g. La Repubblica, Il Messaggero, etc.)? If so, why?
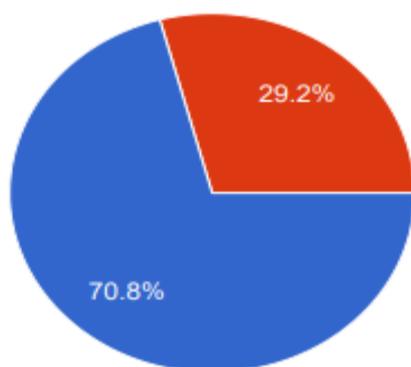
- **I like to know what happens in Italy and around the world 70.8%**

- **I read them by accident 29.2%**

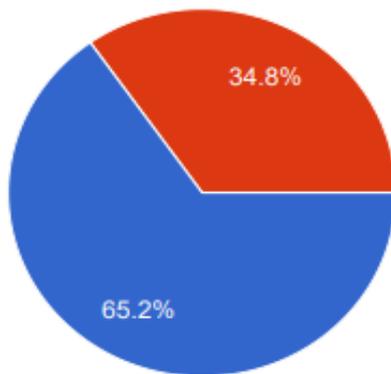**If not, why? 25 negative answers – participants responses:**

- No, because I watch them on TV 52%

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- No, because I can't read well 44%

- No, because I'm not interested 4%

Almost half of those interviewed do not read news on the web because they have difficulty reading. In fact, their low school level is proof that education is important in order to be able to inform themselves and be more integrated into civil society.

Figure 14: Have you ever shopped online? If so, who did you get help from?


- **From no one 65.2%**

- **From a friend/relative 34.8%**

If not, why? 26 negative answers – participants responses:

- I can't do it 42.7%

- I shop in store 19.2%

- No, because I don't need it 15.2%

- I don't care 11.5%

- I don't know 11.4%

About 50% of those interviewed do not use the online shopping system because they do not know how to use the appropriate apps.

Figure 15: Do you know that online you can find free courses in Italian, computer science and other subjects? If the answer is yes, choose one of the following statements?
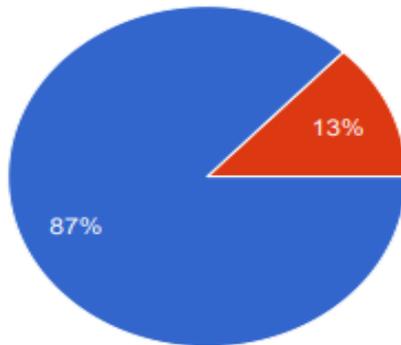
- **The courses could interest me and be useful 87%**

- **I don't care about these services / I think they are useless 13%**

Figure 16: If the answer is no, choose one of the following statements:
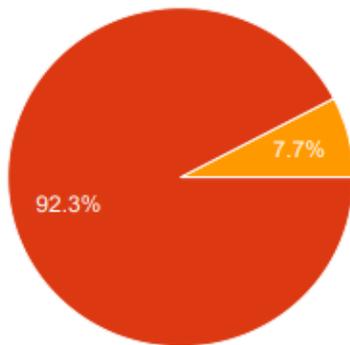
- **I will not bother looking for these courses, even if they are free 92.3%**

- **I'm unsure whether to attend these courses or not 7.7%**

87% of the respondents who believe that training courses could be useful open an interesting window of opportunity for the adult education of Roma.

Figure 17: Do you happen to book an appointment online for the Italian post office?

If not, why? 9 negative answers – participants responses:

- Because I don't know how to do it.

- I go straight to the post office.

- No, because I go directly to the counter.

- No, because I'm not capable of it.

- No, because I don't know how to do it. I go straight to the post office.

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- No, because I've never tried it.

- No, because I've never needed it.

- I don't know what they are.

- I don't know how to do it, I go there and wait in line.

We have a high percentage of people who, to avoid waiting in line at the post office, ask for help to book an appointment directly online at a pre-established time.

Figure 18: Are you registered on the MIUR website to enrol your child in school? If yes, who did you get help from?

- **From no one 22.2%**
- **From a friend/relative 38.9%**
- **From an association 38.9%**

If not, why? 30 negative answers – participants responses:

- I have no children currently 60.3%

- I don't know what MIUR is 16.7%

- No, because I'm not capable 13%

- I made the paper registration 10%

MIUR is the Italian Ministry of Education, competent for the primary education of the public system.

77.8% of those interviewed who answered yes ask for help enrolling their children in school online (and 60% who answered no have no school-age children).

In fact, the greatest difficulty of the Roma community is precisely enrolling their children in kindergarten and/or compulsory schooling for the reason that most Roma do not know how to

use IT. Another problem that has arisen since 2022 is the compulsory to have the SPID to enter every state site and platform online. A further problem is that families who are not in order with the documents cannot enrol their children in school: the only way is through associations or social workers.

Issue 19: Did you know that you can submit an application through a special form, present on the website of the Municipality of Rome, to be inserted in the ranking list for obtaining a council house?

If yes, are you interested in this service? 32 affirmative answers – participants responses:

- Yes, in fact I've already applied for the council house 39%

- Sure 29%

- No, I already live in a house 29%

- No 3%

Would you be able to enroll in the ranking list by yourself or would you get someone to help you?

- I got help + I would like someone to help me 78%

- I am capable on my own 22%

If not, why? 18 negative answers – participants responses:

- No and I don't need it, I have my own house.

- I don't need it, I have my own house.

- I don't know, I still live with my parents.

- No.

- I have my house.

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- No because I have my own house.

- I have my own house and in any case I'm not in order with the documents.

- I'm not in order with the documents.

- No because I'm not in order with documents.

- We already done it.

- I already have public housing.

From the answers it can be seen that about 70% of the interviewees have already applied for social housing, but almost all with the help of someone. From these data it can be seen that the majority of Roma in Rome still live in abusive camps/slums who are not in order: this represents the greatest discomfort of the Roma living in Italy.

The remaining percentage of respondents already have their own homes.

Issue 20: A VR headset is a particular glass that allows you to immerse yourself completely (visually) in a virtual reality. Have you ever heard of them? If yes, have you ever used one?

- No 60%

-Yes 35%

-No, but I want 5%

Do you think it can be a useful tool? And if yes, for what?

- Entertainment 70%

- For all 10%

- For work 10%

- I don't know 10%

If no, would you like to use it at least once? 40 negative answers – participants responses:

- Yes 47%

- I don't know, I'm not sure what it is 34%

- I don't know 6.9%

- Maybe 4.6%

- Yes, to see new places 2.5%

- No 5%

The VR Headset is a rather sophisticated digital tool, which has established itself above all in recent years thanks to the creation of the *Metaverse*. Unfortunately, statistics show that the lack of information (current events) and education do not allow Roma to keep up to date with digital news, preventing the community from keeping up with the times.

Issue 21: Do you know any way to save electricity at home? If yes, which? 8 affirmative answers – participants responses:

- Yes.

- Solar panels.

- Yes. Turn off devices when not in use.

- In the evening you save more.

- Yes. Do not leave devices on standby.

- Yes. Turn off the circuit breaker.

-Yes, using it in certain time slots.

- Using it in certain time slots.

42 negative answers.

Ecology has now become a real science, increasingly essential to deal with climate change and environmental disasters. Ecology and respect for the environment are two subjects which, consequently, are taught in schools (from kindergarten to specific university studies). As we have shown in the previous statistics, the majority of Roma have a very low level of schooling weighed down by early school leaving: it is therefore normal that only 8 interviewees gave an affirmative answer to this question.

CONCLUSIONS

From the statistics of the survey it can be seen that the majority of the Roma interviewed have completed middle school at most (some have no education at all). The lack of education goes hand in hand with the lack of digital education. Education and literacy allow, in fact, to be able

to read and understand the instructions necessary for the use of technological devices and online services. Another obstacle is characterised by the spoken language: most of the Roma who live in Italy use as their first language not Italian, but their own language of origin (usually a Slavic language like Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian; or Romanian) and/or their own Roma dialect (Italian, Sinto, Slavic). Consequently, Roma need to adapt the language in which the contents are written, in the case of Italy it is Italian, and learn it in order to be able to follow the instructions.

The low level of education and the lack of literacy therefore constitute the root of the problem of the low level of digitization of the Roma community in Italy.

The questionnaire is made up of questions about essential online services, such as the question about the SPID, useful to be able to access institutional services - enrolment in schools, booking medical appointments - and questions about more superfluous services - online shopping, ordering food at domicile etc.-.

In today's capitalist-style civil society, where if you don't know how to do certain activities you remain in a state of complete marginalisation, knowing how to use and exploit technology is essential for education, in the world of work (which requires at least digital skills basic, except for 100% manual work), to look for work, for communication and to monitor one's financial resources at any time and manage them independently.

In conclusion of this report, we firmly believe that the digital development path of the Roma communities in Italy has to be integrated with a literacy path capable of integrating the Roma into Italian and world civil society.

6. National Report Serbia

Results of the survey conducted on the territory of

Municipality of Bela Palanka, Republic of Serbia

Digital Skills Among the Roma Migrant Community

Survey and results: Udruzenje gradjana DJURDJEVDAN (Serbia)

DIRA Project Report

"Digital skills in the Roma community" in Serbia

Results of the survey implemented by DIRA Project in

Finland, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia

One of the first activities on the project "Digital Inclusion of Roma Adults: Gaining Knowledge and Skills in e-Services" implied conducting a survey among the Roma population, age 18 and older, living on the territory of Municipality of Bela Palanka. Based on the latest census (2022.), more than 2500 inhabitants have declared themselves as members of Roma national minority- 1100 of them adults (registered in Special Electoral Roll of National Minorities) who live in 12 villages, 4 in suburban settlements and in the town.

Before going to the field and initiating the survey, our team made a visit plan in order to include all villages, settlements and streets within the town, making sure that the survey covered equal percentage of participants in terms of gender, age structure, place of residence and social-economic status.

The questionnaire was filed out by 50 survey participants, who were visited by the team "door-to-door" and were presented with modest food parcels as a token of appreciation for participating in the survey. During the implementation of this activity, which lasted for four days, our team members visited 4 villages, 2 suburban settlements and three streets within the town.

After all survey participants filled out the questionnaires, our team members used Google drive model to record the answers online and we obtained the following survey results:

General information on the survey participants:

Post-war census (conducted after 1945.) confirmed that there were much more female than male inhabitants, and such trend continued to the present time, which is reflected in the latest census in the Republic of Serbia, as well as among the Roma population.
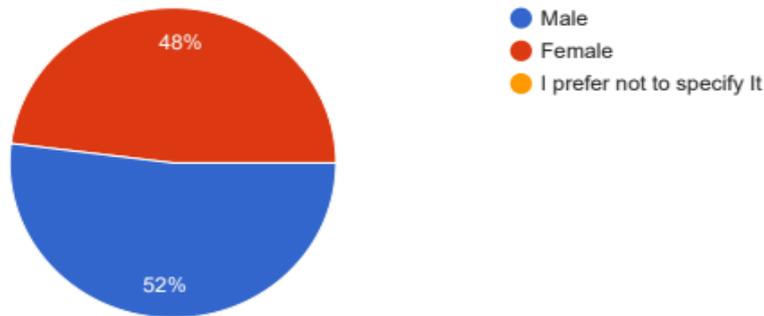
However, the differences in Roma population are also obvious in other segments of life, such as education, employment and residence. Such differences have made a significant impact on social-economic status of the Roma population in the Republic of Serbia, as its members are still on the margin of the social ladder.
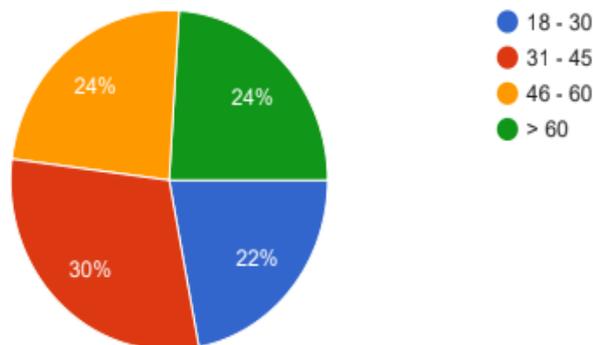
Questionnaire results

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1. Gender:

50 responses

● Male
● Female
● I prefer not to specify It

The total of 50 participants took part in the survey, 52% (26) of them being male and 48% (24) female.

2. Age:
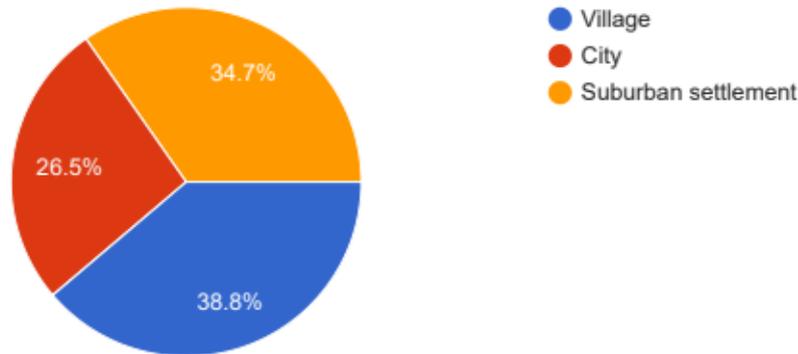
50 responses

● 18 - 30
● 31 - 45
● 46 - 60
● > 60

Age structure was almost equal (which did not actually correspond with the actual state of affairs on the field), but our team planned to include similar percentage of all age structures.

3. Place of residence:

49 responses

- ● Village
- ● City
- ● Suburban settlement

34.7%

26.5%

38.8%

Participants' place of residence was a very important factor for the survey, as the Roma from the town and suburban settlements were more informed about all benefits that were offered to their population, while the Roma living in rural area had insufficient or no information at all.

The survey included 38.8% (19) participants from rural areas, 26.5% (13) participants from the town and 34.7 % (17) participants from suburban settlements.
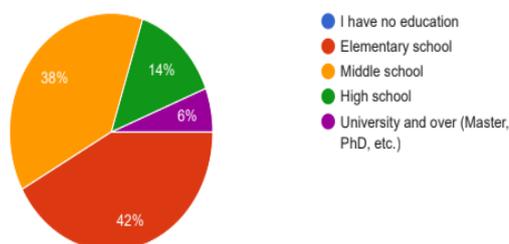
5. Marital status:

49 responses

- ● Married
- ● Single or Not married
- ● Divorced
- ● Widowed

20.4%

10.2%

67.3%
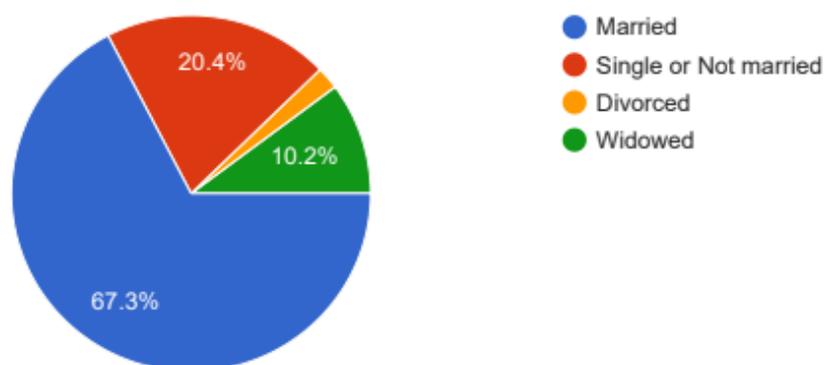
Among the survey participants, 76% of them were married, 20.4% lived alone, 0% were divorced and 10.2% were widowed.
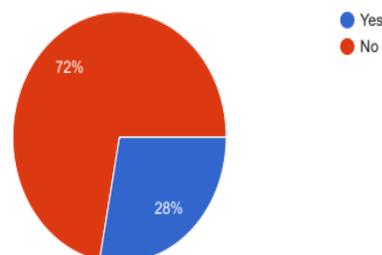
4. Education:

50 responses

6. Are you employed?

50 responses

Until 2010, only 2 out of 1500 Roma living on the territory of Municipality of Bela Palanka had an academic education degree. Nowadays, the situation is quite different.

There were 0% of survey participants who had no education whatsoever, 42% (21) of the participants, primarily the elderly population, had elementary education, 38% (19) of participants had three-year secondary education (mostly craftsmen schools), 14% (7) had four-year secondary education, including medical nurses, while 6% (3) of survey participants had higher school or faculty degree.

Education is one of the crucial segments of finding a proper employment. Until 1980s, majority of the Roma population worked in factories in the town (there were approximately ten of them) or in factories in Pirot, Nis, etc. During 1990s (when the country was under sanctions), majority of factories stopped working, so Roma workers, as all other workers, lost their jobs. At that time, some Roma started trading, some opened blacksmith's shops that Roma were well known for, while others started doing seasonal agricultural works on large farms all over the country.

Based on the above stated, the survey showed that majority of participants, 72% (36) with working capacity were unemployed, while 28% (14) of participants worked in factories in the town, nearby towns or owned a craft shop.

1. Do you have a password for accessing e-Uprava portal?

Digitalization system has been developed in the Republic of Serbia, primarily in the public sector, in the past several years. This refers to municipal administration, public institutions (schools) and organs.

The outburst of the pandemic had a significant impact on the development of digitalization, especially in terms of educational system which was based on online tuition. Therefore, the teachers and students had to master various techniques of digital access to educational system almost overnight. Numerous domestic and foreign donors provided laptops and smart phones, via Ministry of Education and Technological Development, for students from vulnerable groups and poor students, all with the aim of helping them attend online tuition on daily basis.

Citizens' insufficient knowledge on the presence and ways of using digital communication systems and accessing specific e-services resulted in the fact that large number of citizens are now still waiting in queues at majority of public institutions, especially in smaller towns, such as Bela Palanka.

Only 32% of survey participants said that they had password for accessing e-Uprava portal, while 68% stated that they did not use online portal access. The primary reason for not using the portal was the lack of information, while several participants said that they were not interested in online services provided by the portal.

1. Do you have your password for entering the eGovernment portal?
Yes, If so, who do you get it from?

16 responses

Legend:
- From no one
- From friends/relatives
- From associations
- Other (specify)

75%
18.8%
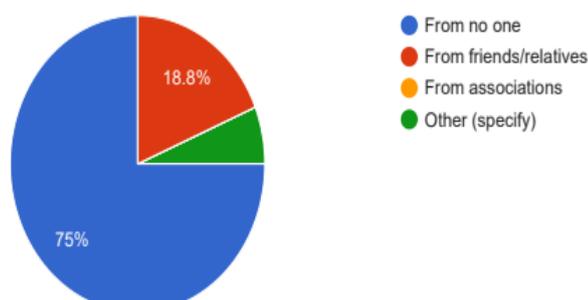
2. Can you use the application of your bank or post office at your mobile phone?

We have already mentioned that minority of population is employed in public or private sector. Bela Palanka is classified in the last (fourth) group of underdeveloped municipalities in Serbia which implies that large number of families, mostly Roma families, use financial (public welfare) assistance. Family heads who are employed in public or private sectors, as well as heads who are unemployed, must have bank accounts opened at post office or a bank. Of course, receiving bank statement information or information on cash inflow largely depends on the type of smart telephone that the beneficiaries have.

Therefore, 62% of survey participants answered that they used bank and post office applications, as well as that they received instructions on using the application from the bank and post office personnel or from their friends. 38% did not have a bank account, having in mind that they were dependents.

2. Can you use the application of your bank or post office on your mobile phone?
Yes, If so, who do you ask for help using this app's services?

31 responses

Legend:
- From no one
- From friends/relatives
- From associations
- Other (specify)

22.6%

71%
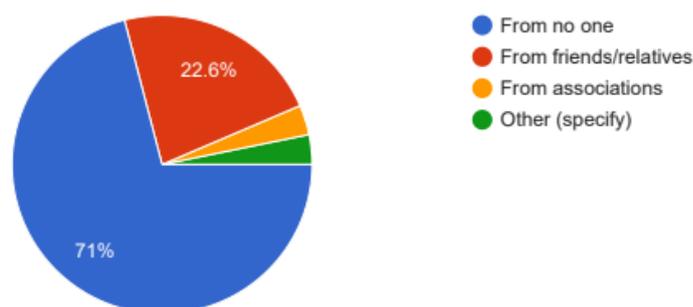
3. Can you make an online appointment at your selected physician?

Unfortunately, small towns have not yet developed this type of service. Therefore, medical appointments can be made either by calling the physician's office or by going directly to the medical facility.

The situation is quite different in larger towns and cities, where majority of the population can make online medical appointments at public and private medical facilities. Making online appointments at private clinics and polyclinics is simplified, as majority of clinics have their own Facebook pages, websites and call centers. The total of 36% of survey participants said that they could make an appointment at their physician on their own, while some of them were able to make an appointment with a little help from their friends, relatives or associations (organizations) who help the elderly and ill. However, 64% of the survey participants, mainly the elderly population, people who live in rural areas, people who live alone and vulnerable group of people, said that they could not make an online appointment.

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3. Can you book an appointment online with your chosen doctor?

Yes, If so, who do you get help from?

18 responses

Legend:
- From no one
- From friends/relatives
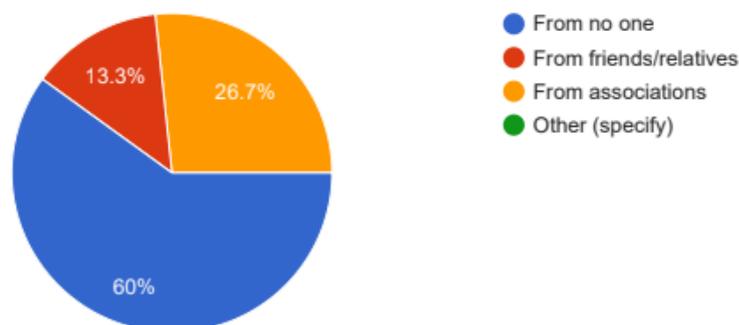- From associations
- Other (specify)

16.7%
22.2%
61.1%
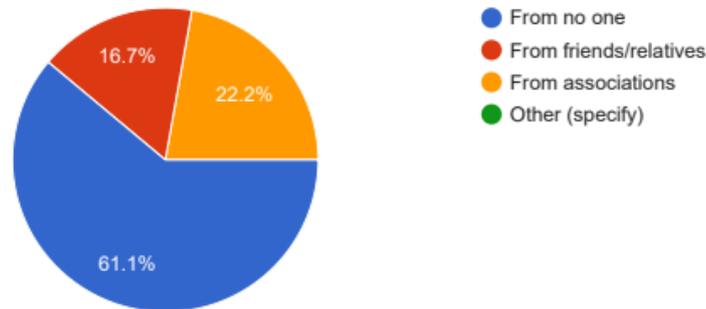
4. Have you been able to download a medical report online?

Only 36% of survey participants have been able to download their medical files online, while 64% of them say that they have been unable to do such a thing.

4. Are you able to collect a medical report online?
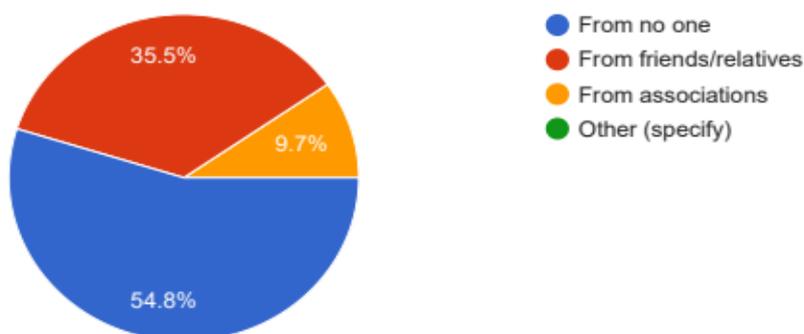
Yes, If so, who do you get help from?

15 responses

Legend:
- From no one
- From friends/relatives
- From associations
- Other (specify)

13.3%
26.7%
60%

5. Have you ever ordered food, clothes, medicine at home through an application?

Yes, If so, who do you get help from?

31 responses

Legend:
- From no one
- From friends/relatives
- From associations
- Other (specify)

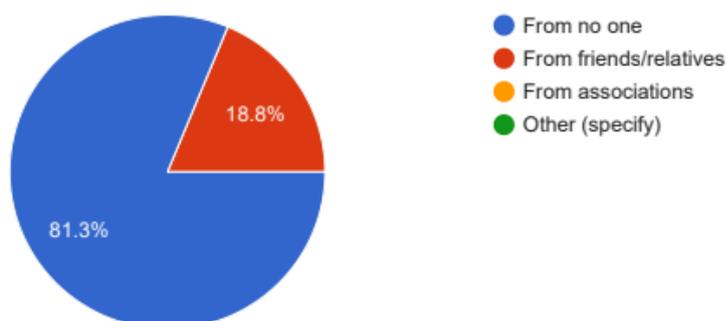Pie chart values: 35.5%, 9.7%, 54.8%

The option of online sale, which is promoted via Facebook, has enabled the sale of various items, especially as the prices of such items are more favorable than in the shops and markets. The items are ordered online primarily by young and middle-aged individuals. Online ordering of food and medications in the town is currently impossible, as objective requirements have not been met yet. The total of 62% of the survey participants confirmed that they shopped online, while half of them said that they managed to use the applications by themselves.

6. Have you ever used the website euprava.gov.rs?

Yes, If so, who do you get help from?

16 responses

Legend:
- From no one
- From friends/relatives
- From associations
- Other (specify)
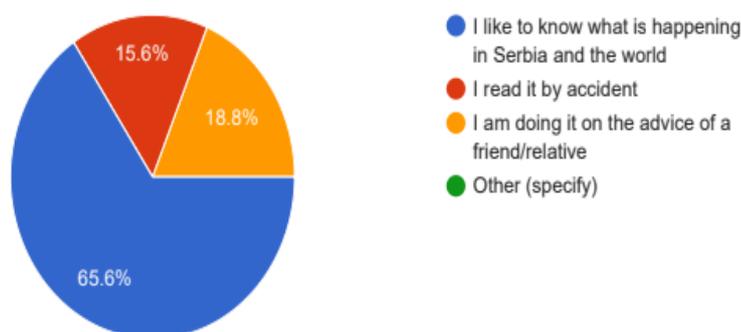
Pie chart values: 18.8%, 81.3%

65

The lack of timely information on the possibilities and ways of using specific websites is primarily reflected in socially vulnerable groups, especially in older population.

Majority of survey participants i.e. 68% of them stated that they did not have knowledge of the website. 32% of participants, mainly secondary school pupils or academically educated individuals, stated that they used the abovementioned website. Most of the participants found the website on their own, while others asked their friends and relatives to help them find the above website.

7. Do you read the latest news on any of the websites of domestic or foreign newspapers?

Yes If so, why?

32 responses

- I like to know what is happening in Serbia and the world
- I read it by accident
- I am doing it on the advice of a friend/relative
- Other (specify)

15.6%
18.8%
65.6%

Receiving information via electronic media is predominant in Serbia, while minority of the population uses print media. Based on the results of the survey, 2/3 of the participants follow the media via electronic instruments, which is very positive in terms of Roma integration and keeping in touch with the latest events, both in their local community, country and abroad.
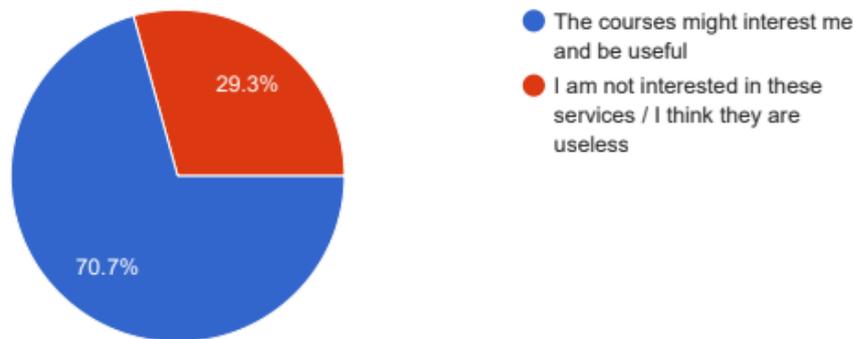
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9. Do you know that you can find free language courses on the Internet?

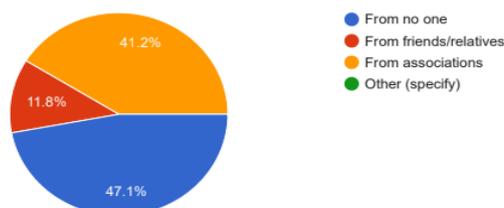Yes, if the answer is yes, choose one of the following statements

41 responses

- The courses might interest me and be useful
- I am not interested in these services / I think they are useless

70.7% / 29.3%

Having in mind that, in the past few years, more and more people in Serbia have started attending foreign language courses, primarily English and German, with the aim of finding and adequate job in the countries of Western Europe or working for international companies from home, 80% of the survey participants said that they knew about online language courses. 70.7% of participants confirmed that they were interested in attending such courses, while 29.3% of participants said that they were not interested in foreign language courses. Only 20% of the survey participants said that they had never heard of free language courses, but half of them told us that they were willing to search for free online courses.

10. When it comes on online appointment at the doctor's, official institutions and organs on the territory of Municipality of Bela Palanka, the total of 34% survey participants knew how to make an online appointment, while 66% stated that they were unable to do that. Almost half (47.1%) of the participants who knew how to make online appointments did this on their own, and 11.8% were assisted by friends or family members.
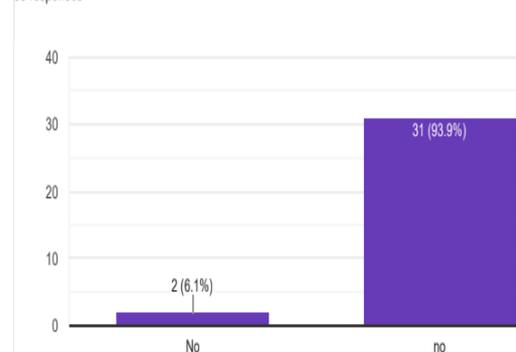
10. Do you happen to book an appointment online with a doctor, in the municipality or some other institution or institution?

Yes, If so, who do you get help from?

17 responses

33 responses

- From no one
- From friends/relatives
- From associations
- Other (specify)

41.2% / 11.8% / 47.1%

31 (93.9%) / 2 (6.1%)

67

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11. Are you registered at the website of the Ministry of Education which helps you monitor the progress of your child at school?

In the past ten years, Serbian elementary and secondary schools started using electronic grade books. This process required additional activities in terms of including the parents i.e., making sure that each parent/guardian had password for accessing her/his child's grades in electronic grade book.
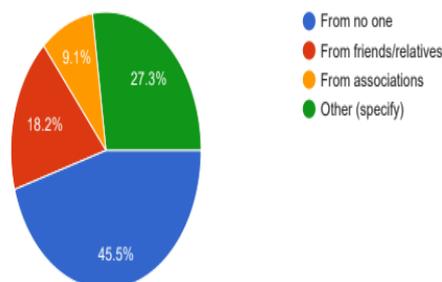
The answers of our survey participants also indicated the number of children that attended elementary and secondary schools, so we concluded that only 20% of survey participants used the website of the Ministry of Education. The total of 27.3% of participants received instructions and information from the school, 18.2% received information from friends/relatives, while 9.1% of participants asked the association (NGO) for help.

A large percentage (80%) of survey participants did not use the website, and only 20% of participants had elementary or secondary school students at home.
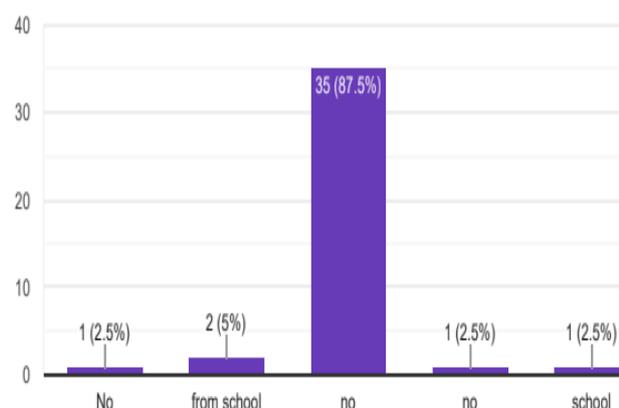
11. Are you registered on the website of the Ministry of Education to monitor your child's progress at school?

40 responses

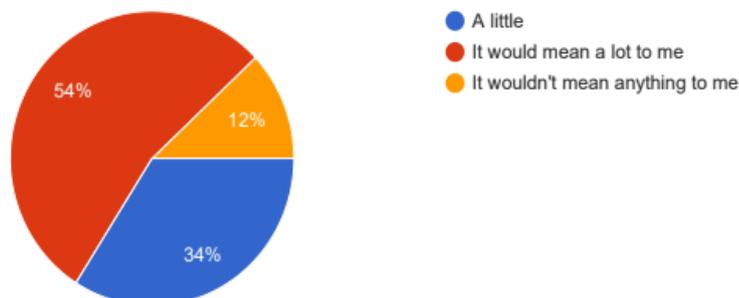Yes, If so, who do you get help from?

11 responses

- From no one
- From friends/relatives
- From associations
- Other (specify)

Pie chart: 9.1%, 27.3%, 18.2%, 45.5%

Bar chart:
- No: 1 (2.5%)
- from school: 2 (5%)
- no: 35 (87.5%)
- no: 1 (2.5%)
- school: 1 (2.5%)

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12. How much would it mean to you to be able to pay household bills online?

50 responses

- A little
- It would mean a lot to me
- It wouldn't mean anything to me

54%
12%
34%

The development of digital technology has significantly improved the process of online utility payment all over the world, including Serbia. Of course, one needs to meet several requirements for making online payment, such as regular salary, knowledge of the tools which are used in the process of digital (online) payment and sufficient skills for using mobile applications for online payment. More than half (54%) of the survey participants said that online payment system would mean a lot to them, 34% stated that online payment would not mean a lot to them, while 12% of survey participants confirmed that online payment system would not mean anything to them.

Conclusions:

Digitalization process is a crucial factor for improving the quality of life of each individual. However, the population that does not possess sufficient knowledge and skills for using e-services, so the application of digital information has remained on the margins of society.

The Roma population on the territory of Municipality of Bela Palanka, Republic of Serbia, is primarily based on the elderly who do not possess adequate education (majority of residents older than 40 have completed only elementary education) or sufficient knowledge on the application of digital technology.

Insufficient knowledge of foreign language (primarily English), inability to obtain and adequately use smart telephones, lack of information on the availability of e-administration websites and portals, and inability to use such portals makes the lives of this group of people rather difficult.

The community, primarily state organs and NGOs (who have the capacity and knowledge, but lack financial support of the state), should improve their engagement and give the Roma

population the opportunity to be included in social events, both in their local community and in general, as well as to enable them easier access to digital services which would improve the quality of their lives and provide better integration into the social environment.

7.National Report Macedonia

Digital Skills Among the Roma Migrant Community

Survey and results: DEACONESS FOUNDATION

DIRA Project Report

"Digital skills in the Roma community"

in North Macedonia

Results of the survey implemented by DIRA Project in Finland, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia

I. Introduction

This report presents the results from the conducted survey regarding the digital skills of the Roma community in Bitola, North Macedonia. The survey was implemented with the goal to research the current state and the needs of Roma in using eServices, the intensity of their usage, the educational and employment needs of Roma using or lacking using eServices, and the main platforms and websites that require training for Roma. In particular, it examines the use of IT devices including the type of devices used, the familiarity with and ability to use of the online platforms/websites for eServices, main activities performed online, including their digital communication skills. As a conclusion, this report highlights the training needs of the Roma community members in Bitola**,** in order to improve their digital skills and be able to successfully use computer with accent on the office package, to access online educational services, employment and social benefits.

The study has been performed by the Association of Roma Community Development "Sumnal" within the project for Cooperation partnerships in adult education "Digital Inclusion for Roma Adults: Gaining Knowledge and Skills in eServices (DIRA)", funded by the European Commission through the Erasmus + program with reference number 2022-1-FI01-KA220-ADU-000086385.

II. Methodology

The survey was conducted from 14-18 November 2022 in Bitola with 50 adult Roma by 2 staff members of Sumnal. The staff members interviewed the Roma in person doing field work and also interviewing some of the beneficiaries of our services that came in our Center. Afterwards, their responses were entered in the digital version of Google Forms.

The majority of questions were closed, while a few of them were open, allowing respondents to explain their chosen answer. The quantitative data was then analyzed in SPSS and presented in the form of graphs, as well as a list of responses to the open questions.

III. Analysis of the data

1. General description of the target group

According to the last census from 2021, in Bitola there are around 2900 Roma or 3,39%, but given the fact that more than 5000 citizens (around 6,5%) were not included because of lack of data, documents, refusal to participate or similar reasons, this number is higher. According to the NGO sector, in Bitola there are around 4000 Roma. They are regular citizens and live in the four settlements Karaorman, Bair, Petocna voda, and Ljubojno in the city. They face social exclusion and marginalization, including major obstacles in finding employment, accessing health services, housing and education.

The Association for Roma Community Development, in cooperation with the Municipality of Bitola, the schools and different institutions, offers them educational and training opportunities, as well as mediation and help in obtaining different public services, access to public education, health services, employment and important information related to improving their living conditions and exercising their basic human rights.
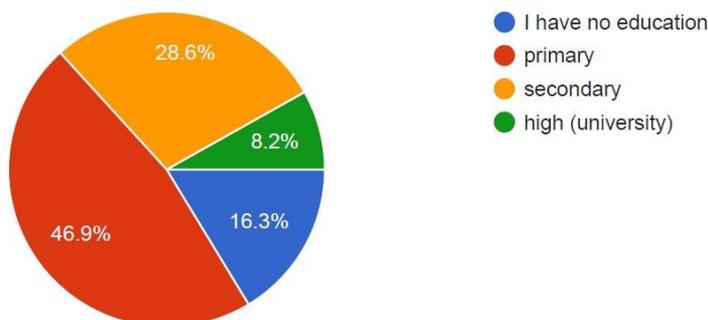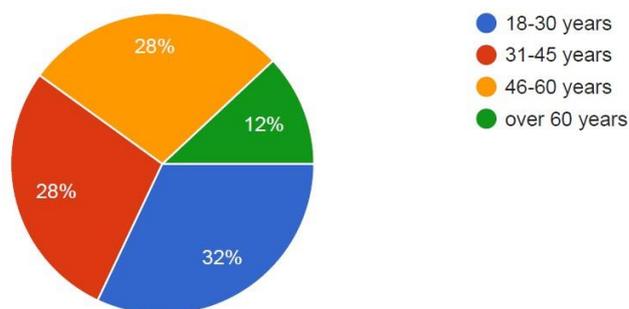
Figure 1: Gender
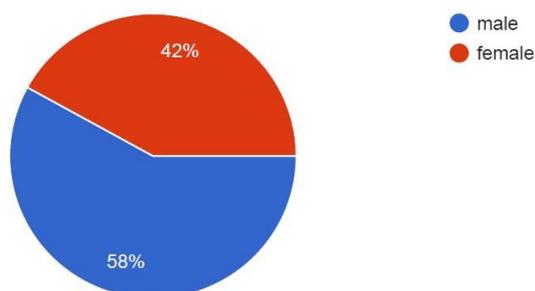
According to the results of the survey, the majority of the respondents, or 46,9%, have finished primary education, 28.6% have secondary education, 8.2% high education and 16.3% have no education.

Figure 2: Educational level

If we take into consideration our knowledge and experience from working with them, we can confirm that among the ones with primary education there are a lot of functional illiterates and also the number of illiterate Roma that were not included in the survey is quite high. These Roma are usually above 40 or 50 years of age and because of their lack of education and knowledge they usually refuse to participate in a survey out of fear of data abuse or political abuse. Throughout their life, the Roma face a lot of difficulties such as poverty, discrimination, early marriages, including limited access to education, employment and decent housing. According to our survey, this is the reason of the low percent of included respondents above 60 years (Figure 3). As marriage is very important in the Roma community, the majority of our respondents are married usually very early in their lives (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Age
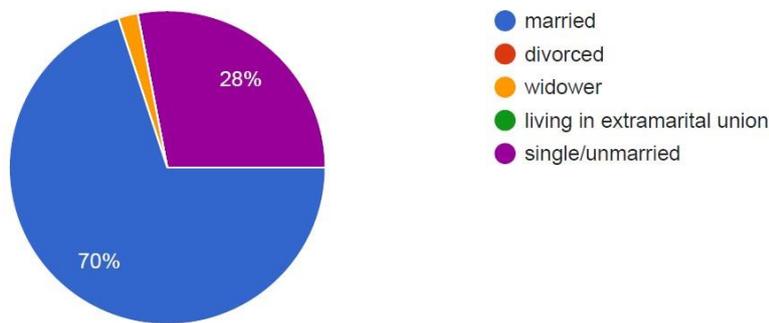
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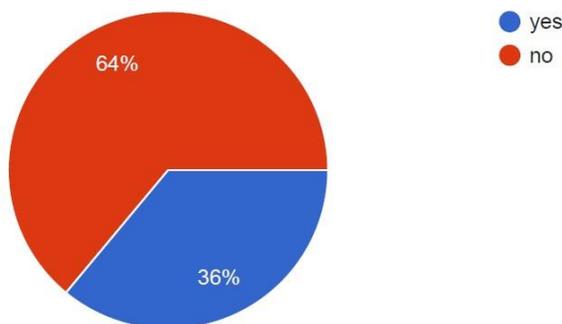of the European Union

Figure 4: Marital status

The lack of education, or the low level of education prevents them from finding a job and providing themselves with good living conditions that affects their housing. Thus, the high number of unemployed Roma (64%). The poor use of internet and IT devices for job searching is directly related to this.

Figure 4: Employment

The majority of the Roma population do seasonal work in agriculture, selling goods on the street or the market, collecting plastic bottles or iron. The ones that manage to get employment, usually work as garbage collectors or hygienists in the public, private institutions or different businesses.

In Bitola there are also community members that have no personal identification documents or legalized housing which affects their ability to obtain health insurance, ID's, regular employment and education.

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2. Access to internet and IT devices and their use

The majority of the respondents (more than 80%) have access to internet and more than 90% have mobile phones (smartphones). They do not use desktop computers, laptops or tablets mainly because of their lack of digital knowledge and skills, and prefer the use of the smartphones as they are easier to use and access, even for the less literate community members. The majority (more than 70%) uses mobile phones mainly for communication. They know how to search the Internet, but almost half of them are not sure in judging whether the information is reliable or not.

When it comes to communication, they mostly use Viber or social media, but do not know hot to communicate properly via e-mail including writing messages and attaching documents or other data.

The lack of digital skills and knowledge reflects on the extremely high percentage of no use or knowledge about the office programs: more than 90% do not know or use them. This is directly connected to the previously mentioned results of lack of use of desktop computers, laptops or tablets.

On the contrary, the use of the social networks is very high (more than 70%) but it is mostly limited to communication, sharing pictures, videos, entertainment or viewing content. Despite this, half of the respondents do not know how to recognize hate speech or properly respond.

The use of eServices is also low as the majority do not know how to pay bills online or check the state of their bank accounts. The use of ATM's is high but only limited to withdrawing money, and the shopping online is also high due to the simplicity of doing it with smartphone.
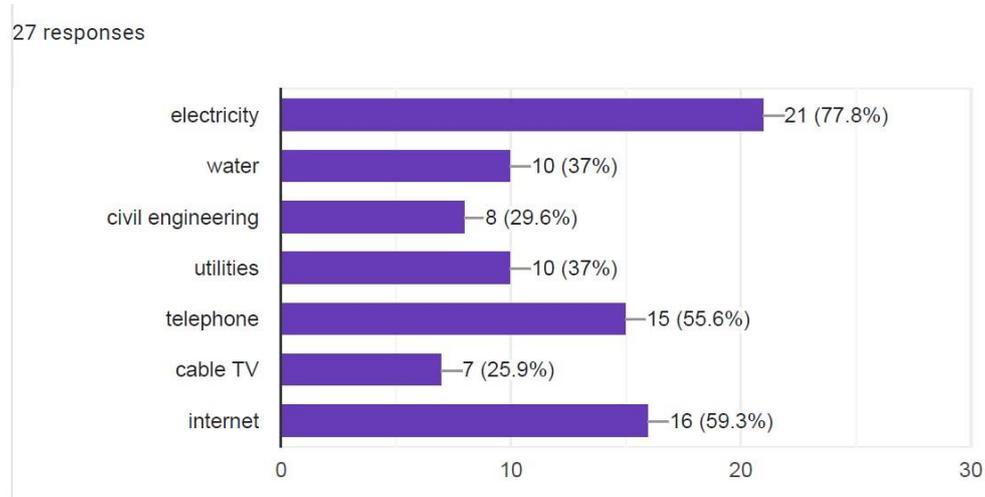
Generally, we can conclude that the majority of the Roma community lacks proper digital knowledge and skills that will enable them to use more digital tools and in the proper way. More particularly, they need to learn how to use desktop computers, laptops and tablets with accent on the office programs and proper search of the internet differentiating reliable from unreliable content. Additionally, they need to improve their skills in using smartphones related to the previously mentioned knowledge and skills, emphasizing the proper use of the social media with accent on personal data safety and use, recognizing hate speech and properly responding to it. Having proper digital knowledge and skills with make them more employable, able to search employment on the internet and able to improve their everyday lives by using the available eServices.

3. Results on the specific survey implemented in Bitola, North Macedonia

When it comes to the available eServices and their use, each partner country has its own specifics. For this purpose and additional survey was conducted that enabled us to find out which specific digital knowledge and skills the Roma from our local community in Bitola need.

From the available eServices for paying bills, only 27 out of 50 answered that they can and from them the majority (77,8%) knows how to pay the electricity bill.

27 responses

electricity — 21 (77.8%)
water — 10 (37%)
civil engineering — 8 (29.6%)
utilities — 10 (37%)
telephone — 15 (55.6%)
cable TV — 7 (25.9%)
internet — 16 (59.3%)

The available e-banking services of the banks are familiar to only 33 respondents out of 50, and the majority (87,9%) know how to use them only on their mobile phones.

33 responses

- computer/laptop
- the mobile application for your phone

87.9%
12.1%
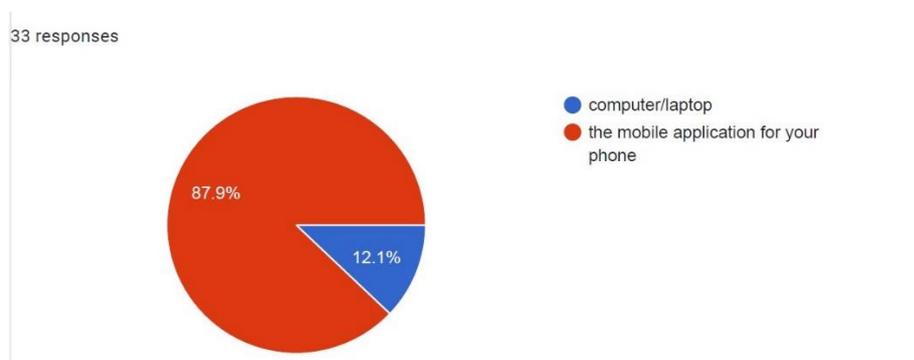
48 respondents out of 50 answered that they are not familiar with the eServices portal of our country which corresponds to 77.1%. Out of them only 21 answered to the question if they know how to use them resulting with only 33.3% positive responses.

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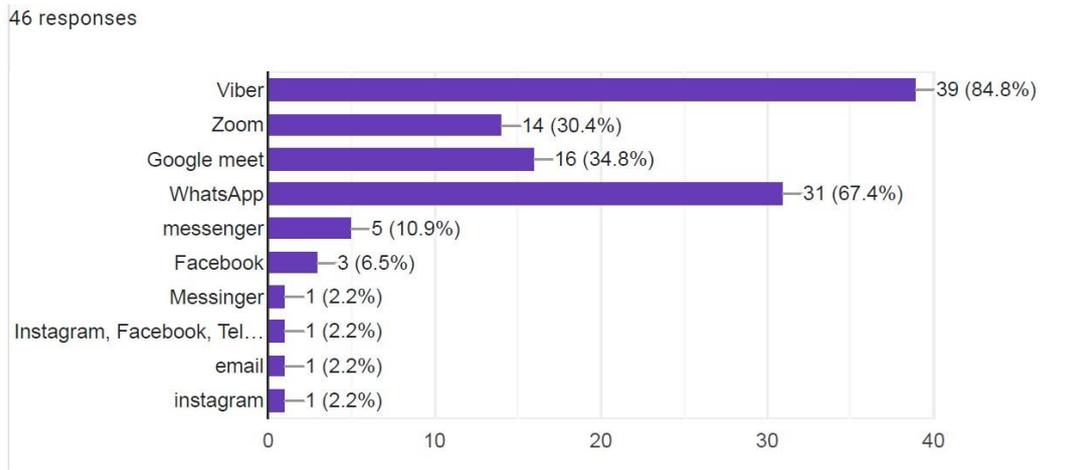
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21 responses
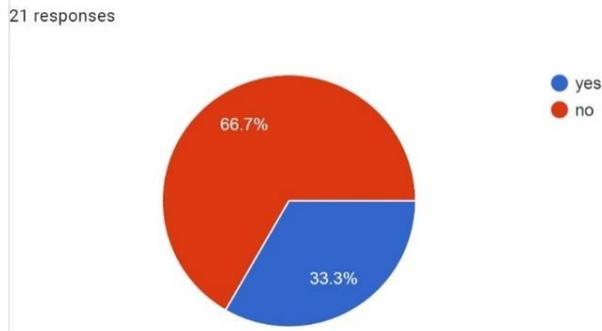
Online shopping is used by half of the respondents. 53.1% answered that they know how to order food online, and 61.2% know how to do shopping online.
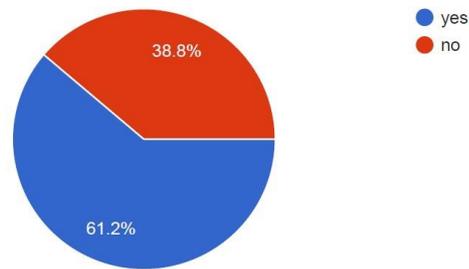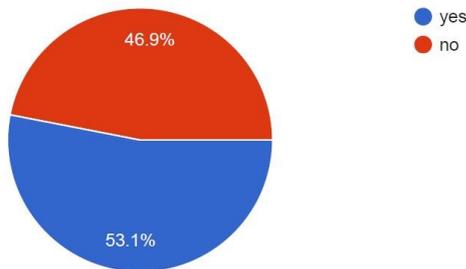
Booking travel tickets online is familiar to 61.2% of the respondents.
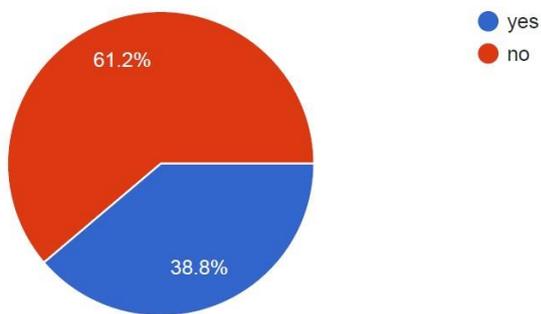
The question "Do you know how to use digital communication tools?" was answered by 46 respondents. The majority of them (84.8%) answered that they mostly use Viber, followed by WhatsApp with 67.4%.

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46 responses

Viber	39 (84.8%)
Zoom	14 (30.4%)
Google meet	16 (34.8%)
WhatsApp	31 (67.4%)
messenger	5 (10.9%)
Facebook	3 (6.5%)
Messinger	1 (2.2%)
Instagram, Facebook, Tel…	1 (2.2%)
email	1 (2.2%)
instagram	1 (2.2%)

Unfortunately, more than 90% of the respondents are not familiar with the existing of the online portal of the cadastre or the tax office and do not know how to use them.
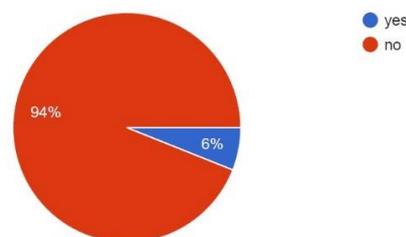
Do you know how to use the e-cadastre online portal for obtaining a property certificate?
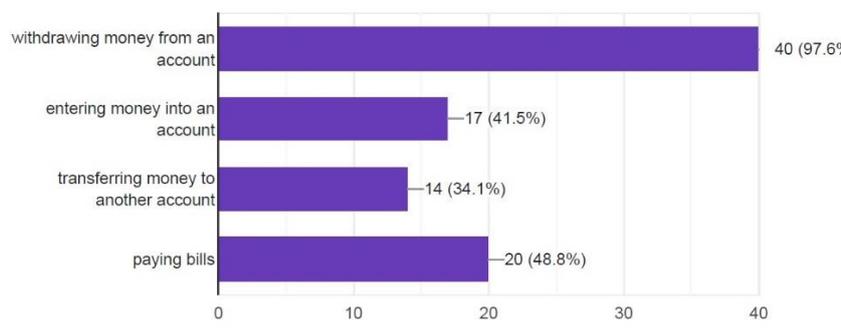
50 responses

- yes
- no

92%
8%
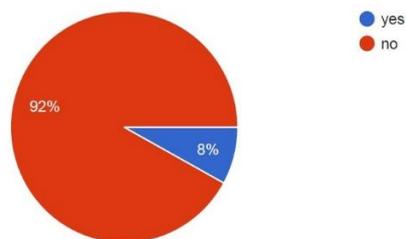
Do you know how to use the e-tax online portal to check your annual tax situation?

50 responses

- yes
- no

94%
6%

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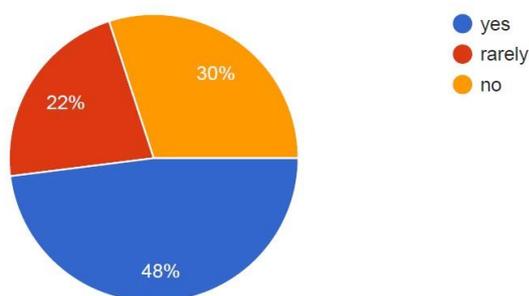Erasmus+ Programme
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41 respondents answered that they know how to use the ATM, but mainly for withdrawing money (97.6%).

Reading news and events on online portals is not a common habit among the Roma community as only 48% do it regularly.

From the results we can notice that almost half of the adult Roma in Bitola lack digital skills and knowledge and more than 70% of them do not know the existence of national online portals for obtaining public services.

IV. Conclusions and further need for training

The results show that there is a major gap to be addressed in the digital skills of members of the Roma community from Bitola, North Macedonia and their ability to perform everyday tasks and to access basic e-services. Their inability to perform basic online tasks and to access e-services is a result of their low level of education or no education, including poor foreign languages skills (mainly English). These are the major obstacles that prevent them from developing their digital skills and participating in the online sharing of knowledge and information.

The obstacles in reaching basic eServices pose significant barriers for their economic and social integration, by preventing them from fulfilling basic tasks, such as contacting an employer, day care services, schools, checking their bank accounts, paying bills and services online and so

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on. Not having the proper digital knowledge and skills requires external help from other people endangering the data protection and confidentiality of the beneficiary information. As consequence they need to access these services only face-to-face which requires more time and resources for both the beneficiary and the relevant public or private institutions, as this involves individual guidance provided during working hours.

Therefore, the need of trainings providing digital skills and knowledge for this group is essential in order to improve their social inclusion and employability resulting with better life and wellbeing. The duration and the financial aspect of the offer have to be taken into consideration as most of them are unemployed, or work long hours. Childcare during the training should be also considered as many do not have whom to leave their children to attend the training.

8. Conclusions

<u>Roma people suffer digital exclusion in large proportions and everywhere</u>

The first objective of the baseline study conducted through the survey in Roma communities in four project countries (Finland, Italy, Serbia and Macedonia) was to identify the situation of the Roma people in the various countries as regards the level of digital education and access to local, national and international digital services.

The results of the general survey and the conclusions of the national reports show that the usage of digital devices and the access to digital opportunities are severely limited for Roma people regardless of the country - of residence and of origin. This result reinforces the approach of the DIRA project to devise common actions and initiatives to introduce and foster access to digitalization among Roma.

Digitally feeblest communities are rural and segregated areas, precisely those where access to digital opportunities could provide meaningful tools for opening new and relatively inexpensive channels for integration.

The "lack of facilities and digital skills" is pointed out by the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation (2021/C 93/01) as one of the structural inequalities that prevent access to opportunities in all walks of life and notably in the essential fields of education, employment and health.

<u>Community facilities for computer and internet access in Roma settlements are needed</u>

The second objective of the baseline study was to identify the concrete needs of the Roma for the development of digitization.

The fact that access to digital opportunities is among Roma limited to the use of the smartphone represents a huge barrier for the use of digital services. Public administration, education and training, job market, consumerism and information sphere are all shifting fast to hybrid and digital modalities. Communities without computer and internet in homes or in easily accessible communal facilities risk to remain cut out not only of present opportunities but adroitly of future perspectives.

Council Recommendation (2021/C 93/01) specifically advocates for enhancing digitalization as a transversal tool for education, where digital literacy is at the same time an essential component of literacy and basic life skills and a channel of access to learning opportunities;

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- employment, where digital skills represent an invaluable asset for self-employment and self-entrepreneurship and could offer new venues for development in rural and segregated areas;
- health, in particular in order to avoid excluding Roma women and children from information, awareness raising and prevention initiatives.

Community resources for fostering digitalization: Roma youth and use of smartphones

The third objective of the baseline study was to clarify the objectives of the project after identifying the main difficulties of the Roma in the development of digital skills.

Results provide a wealth of detailed information for partners to identify concrete and innovative initiatives for working on enlarging the access of Roma to the digital world.

Most importantly, the analysis of the results permits to identify two strong points on which to anchor strategic thinking on how to address systematically the digital segregation of Roma communities.

The first strong point is the Roma youth. However high their risk of exclusion and however limited their opportunities, financial and educational, they are native digitals. Their familiarity with digital devices and social channels could be harnessed at the service of their families and immediate communities, in a function of digital mediators.

The second strong point is the use of smartphone in all generations for communication purposes. This apparently useless digital capacity could be put to use for pushing meaningful content through widely diffused channels such as Viber or Whatsapp that almost everybody has access to.