

SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIETY

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SOME ASPECTS OF SOCIAL–ECONOMIC SITUATION OF ROMA PEOPLE IN CONDITIONS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN UKRAINE

According to the All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001 [1], representatives of more than 130 nationalities live in Ukraine. Of them Roma (Gypsies) comprise 47.6 thousand or 0.1% of the country's total population. Since the Census, the number of Roma has increased. According to the data collected by the public organization "Roma Women Fund Chiricli" [2], the majority of them – more than 20 thousand people – reside in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. In other regions of Ukraine, the presence of Roma minority is also noticeable: 14 thousand people of Roma nationality (according to public activists – up to 20 thousand people) live in the Odessa region; 8 thousand people – in the Kharkiv region; 17 thousand people – in the Zaporizhzhya region; 6 thousand people – in the Donetsk region; 5-7 thousand people – in the Cherkasy region; 2.5 thousand people – in the Kherson region; 0.8 thousand people – in the Lviv region [2].

The duration of the first wave quarantine from the middle of March until the beginning of June 2020 and related consequences of COVID-19 spread are unprecedented in the recent history of Ukraine. The education sector underwent the most dramatic changes due to the inability to apply technologies and techniques proved effective previously. Participants of the learning process, especially parents, were completely unprepared to the introduction of distance education. The school has always been a basic social institution, an agent of socialization of children. The school's role in the life of Roma communities is difficult to overestimate.

Taking into account the general social-economic situation in Ukraine, Roma expressed rather negative assessment of their financial situation. COVID-19 pandemic seriously affected the material well-being of parents of Roma children. Almost a third of respondents (31.5%) mentioned they barely make ends meet, sometimes not enough for food. Almost half of respondents (45%) mentioned there was enough food, but buying clothes or shoes was difficult. 19.7% of respondents said they generally had enough income, but the purchase of valuables was difficult. 2.7% of respondents were among the richest, i.e. those who could afford almost everything except for particularly major purchases (housing, expensive car, etc.) [3].

During COVID-19 pandemic Roma people suffered not only from material deprivation, but also in many cases from awareness of being personally unrealized and socially unclaimed in society.

For Roma children, in addition to the educational function, the school also performed the function of social protection, as e.g., here the medical examination of children was carried out, and hot lunches were provided. It should be noted that Roma children were not ready for the introduction of distance education; communication with teachers was almost not maintained. Most Roma parents claimed that the worsening took place in all subjects simultaneously. In addition, the low level of material well-being significantly affected the educational level of their children. The main barrier to Roma children's access to distance education was the lack of means of communication and the low priority of educational needs in general. The low level of mastery of modern digital communication devices made it impossible to study distantly. The All-Ukrainian online school, introduced by the Ukrainian government [4], turned out to be inaccessible and uninteresting to Roma community.

Another problem is the lack of a common vision of parents on the ways to improve the educational level of children. Therefore, the solution of the issue with the completion of the school curriculum is to be done in the triad "state-school-parents". As a way out of the problem of the level of acquired knowledge worsened, can be offered: additional lessons for the next school year; attending a "street school"; independent work of pupils; focused distance education on particular subjects.

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