

Food Security Plan - NetWorks Romania

for Roma and marginalised people registered within our holistic development programs in the County of Arad.

Summary:

1348 vulnerable people

\$26 per person per month or \$0.88 cents per person per day

Total Grant needed : One Month \$35,048

 Two Months \$70,096

Background – Overview

The majority of the Roma people in our programs are living in small simple houses, many made of mud bricks dried in the sun or tiny shacks made of scrap wood and metal. Many of their homes have earth floors and very very few have fresh water or drainage. For many of these families fresh water is from a water pump, often a long walk away. (In Alfa community (see below) it is a 1 km (0.62 miles) round trip.)

The temperature can be as high as 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in the summer months and drop to around - 25 degrees Celsius (-13 Fahrenheit) (and below) in the winter.

The Roma and Open Society have described the Roma as ***"the most disadvantaged ethnic minority in Europe. In 2003, a United Nations report provided, for the first time, robust statistical evidence on the extent of the challenges faced by Roma, including illiteracy, infant mortality, unemployment and segregation in education. Hunger and malnutrition, squalid housing without plumbing or sanitation, substandard health care, and other factors mean Roma have the shortest life expectancy in Europe."***

The Roma and Open Society

The European Commission Paper entitled "An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020" reported that ***"Many of the estimated 10-12 million Roma in Europe face prejudice, intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion in their daily lives. They are marginalised and live in very poor socio-economic conditions. This is not acceptable in the European Union at the beginning of the 21st century."***

Background - Vulnerability

COVID 19

These communities are extremely vulnerable and are recognised as being high risk. The Council of Europe on the 7th April 2020 said "Roma people living in substandard housing and in segregated settlements across Europe are among the groups most vulnerable to the current COVID-19 pandemic." The article which can be found here is worth reading (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/governments-must-ensure-equal-protection-and-care-for-roma-and-travellers-during-the-covid-19-crisis>)

This heightened vulnerability is for a number of reasons which include:

Poor nutrition over many years which means that their immune systems are weak. Many people have long standing illnesses that have become compounded over time because they have been left untreated because of the expense of medication.

Hand washing - the first line of defence against COVID 19 is not easy for the vast majority because they do not have ready access to fresh water, which can be between 150 yards/ meters and 500 yards/ meters from their homes.

The need to collect fresh water for washing, cooking etc means that “staying at home” is difficult.

Social Distancing is difficult because people live in overcrowded homes with (often) several generations living in one or two rooms.

Functional illiteracy and lack of education means that there is much misunderstanding amongst the community regarding infection and cross infection and people cannot complete the State required compulsory documentation needed for each visit to a permitted destination (eg pharmacy, supermarket) resulting in a lot of fear.

The Roma from poor communities have tended to travel to other countries seasonally for work. Common destinations are Spain and Italy. Many Families are now returning to these communities and are supposed to self isolate but this is not proving to be so easy.

Why is there Food Insecurity now?

The majority of people survive by doing informal/ illegal day work. This is usually in areas such as agriculture or construction. In a normal environment people will rarely get such work consistently every day and on average may work 2 or 3 days per week earning (120 ron per day) around \$26 per day producing around \$52 per week average over the year. (Around \$200 per month)

This would compare with the legal minimum salary of around \$74 per week.

At the moment the COVID19 lockdown means that no one can go to find work and this is resulting in a lack of money to buy even basic food or to pay for medication and electricity.

NetWorks Romania

NetWorks, is a registered Romanian Charity established in 2001, based in the village of Siria, in the County of Arad, in North West Romania. (Romanian Charity number : 13877351) Our team have 24 years of experience (since 1996) of working and living with the poor and the Roma in Romania.

We currently work in 3 communities. A rural community (99 families with 350 family members of which 137 are children), a community living in an inner City ghetto (113 families with 552 family members of which 299 are children) and a community living on a rubbish dump site (90 families with 446 family members of which 209 are children).

We have developed a long term holistic community development program that we call **E³ (Education x Empowerment x Employment)**. You can see more about the range of programs we offer on our web site at www.networks.org.ro and www.dececlothing.com

The Need

We currently have around 300 vulnerable families (1348 people (and rising) as people return) in 3 communities spread over 30 km currently at risk. Our assessment is that these families are now in need of support and this need is likely to become more extreme the longer the State of Emergency imposing restriction on movements exists. This has recently been extended to the middle of May.

Our Response

In the rural community where people have access to land we have ploughed and disked gardens and will distribute vegetable seed and seedlings in order that families can grow food for themselves. This option is not available in the inner city or the rubbish dump site and even in the rural community it will be 2 months before these gardens begin to produce a crop.

We are therefore estimating that we will need to help to provide food support for a period of 2 months in all 3 of our communities.

How much will this cost per family?

The minimum salary in the country is a good guide to determine a families basic needs. At the moment the minimum salary is 1346 ron net, approximately \$297 per month (approximately \$74 per week)

Our goal is to provide a level of food support that will relieve suffering and help to maintain family and child health through this period.

We have tried to contextualise the World Food Program guidance and also talked to local people in order to determine an approximate cost per person per month. Based on the WFP recommendations, at local prices the cost of providing this basic kind of support is around 120 ron per person per month. (\$26 per person per month or \$0.88 cents per person per day.)

This would mean that in a family of 4 the amount would be 480 Ron per month. (\$106)

Our recommendation would be to provide a minimum of \$50 per month for a family of 1 (usually the elderly living alone) and \$26 per person per month when more than one person lives together.

The support we would provide would be for families already known to us and registered in our programs, following a need assessment. The figure of \$26 per month per person is intended to be a guide and the amount of support received by individuals and families may be varied according to actual need and circumstances at the time.

How would this work?

The current Pandemic and the vulnerability of the communities raises important questions around logistics and distribution.

1. We are wanting to ensure that we do not increase the risk of infection within a vulnerable community by moving from home to home and therefore possibly cross infecting families who would otherwise have no contact with one another.
2. We are wanting to ensure that we do not expose our volunteers and staff to unreasonable risk of infection in areas of high risk.
3. There are currently guidelines on disinfecting foods and packaging before taking them into the home. At the moment there is a shortage of supply of sanitizer and there is a priority of need within the health care sector.
4. Transportation and storage of food in large quantities brings with it specific costs and challenges.
5. In rural areas some families will have access to early crops of certain vegetables eg spring onions or spinach etc
6. Supplies of produce locally are not constant at the present time and so obtaining foods of a specific type in sufficient quantities can be difficult.

Our intention, rather than bulk purchase and distribution, is to allow families to buy their own food supplies from their local supermarkets that have already satisfied the new stringent requirements of the Ministry of Health to ensure reduction of the spread of infection. This method seems to be the global trend in the area of food security.

The supermarkets currently used by families in these areas are Carrfour and Kaufland both of whom operate a “gift card” program for customers.

We propose to provide each family with a Carrfour or Kaufland gift card.

This can be “credited” with a sum of money through the bank weekly.

Different family sizes can be credited with different sums.

The Card cannot be restricted to the purchase of certain goods and therefore cannot exclude the purchase of cigarettes and alcohol, (but our experience is that even where physical food distributions take place, families determined to buy cigarettes or alcohol would simply sell the food).

The families would then be able to buy the “mix” of food that will support their needs for the week.

We will also provide each family with the necessary legal documents that they will need to leave their home to go to the store. This simple act of getting out of the home to go shopping will help relieve some of the stress that is evident in some families that is reported internationally as increasing the incidence of domestic violence.

The advantages of this system are:

1. A family will only buy items that they will consume.
2. They will not buy items that they can already access through neighbours or friends (eg onions or spinach)
3. It will help stimulate the local economy.

4. It will ensure that each person has the necessary documents to visit the local store and pharmacy at least once per week to provide for any other needs that the family may have.
5. The family themselves will deal with the issue of selecting and transporting food.
6. Reduced risk of infection and cross infection of families who would otherwise never meet.
7. Reduced risks to volunteers and staff.

Funding Needed

An emergency relief fund for 1348 people at \$0.88 per person per day or approx \$26 per person per month would mean we would need:

\$35,048 for one month.

\$70,096 for two months

Note: The figure of \$26 per month per person is a guide figure only and we would use our discretion and may vary the actual amounts received by individuals and families according to actual need and circumstances at the time.

In the event that at the end of the period of emergency any funds remain unused then these would be used by the Charity in its work with the poor.

