



BASELINE STUDY

FINANCIAL ALLOWANCES FOR CHILDREN IN FAMILIES AT SOCIAL RISK:

**Research on exercising
social benefits and factors
that limit the Roma community access**



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FOREWORD

This research was conducted as part of the project “Empowering Roma children and families to exercise their rights”, which is implemented in the period from June 2016- April 2017 in six municipalities, i.e. Prilep, Suto Orizari, Bitola, Stip, Kumanovo and Gjorche Petrov.

The research aims to identify the barriers and factors which influence the exercising of rights by Roma children in terms of their social protection, and also to contribute to increased outreach and their inclusion in the institutional mechanisms for financial support and development.

The assessment conducted by UNICEF in 2012, concerning the system of child allowance in the country, was used as starting base for this research, according to which there is swift decline in the number of beneficiaries of the key rights to child allowance and that such benefits do not reach the poorest households with children. People living outside of the capital city are striving to obtain information and they are not always aware of the required documentation, and therefore rely heavily on the center for social work. Most often, those are Roma families which are exposed to persistent poverty, as well as poor agrarian families who are most often affected by natural catastrophes and risks.

The Institute for policy research and analysis Romalitico conducted the research and drafted the report, in capacity of consultant, while the logistics support for realization of the activities in the communities was provided by the local partner associations in each of the six municipalities.

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Hereby, we extend our gratitude to the Association of education workers for protection of women's and children's rights "LIL", Centre for development of the Roma community "Bairska svetlina", Roma educational centre "AMBRELA", Association of multiethnic society for human rights and Organization of Roma women in Macedonia "DAJA".

We also extend our gratitude to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Centres for Social Work from Stip, Prilep and Kumanovo which responded to our requests to fill out questionnaires and gave their input for the situational analysis.

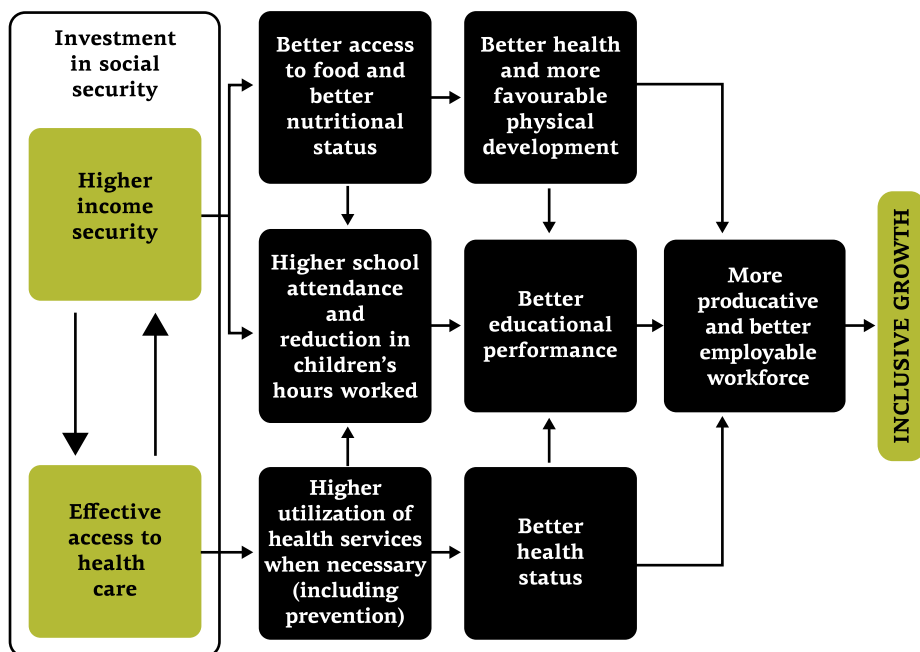
Finally, we would like to express major gratitude to UNICEF Office Skopje that provided financial and technical support for the project, which aims to ensure better protection and integration of children from Roma communities.

Nesime Salioska

Executive director, Association ROMA S.O.S.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aspiration to ensure better child protection should be achieved through budget redistribution in the state, i.e. allocation of bigger amounts of funds concerning the rights stipulated in the Law on Child Protection. Increased allocation of budget funds shall contribute to enhanced social protection of most vulnerable groups in the society, especially for the children from poor families, in order to ensure social security and equal opportunities to all in the society. In this context, creators of policies for social protection of children should envisage more effective measures, in particular, with regard to reduction of poverty.



Adapted: (ILO, 2015)

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On the other hand, the aspiration for inclusive growth is undoubtedly related to the improvement of the social protection system and additional investments, whereby the final goal is to create productive and better labor force in future. Therefore, provision of enhanced income security and more effective access to healthcare for the children is an investment which is cost-effective for the states in the long run, given the fact that children will be the future labor force of the state and the main driver of economic growth. Nevertheless, certain states, and especially underdeveloped and developing countries, are increasingly prone to reduce social transfers from the budget, including the social allowances for child rights. Conversely, in Western European countries, social transfers account for almost 2, 2 % of GDP, while this accounts for less than 1% of GDP in many other countries¹.

According to 2012 UNICEF Assessment on the system of child allowances in the country, there is a general trend in Republic of Macedonia of swift decline in the number of beneficiaries of the key rights to child allowance, and that such benefits do not reach the poorest households with children. As result, the association ROMA S.O.S. decided to conduct a research of this trend among the Roma families and hired the Institute for policy research and analysis - Romalitico.

The purpose of the research is to present the current situation concerning the use of financial allowances which are stipulated in the Law on Child Protection, and focuses on the Roma communities from six municipalities, i.e. Prilep, Kumanovo, Bitola, Stip, Gorche Petrov and Suto Orizari. The research includes data about Roma beneficiaries of legally prescribed rights to financial allowances for the period 2014-2015 as well as data from the survey conducted with the Centres for Social Work in the six respective municipalities, with regard to their positions on the Roma community. In addition, the research included focus group discussions with current and potential Roma beneficiaries of the rights arising from the Law on Child Protection.

The general conclusion from this report is the existent downward trend in the beneficiaries of all social protection measures with regard to child rights, except for the parental allowance in 2015. With regard to focus group discussions, one can discern the perception about the discriminatory treatment of Roma, especially by the Centre for Social Work (CSW) in view

¹ Social protection for children: key policy trends and statistics / International Labour Office, Social Protection Department. - Geneva: ILO, 2015.

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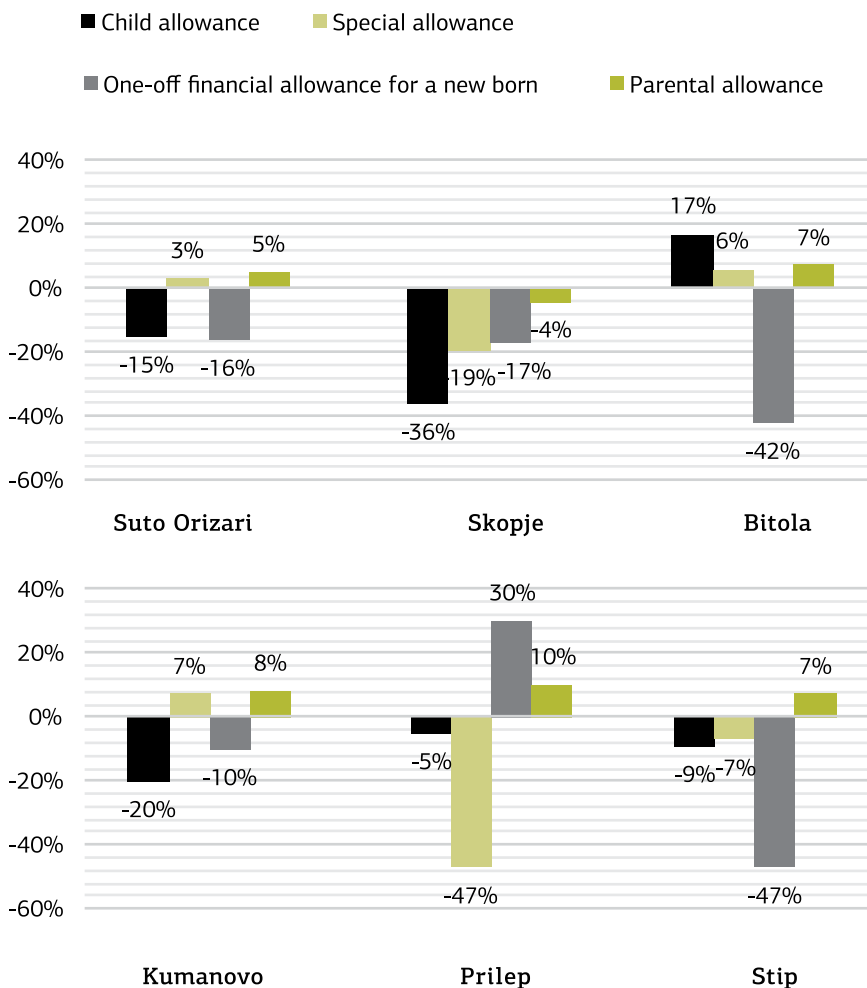
of information and services provided as well as access to rights from social protection. As far as the legal framework and bylaws are concerned, one can conclude that the measures for immunization, regular attendance of school and regular gynecological check-ups are introduced as accompanying measures to exercise rights to financial benefits, which ultimately aim to improve the standard of living in the long run. Still, certain communities inhabited by Roma population, lack gynecological services and patronage services for immunization, and given this fact, this group of people cannot meet the above stated conditions which, in turn, means inability to exercise their right to parental allowance or possibility to lose the respective right. Such is the example of the municipality of Suto Orizari, where the gynecological dispensary does not exist for many years in the past, and prevents several thousands of Roma women to see gynecologist on regular basis. In view of the attitudes of CSW, there is no positive experience with the Roma community, especially in Prilep and Stip.

KEY FINDINGS

Trends of child and social protection

According to the analysis of trends in child and social protection of Roma families, as presented on Graph 1, one can discern the following findings based on the changes in the number of beneficiaries in 2015, compared to 2014:

Graph 1: Trends of using child protection measures



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1. Child allowance

- Downward trend in the number of beneficiaries of child allowance among Roma population.

✱ One can notice a major decline in Skopje at almost 36%, in Kumanovo 20%, Suto Orizari 15%, Stip 9% and Prilep 5%. Increase by 17% is noticed only in the municipality of Bitola.

2. Special allowance

- The prevailing trends are similar to the trends concerning the beneficiaries of child allowance.

✱ There is major decline in the municipality of Prilep - 47%, Skopje-19% and Stip - 7%. Increase by 7% is noticed in the municipality of Kumanovo, Bitola 6% and municipality of Suto Orizari 3%.

3. One-off financial allowance for a newborn

- Downward trend concerning the one-off financial allowance for a newborn.

✱ Most drastic decline in noticed in the municipality of Stip-47%, and then in the municipalities of Bitola - 42%, Skopje-17%, Suto Orizari - 16% and municipality of Kumanovo - 10%. Increase by 30% can be noticed only in the municipality of Prilep. These data are illustrative of the fact that decline in the number of beneficiaries may be related to two factors. The first factor refers to the reduced number of newborns, i.e. by 18% in 2015, compared to 2014. The second factor emerged from focus group discussions and refers to the immigration of the young Roma population to the Western European countries.

4. Parental allowance

- Upward trend concerning the number of beneficiaries of parental allowance among the Roma community.

✱ Biggest increase is noticed in the municipality of Prilep by 10%, and then in municipality of Kumanovo 8%, Bitola 7%, Stip 7% and municipality of Suto Orizari 5%. Decline by 4% was noticed only in Skopje.

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Allocated budget funds

5. Upward trend concerning the allocated budget funds from the subprogram 52

- There is a positive trend concerning the allocated budget funds for child protection with persistent increase in absolute value, year after year. In view of percentage increase, the biggest increase is noticed in 2015, when the costs for child protection increased by 31%.

Identified problems which are encountered by the Roma community

- 6. Most often, there is lack of information in the Roma community about rights to financial assistance arising from the Law on Child Protection, whereby most of the respondents are not familiar with the right to child allowance.**
- 7. Roma community is not familiar with the requirements, application procedure and deadlines.**
- 8. Decisions for termination of any of the rights sometimes are not sent to their home addresses, but the responsible workers call the beneficiaries once the deadline for appeal is expired.**
- 9. Staff at the CSW does not inform the beneficiaries about the possibility and the process of the appeal procedure.**
- 10. Most often, members of the Roma community lack precise information who should be addressed.**
- 11. Members of the Roma community are confronted with difficulties regarding the access to legal aid, as they lack legal knowledge to draft the appeal.**
- 12. The attitude of the CSW staff is identified as inadequate towards the members of the Roma community.**
- 13. Concerning the information and service provision, as well as access to rights from social protection, the attitude of CSW is identified as discriminatory towards Roma people.**

Potential reasons for failure to exercise or termination of the right

14. Child allowance

This right is subject to:

- Registered employment of parents



It is considered as negative because unemployment of Roma population accounts for almost 49%, so that the requirement for regular salary prevents them to exercise this right.

- Regular attendance of school



It is considered as negative because some of the Roma children are not included in the educational process, i.e. do not attend school on regular basis. The percentage of Roma children who complete the primary education accounts for 73%.

- The maximum monthly amount which can be awarded to one family on the basis of this right amounts to 1800 MKD. The amount awarded for a child aged up to 15 (primary education) amounts to 716 MKD, i.e. 1.136 MKD for a child aged up to 18 (secondary education).



The maximum amount, which is specified by law, may not be an obstacle for equal distribution of funds. There are many Roma families with more than three children who attend school; however, due to certain restrictions, the amount awarded to the third child is lower than the amount awarded for the other two children, while the fourth child is not entitled to such allowance. Given this fact, the benefits from child allowance should be available to all children in one family, while they attend school on regular basis.

- Income per family members should amount to 2.490 MKD



It is considered negative because the calculation of the income generated by family members also includes social benefits and permanent financial allowances.

15. Special allowance

- Children with disabilities and children with special needs are the beneficiaries of this right. According to the rulebook, the competent body that issues the findings and opinion about the degree of disability may recommend a repeated check-up or recategorization. The Centre for Social Work is obligated, one month before the expiry of the repeated check-up or recategorization in advance, to notify in written the beneficiary of the right about the need for resubmission of findings and opinion about the type and degree of disability.



One assumption is that the centres for social work fail to submit such notification to the beneficiaries who have scheduled repeated check-up or recategorization, and for this reason, the beneficiaries are no longer entitled. The other assumption is that the beneficiaries change their residence and fail to inform the Centre for Social Work, which is why the notification does not reach the real home address of beneficiaries.

16. Parental allowance

- The right to parental allowance, as specified by law, cannot be exercised if the mother fails to go for gynecological check-ups conducted by medical doctor during pregnancy; if the mandatory immunization of the child is not performed, and if the child is not enrolled at school, i.e. does not regularly attend the classes.



It was established that gynecological dispensaries in small urban areas, especially in Roma settlements are inexistent. With regard to antenatal care, 21% of Roma women did not take any medical check-up during pregnancy. Immunization of Roma children is below the national average, which accounts for 95%, while the administering of certain vaccines to children aged 0-6 in different municipalities ranges from 20 – 90%. The coverage of Roma children aged 7-15, when vaccines are administered during the school period, is at worrying level and accounts for 35-93%.

Furthermore, the right to parental allowance mainly belongs to the mother, but not to the father, which may, to certain extent, amount to discrimination, especially discrimination against the father. The father may exercise the right to parental allowance only under conditions when the mother is deceased, abandoned the child and cannot take care of the child due to justified reasons.

17. One-off financial allowance

- ✳ Roma who do not possess personal identification documents are confronted with special problem when exercising these rights. The main precondition to exercise this right is the registration of the newborn; however, one can still notice that newborns are not registered on timely basis or within the first 30 days from birth.

The recommendations in this part shall refer to all stakeholders who make their contribution and work in the sphere of social protection of children and inclusion of marginalized groups, especially of Roma, in the society:

Recommendations for policy creators – MLSP:

- 1. Provision of the necessary infrastructure (gynecological services, mobile patronage service etc.) in order to ensure that the conditions, concerning the right to parental allowance, are fulfilled.**
- 2. Exercising the right to child allowance by parents who are beneficiaries of social welfare, who also have very low income, in order to ensure equal conditions for children with respect to their basic needs in everyday life.**
- 3. Increasing the financial allowances which are provided on the basis of all above stated rights, which are also adjusted to the consumption basket of a family, in order to ensure decent and quality life for every child.**
- 4. The financial assistance related to the child allowance, as specified by law, should be exercised by all children in one family, without restriction based on the number of children in the family, and the maximum amount should be properly adjusted.**

Recommendations for the centres for social work

- 5. Introduction of an Open day every month at the centres for social work for the purpose of providing information. That would also require some cooperation with the Roma Information Centres concerning the implementation of outreach campaigns. In this context, the placement of RICs in the premises of the centres for social work shall contribute to the increased number of informative meetings, as well as strengthened trust in the institutions.**

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6. Introduction of transparent complaints mechanism at all counters, so that beneficiaries of rights or applicants can evaluate the work of civil servants.
7. Employment of Roma at the centres for social work in order to increase the trust of Roma community in the state institutions.
8. Informative meetings among CSW and Roma community in order to bring closer the changes and amendments to the beneficiaries concerning procedures/rulebooks on the rights from social protection, having in mind that they are adopted in a short time frame and are not being shared with the beneficiaries, which may result in termination of rights.

Recommendations for civic organizations

9. Civic sector should proceed with outreach and campaigns, public debates and round tables, on monthly level, with the Roma community in order to provide more information on the conditions and criteria for financial allowances.
10. Provision of free legal aid and representation of the beneficiaries of financial allowances before the institutions whenever there are cases of inadequate treatment by the institutions and violation of the rights to social protection.
11. Civic sector should actively monitor the work of institutions, both on national and local level, concerning the implementation of measures for social protection of children, application of rulebooks and initiatives for changing the criteria.

Recommendations for the beneficiaries of social allowances from the Roma community

12. Reporting cases of discrimination to the state institutions or civic organizations.
13. More active participation in obtaining information on the criteria for realization and extension of the right to social benefits and timely submission of required documents and any changes of data.

INTRODUCTION

Social protection is of essential importance for prevention and reduction of poverty among children and their families. Also, social protection is important for realization of children's rights and addressing the inequalities among children. Social protection policies are essential element for realization of children's rights, ensuring their wellbeing, breaking the vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability, prevention of child labor abuse as well as providing assistance to all children to realize their full potential². However, social protection and level of social security, offered to citizens, largely depend on the extent of development of the country, demographic trends, economic growth as well as social gap among the population. In this context, the development of measures within the social protection policies, as well as the institutional approach, play the key role in utilization of these measures and reduction of poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable categories of citizens.

The processes of approximation to EU as well as the harmonization with EU legislation require the creation of system for social protection which is based on the needs of the citizens. In Republic of Macedonia, measures for social protection aim to provide social assistance and social services in case of need, i.e. when citizens are unable to independently realize their social security. In general, one can conclude that "there are numerous identified deficiencies in the social security network in Macedonia which have the effect of preventing the ability of people to seek their social rights"³. As one can notice, there is existent gap between adoption of certain measures for social protection and the implementation of the respective measures and the effects thereof.

² World Social Protection Report 2014/15: Building economic recovery, inclusive development and social justice International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2014.

³ Helsinki Committee of Human Rights, Rights of children and citizens from the aspect of economic social rights in Republic of Macedonia, 2015, page3.

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According to UNICEF findings, the major deficiency of the social protection measures concerning children's rights is that "in most of the cases, they fail to reach the poorest families"⁴ (UNICEF, 2013). The analysis of the measures, as one can notice, shows that for example, the right to child allowance, instead of reducing the inequality among the poorest groups of citizens, it increases the gap since the measure does not target the most vulnerable groups.

With regard to the Roma community and the social protection concerning children's rights, certain factors, such as: creation of social protection measures in terms of children's rights; institutional setup and approach of the staff towards the beneficiaries; as well as the extent to which citizens are informed, have restrictive effect on the utilization of these measures. As result of the restrictive factors, poverty is transferred from one generation to another and increasing number of children from the Roma community are forced to work since early age in order to contribute to the family's budget.

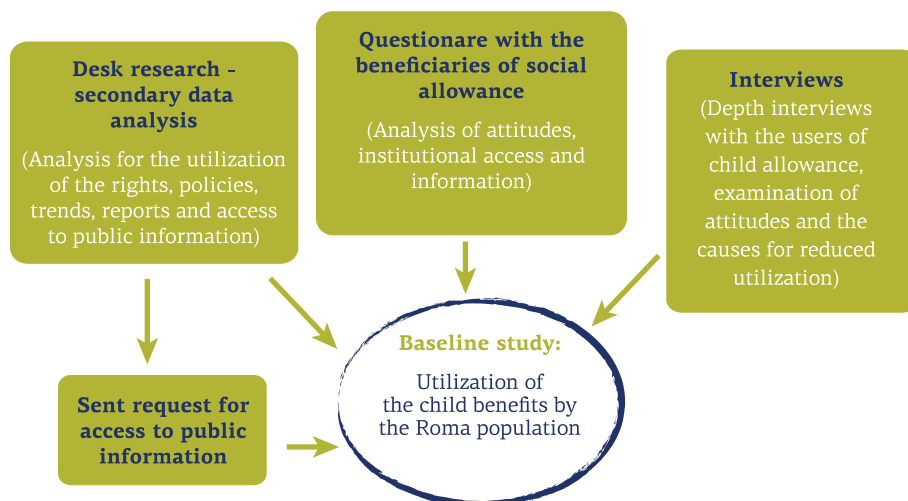
The purpose of this research is to determine the situation in the Roma community regarding social protection, and to determine the extent to which social benefits are utilized based on the rights specified in the Law on Child Protection. In this context, this study is generally focused on discerning the factors which restrict the exercising of these rights, as well as examining the positions and perception of Roma families regarding the information they possess and their access to these rights. Also, this study provides recommendations to all stakeholders in order to alleviate the access of Roma community to social benefits concerning children's rights.

⁴ UNICEF Office, Strengthening the social protection for children: analysis and recommendations for more equitable and more efficient system of child benefits, 2013.

METHODOLOGY

This study shall contribute to discern the factors which restrict the exercising of child rights for social protection, as well as to examine the attitudes and perception of Roma families regarding the information they possess and their access to these rights. The research was conducted in six municipalities: Kumanovo, Prilep, Bitola, Stip, Gorce Petrov, Suto Orizari.

An integrative approach was applied for the research, which includes a combination of three methods:



The secondary data analysis means analysis of the right to child allowance, special allowance, parental allowance and one-off allowance for a newborn. In this context, the analysis was conducted on key documents, public policies and other research, including the Strategic plan of the Ministry of labor and social policy, Law on Child Protection, bylaws (rulebooks, guidelines, etc.) which refer to the implementation of the respective rights, 2011 – 2021 Program for development of social protection, 2010 – 2020 National strategy for poverty reduction, Program for development of child protection for 2016, 2014 – 2020 Roma Strategy, National Action Plans, as well as UNICEF research on strengthening social protection of children. Concerning the basic statistics, the team of Romalitico submitted requests for access to data to the MLSP and CSW in order to determine the number of beneficiaries of social rights.

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The quantitative part of the research includes the analysis of the survey questionnaire, which was distributed⁵ to the staff at the centres for social work [See ANNEX 1]. The purpose of the questionnaire is to discern the positions and opinions of the staff at the centres for social work about the exercising of children's rights to social protection with special focus on Roma families. The questionnaire includes 12 questions and is divided in 3 parts: extent to which Roma families are informed, problems encountered by Roma communities in the application process, as well as need for additional support in the access to the institutions for social protection. The questionnaires were submitted to the centres for social work in all six municipalities, but it was filled out only by 8 individuals from 3 municipalities. The political situation and the institutional vacuum largely influenced the response on the questionnaires.

The qualitative analysis was realized through focus group discussions in the municipalities that were included in the research, based on previously drafted questionnaire [See ANNEX 2]. The purpose of the focus group discussions is to identify the barriers and factors that contribute to and influence the downward trend in exercising the children's rights to social protection with special focus on Roma families. The concept⁶ of Sara Owen was used for the realization of focus group discussion in practical ways, which takes into account the methodological and ethical norms in working with vulnerable categories. Focus group discussions lasted from 60 to 90 minutes, whereby the participative approach to all participants was observed. The following three topics were discussed within the focus group discussions:

1. Extent to which citizens are informed about their rights;
2. Attitude of CSW staff to Roma people;
3. Support in exercising the rights to social protection.

⁵ The questionnaire is electronically submitted to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy through the application Google Forms by UNICEF representative, and the local assistants submitted the survey in written to the staff at the Centres for social work.

⁶ Owen, Sara. "The practical, methodological and ethical dilemmas of conducting focus groups with vulnerable clients, *Journal of advanced nursing* 36, no.5,652-658, 2001.

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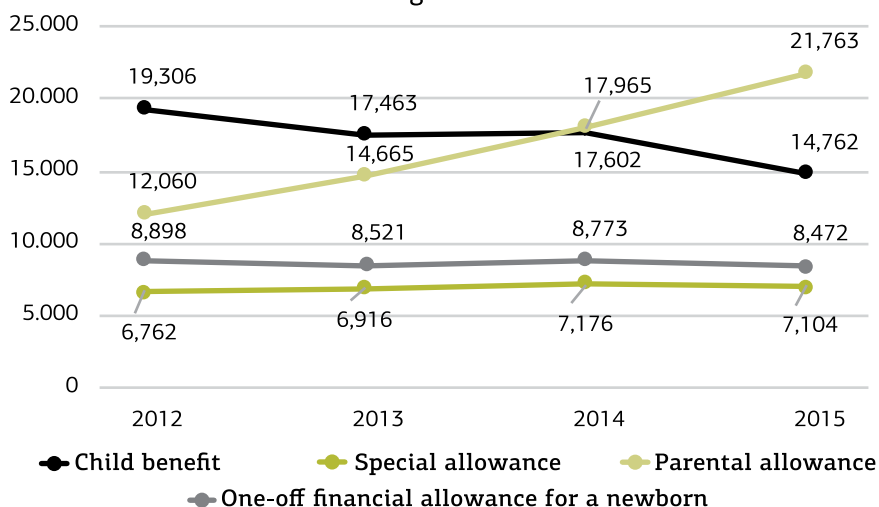
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TRENDS OF CHILD AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

This part illustrates the main trends concerning the budget for allowances, beneficiaries of child's rights to social protection, as well as comparison of trends in non-Roma and Roma community. The data were taken from the State Statistical Office, as well as from the administrative records of the centres for social work and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy by using the mechanism for collecting information of public character. This part aims to provide insight in the situation concerning the utilization of social protection measures by Roma community in the period 2013 – 2015 on national level, as well as in the six municipalities included in the research, that is: Kumanovo, Prilep, Bitola, Stip, Gorce Petrov, Suto Orizari.

From the analysis of trends of social benefits, according to the number of children, most illustrative is the downward trend in children's allowance for the period 2012 – 2015. The figures, year after year, show the decline by 10% in 2013, increase by 1% in 2014 and decline by 16% in 2015. Concerning other measures, there is a noticeable increase in the parental allowance, that is, by 22% in average, year after year. Other measures for one-off allowance for newborn and special allowance remain almost identical; however, from the aspect of the budget, they are reduced compared to the previous two measures.

Graph 1: Trends in Child and Social Protection,
2012 - 2015 according to the number of children



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Table 1 presents the number of beneficiaries of child allowance based on ethnic background and municipalities, respectively. The analysis of trends shows that there is decline in the number of beneficiaries of child allowance in almost all municipalities in 2015, compared to 2014, both in Roma and non-Roma.

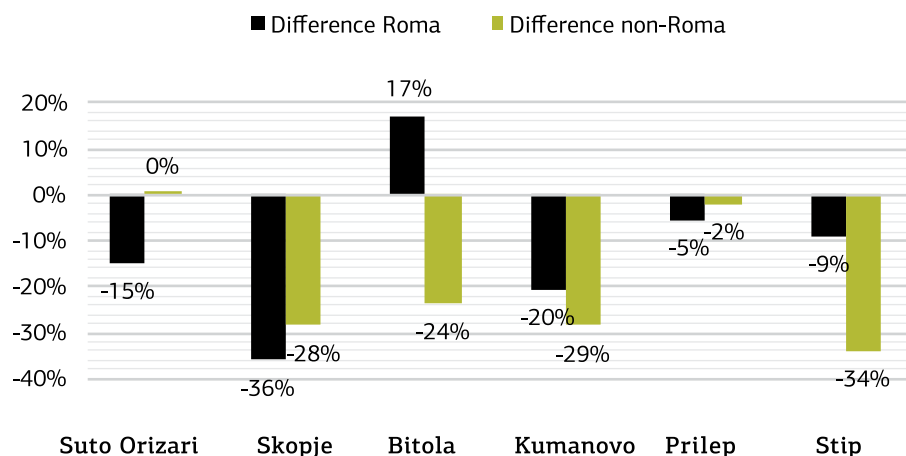
Table 1: Beneficiaries of child allowance

	Non-Roma		Roma	
	2015	2014	2015	2014
Suto Orizari	n/a	n/a	225	264
Skopje	2 280	3 184	289	451
Bitola	405	530	152	130
Kumanovo	1 013	1 417	66	83
Prilep	1 691	1 723	71	75
Stip	205	310	82	90

Source: State Statistical Office and MLSP

The biggest decline is noticed in Skopje, which accounts to 36% in Roma, while it declines by 28% among non-Roma communities. Also, concerning the child's allowance, the biggest differences may be noticed in Stip, Kumanovo and Bitola, where the decline accounts for 34% in the Roma community in Stip, 29% in Kumanovo and 24% in Bitola.

Graph 2: Beneficiaries of child allowance



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In the municipality of Prilep, one can notice a decline by 5% among Roma, and 2% among non-Roma. Major discrepancies/differences of almost 40% percentage points are noticed in Bitola, where the number of beneficiaries of child allowance in the Roma community is increased by 17%, while in non-Roma community is decreased by 24%. In Suto Orizari, there is also a prevailing downward trend in the beneficiaries of child allowance in the Roma community by 15%, while for non-Roma community there are no available data. Disaggregated trends in terms of municipalities and ethnic background show similarity with the general trend, shown in Graph 1, where one can notice drastic decline in the number of beneficiaries of child allowance.

With regard to beneficiaries of special allowance, the prevalent trends are almost similar to the trends regarding the beneficiaries of child allowance. As one can notice, the municipalities of Bitola and Kumanovo show discrepancies, with an upward trend of the beneficiaries in the Roma community, which accounts for 6% and 7%, respectively, while increase by 18% in Bitola and decrease by 13% in Kumanovo is noticed among the non-Roma.

Table 2: Beneficiaries of special allowance

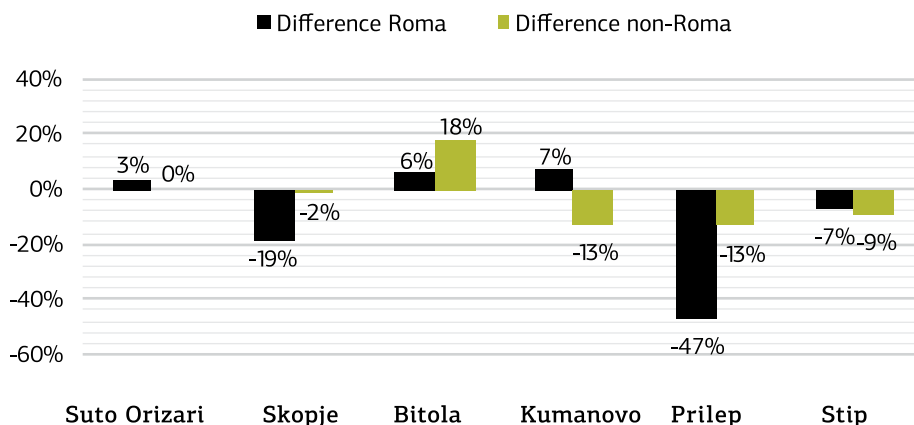
	non-Roma		Roma	
	2015	2014	2015	2014
Suto Orizari			129	125
Skopje	1,965	2,001	189	233
Bitola	261	221	86	81
Куманово	448	513	46	43
Prilep	416	480	41	77
Stip	131	144	40	43
Source: State Statistical Office and MLSP				

In the other municipalities, there is a dominant downward trend, with particular differences in the municipality of Prilep where the difference between Roma and non-Roma is biggest, and accounts for almost 34% percentage points. As one can notice from Graph 3, the biggest decline is in the Roma community in Prilep which accounts for 47%, which can be also related to the non-extension of the right to special child allowance, since it is illogical that the situation of children with disabilities can significantly improve within one year. In Suto Orizari, the number of Roma beneficiaries increased by 3%.

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Graph 3: Special allowance



With regard to beneficiaries of one-off financial allowance for a newborn, there is a prevailing downward trend in almost all municipalities, where the biggest decline in the number of beneficiaries is in the municipalities of Bitola and Prilep. Concerning non-Roma, there is a mild decline, which ranges from 17% in Prilep to 9% in Bitola.

Table 3: Beneficiaries of one-off financial allowance for a newborn

	non-Roma		Roma	
	2015	2014	2015	2014
Suto Orizari			64	76
Skopje	2,602	,707	120	145
Bitola	417	383	21	36
Kumanovo	550	566	19	21
Prilep	388	469	13	10
Stip	195	231	9	17

Source: State Statistical Office and MLSP

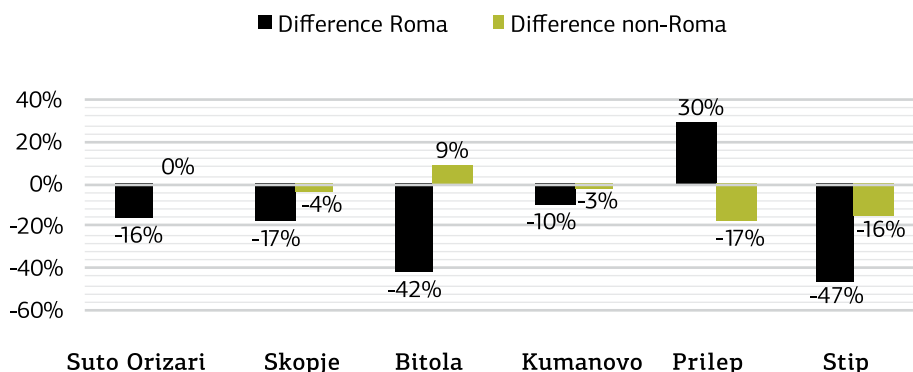
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Only in the municipalities of Prilep and Bitola, there is increase in the number of beneficiaries, by 9 % in non-Roma in Bitola, and the peak by 30% in Roma community in Prilep. In the municipality of Suto Orizari, one can notice a decline by 16% of the beneficiaries, compared to the previous year.

Although the general trend of one-off financial allowance remains unchanged, the disaggregated data show a drastic decline in the number of Roma beneficiaries, that is, decreased number of newborns by 18% in 2015, compared to 2014.⁷

Graph 4: Beneficiaries of one-off financial allowance for a newborn



With regard to the parental allowance for third and fourth child, in all municipalities, there is an upward trend of beneficiaries of parental allowance. Yet, such increase is more prominent among the non-Roma community and reached the maximum in Stip - 47% and in Skopje - 39%.

⁷ State Statistical Office, Natural population growth, 2015.
Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija.aspx?id=10>

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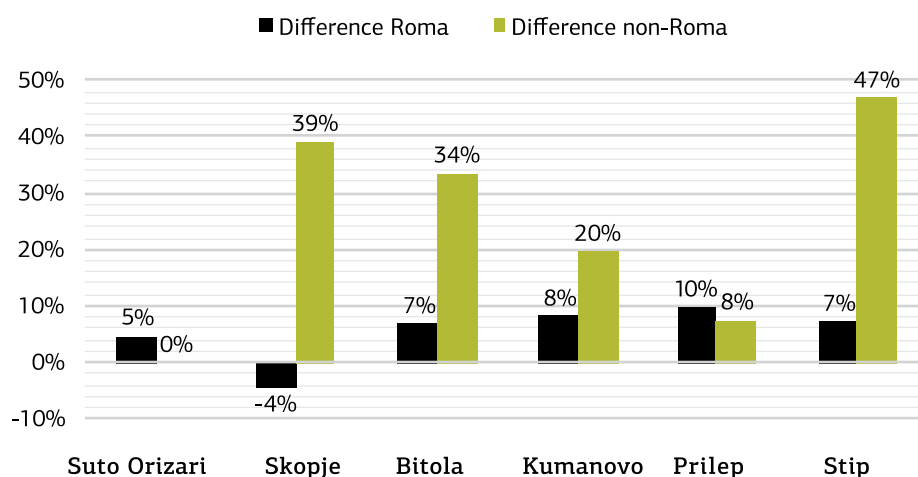
Table 4: Beneficiaries of parental allowance

	non-Roma		Roma	
	2015	2014	2015	2014
Suto Orizari			838	800
Skopje	6,273	4,507	1,356	1,416
Bitola	175	131	434	406
Kumanovo	1,616	1,350	316	292
Prilep	627	583	268	244
Stip	141	96	294	274

Source: State Statistical Office and MLSP

The increase in the Roma community ranges from 5 % to 10%, which is most prominent in the municipality of Prilep. Only in the City of Skopje, there is noticed decline in the number of beneficiaries of parental allowance in the Roma community by 4%.

Graph 5: Beneficiaries of parental allowance for a child



The increase in the Roma community ranges from 5 % to 10%, which is most prominent in the municipality of Prilep. Only in the City of Skopje, there is noticed decline in the number of beneficiaries of parental allowance in the Roma community by 4%.

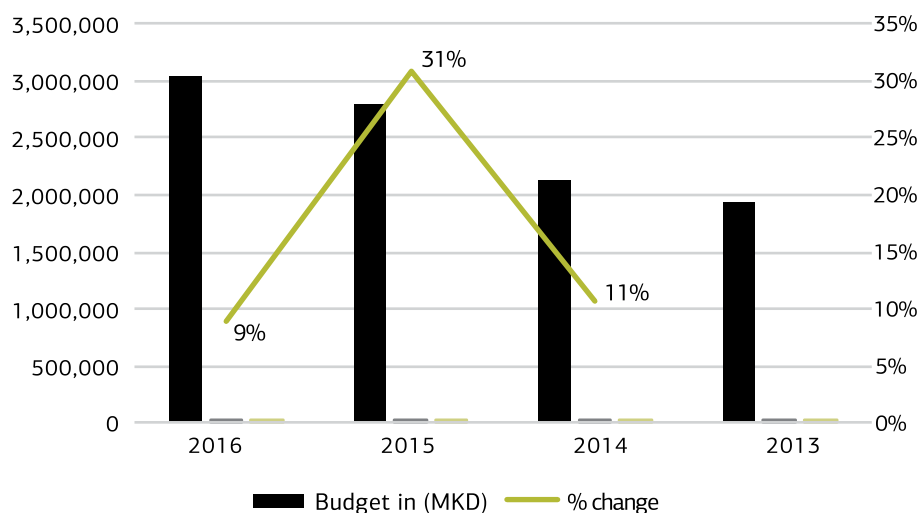
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The above data illustrate the general downward trend in beneficiaries of all measures of social protection based on children's rights, with the exception of the parental allowance. Still, if one considers the allocated budget on Graph 6, the trend in allocated funds from the subprogram 52 for child protection is positive with persistent increase in absolute values, year after year. With regard to percentage increase, the biggest increase is noticed in 2015, where the costs for child protection increased by 31%, and the parental allowance increased by 21%.

Graph 6: Allocated budget for child protection 2013 - 2016



ANALYSIS OF LEGISLATION

Social protection of the child is a human right, which is stipulated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite the protection, many children are still not provided with basic living conditions, which reduces their chances for realization of their full potential.

Constitution of Republic of Macedonia

According to the Constitution of Republic of Macedonia, the main obligation of the state is to secure the social care and protection for the family. Also, the Constitution stipulates that parents have the right and the obligation to ensure the sustenance and education for the children. Republic of Macedonia, in particular provides protection for maternity, children and juveniles.

Legislation of Republic of Macedonia

- Law on Child Protection⁸

Rulebooks in line with the Law on Child Protection

- Rulebook on the detailed conditions, criteria and manner of exercising the rights to child protection⁹
- Rulebook on the detailed conditions, criteria and manner of exercising the right to one-off allowance for a newborn and right to parental allowance for a child¹⁰

⁸ Law on Child Protection, Official gazette 23/2013, (changes and amendments: Official Gazette- No.12/2014, 44/2014, 144/2014, 10/2015, 25/2015, 150/2015, 192/2015 and 27/2016).

⁹ Rulebook on detailed conditions, criteria and manner of exercising the rights to child protection, Official gazette 62/2013, (changes and amendments: Official Gazette No.51/2014, 43/2015).

¹⁰ Rulebook on detailed conditions, criteria and manner of exercising the rights to one-off financial allowance for a newborn and right to parental allowance, Official Gazette 163/2008, (changes and amendments: Official Gazette No. 34/2009).

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Child protection, as system of organized state measures and activities for care and protection of children, is implemented in accordance with the Law on Child Protection and respective bylaws. According to the Law, child protection is an organized activity based on children's rights as well as rights and obligations of parents to family planning, providing conditions and standard of living that responds to the physical, mental, emotional and social development of children. In addition, according to the Law, the state, as well as local self-government units are obligated to run a humane population policy and provide adequate material support to parents for sustenance, raising, care and protection of children and organizational development of institutions and services for child protection.

The Law on Child Protection entails a list of all rights concerning child protection, i.e.:

- Child allowance,
- Special allowance,
- One-off financial allowance for a newborn,
- Parental allowance for a child, and
- Participation fee.

Child allowance

According to the Law on Child Protection, the right to child allowance means a right that includes provision of certain financial allowance to cover the costs for raising and development of a child. This right to financial allowance enables the parents with low monthly income to provide the necessary conditions for everyday life of their children. According to the law, the right to child allowance is provided to a child who is a citizen of Republic of Macedonia, and regularly attends school in the country. This right may be exercised by one of the parents or custodians or by a person who was entrusted by decision of a competent body to take care and live with the child. The realization of this right is subject to the monthly income of the family and the age of the child.

With regard to the child, the right is ensured to:

- A child who regularly attends schools, for the whole period of the duration of regular school, and until 31 August in the current year.
- A child who regularly attends secondary school, for every school year until completion of secondary education, until 31 August of the current year.
- A child that completely and permanently or for a period of one year shall become incapacitated for work before reaching the age of 15 or during attendance of school, and is entitled to child allowance throughout the duration of the incapacitation of the child, but only up to the age of 18.
- A child who is completely and permanently incapacitated for work shall be considered a child who was recognized the right to obtaining vocational qualifications until the completion, but only by the age of 18, at latest.
- The right to child allowance is given to a child due to illness or injury, who is prevented to regularly attend school and given this barrier, proceeds with extramural classes, according to the law.

A child who terminated the regular attendance of school, i.e. lost the capacity of regular student, is not entitled to the right to child allowance, which shall no longer be valid from the first day of the following month once his/her capacity of regular student ended.

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In view of the condition related to the monthly income for exercising the right to child allowance, the Law stipulates that the family income on all grounds per family member, should amount to 2.490 MKD, while for a child of a single parent to 4.980 MKD. These amounts are further reconciled with the growth of expenses for the previous year, that were published by the State Statistical Office, in January of the current year. According to the Law, the following shall be considered as income that is used to specify the material status of a family:

- Salary and fringe benefits (reduced for the contributions, according to law),
- Pension income according to law,
- Financial allowance for unemployed people,
- Permanent financial assistance,
- Social financial assistance,
- Income on the ground of property and property rights, on the ground of self-employment, on the ground of craftsmanship and other income subject to taxation (copyrights, industrial property rights, service contracts, expertise, interim income),
- Income on the ground of agrarian activity, which is considered as cadaster income and is used as basis to determine the profit tax from agrarian activity,
- Income on the ground of temporary work abroad,
- Income generated by dispatched workers abroad,
- Alimony and scholarship, and
- Civil disability benefits.

The child allowance amounts to 716 MKD for a pre-school aged child, i.e. primary school student, while for a child in secondary education until reached 18 years of age shall amount to 1.136 MKD. The Law also stipulates the amount of the child allowance for children who are permanently or completely incapacitated to work and amounts to 716 MKD for a child aged up to 15, i.e. 1.136 MKD for a child over 15 years of age until the age of 18. The total monthly amount of child allowance, on basis of which the parent can exercise the right, amounts to 1800 MKD.

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According to the Law, this right is subject to regular attendance of school by the child. Children in very poor Roma families do not attend regular education and are not included in the mainstream educational process. Lack of personal identification documents, parental irresponsibility and heavy economic conditions are the reasons that Roma children do not regularly attend school, i.e. are not included in the mainstream educational process. According to the Roma inclusion index, the percentage of Roma students who complete primary education accounts for 73%.¹¹

In addition, the Law stipulates that one parent should have regular employment, i.e. receive regular salary. Unemployment rate¹² of Roma population accounts for 49%, and therefore the condition for regular salary restricts the exercising of this right. Also, the Law stipulates that the material status of one family is determined on the basis of income generated by all family members, and separate income by each family member should amount to 2.490 MKD. Another deficiency of the law is that the calculation of the family income includes the social and permanent financial assistance. Roma who do not possess personal identification documents face a particular problem in exercising these rights.

¹¹ Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, Roma Inclusion Index – 2015, 2015.

¹² Ibid. See also: UNDP, The Living Standards of Roma, Country Status, 2012..

Special allowance

The right to special allowance is provided for a child with special needs due to physical or mental developmental difficulties or combined developmental difficulties up to the age of 26. This right is determined on basis of findings, assessment and opinion by competent body responsible to specify the type and degree of disability.

According to the Law, a child with developmental difficulties and special needs is:

- A child with severe, more severe or most severe physical developmental difficulties,
- Moderate, severe or profound mental disability,
- Most severe forms of chronic illnesses,
- Most severe degree of hearing, sight and speech impairments (blind person or partially sighted person, partially deaf or completely deaf person, person with complete speech impairment, person with severely impaired speech due to infantile paralysis, person with autism and person with impaired or lost speech ability),
- Down syndrome, and
- Several types of (combined) developmental difficulties.

The right to special allowance is prescribed for one parent of the child, custodian or person who was entrusted the child and the child lives in his/her family based on decision of the competent centre for social work, with permanent residence in Republic of Macedonia, and if the child is citizen of Republic of Macedonia with permanent residence in Republic of Macedonia until reaching the age of 26, unless the child is placed in a residential facility at the expense of the state.

The amount of the special allowance in accordance with the Law, amounts to 4.202 MKD. This amount is increased by 50% for a single parent of a child with specific needs and physical and mental developmental difficulties or combined difficulties, and amounts to 6.303, and can be obtained until the age of 26. The amount of 4.202 MKD may be increased by 25%, i.e. 5.252,50 MKD for parents who are materially deprived and use social financial assistance and permanent financial assistance, and also have a child with special needs due to physical or mental developmental difficulties or combined developmental difficulties until the age of 26.

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All above stated amounts are reconciled with the growth of life expenses for the previous year that were published by the State Statistical Office in January for the current year.

According to the Law, single parent who can exercise the right to special allowance, shall be a parent of:

- A child taken care of, when the other parent is deceased,
- Child that exercises the right to family pension after the death of one of the parents, and the other parent is employed,
- Child that exercises the right to family pension after the death of one of the parents, and the other parent is not employed,
- Child from a divorced marriage, if the parent with whom the child lives, is not married and does not live in extramarital relationship,
- Child who has one unknown parent, and
- Child who has one parent who is registered as missing.

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The right to special allowance is further regulated in bylaws, that is, the Rulebook on detailed conditions, criteria and realization of the rights to child protection. With regard to the trends established by the research, there is a drastic decline in the number of beneficiaries (around 40) of the right to special allowance in Prilep and Skopje. According to the Law, children with developmental difficulties and children with specific needs are beneficiaries of this particular right. Those are characteristics which cannot be either eliminated or treated for a short period of one year.

According to the Rulebook, the competent body that issues the findings and opinion about the degree of disability may give recommendation for repeated check-up or recategorization of disability. However, in this case, the centre for social work is obligated, one month in advance, before the expiry of the repeated check-up or recategorization, to notify in written the beneficiary of the right about the need for resubmission of findings and opinion about the type and degree of disability. If after the written notification, the beneficiary fails to submit the findings and the opinion in timely manner, the beneficiary is no longer entitled to this allowance. One assumption is that the centres for social work fail to submit such notification to the beneficiaries who have scheduled repeated check-up or recategorization, and for this reason, the beneficiaries are no longer entitled to this allowance. The other assumption is that the beneficiaries change their residence and fail to inform the centre for social work, which is why the notification does not reach the real home address of beneficiaries. This is further noted in the 2014 Strategy for Roma in Republic of Macedonia concerning immunization, according to which "Due to frequent changes of residence and incorrect home addresses, Roma do not receive the immunization invitations in timely manner".¹³ Roma who do not possess personal identification documents face a particular problem in exercising these rights.

¹³ Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Strategy for Roma in Republic of Macedonia 2014-2020.

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One-off financial allowance for a newborn

One-off financial allowance for a newborn is provided as financial assistance for the first newborn in the family. First newborn shall be the first born live child of the mother. The first newborn child shall also be considered when the mother gives birth to twins, three or more children at one birth. The first newborn child shall also be considered the first adopted child, as well as when several children are adopted at once (twins, three children, and more) at first adoption, when the child/children are up to 1 year of age and if the mother does not have a first born child. One parent is entitled to use the one-off financial assistance for a newborn, who is a citizen of Republic of Macedonia with permanent residence in Republic of Macedonia and for a child born on the territory of Republic of Macedonia. The amount of the financial assistance for a newborn amounts to 4.829 MKD. This amount is further reconciled with the growth of expenses for the previous year, that are published by the State Statistical Office, in January of the current year.

Roma who do not possess personal identification documents are confronted with special problem concerning the exercising of these rights. The main precondition to exercise this right is the registration of the newborn; however, one can still notice that newborns are not registered on timely basis or within the first 30 days from birth.

Parental allowance for a child

The right to parental allowance for a child is exercised by the mother for her third live born child who is citizen of Republic of Macedonia with permanent residence in Republic of Macedonia in the last three years before the submission of the application. In order to exercise this right, the mother should be the caregiver of the child to whom the application refers, and that previously born children are not placed in residential facilities for social protection or in foster families, or adopted, and the mother is not deprived of her parental right to the children.

The right to parental allowance, as specified by law, cannot be exercised if the mother fails to go for gynecological check-ups conducted by medical doctor during pregnancy. In addition, the mother may no longer be entitled to this right if the mandatory immunization of the child is not performed, and if the child is not enrolled at school, i.e. does not regularly attend the classes. Also, according to the Law, when the mother is deceased, abandoned the child and cannot take care of the child due to justified reasons, the right to parental allowance for a child may be exercised by the father or custodian who takes care of the child and fulfills the above stated conditions. Parental allowance for a third child is paid on monthly basis, for a period of ten years, and amounts to 8.048 MKD.

One can conclude that the measures for immunization, regular attendance of school and regular gynecological check-ups are introduced as accompanying measures to exercise rights to financial benefits, which ultimately aim to improve the standard of living in the long run. Still, certain communities inhabited by Roma population, lack gynecological services and patronage services for immunization, and given this fact, this group of people cannot exercise the above stated conditions, which means inability to exercise the right to parental allowance or possibility to lose the respective right. Such is the example of the municipality of Suto Orizari, where the gynecological dispensary does not exist for many years in the past, which prevents several thousand of Roma women to see gynecologist on regular basis. Data are illustrative of the fact that preventive healthcare for Roma mothers and children is provided on very low level, in particular regarding immunization, health education and visits by patronage nurses.

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Immunization of Roma children is below the national average, which accounts for 95%, while the administering of certain vaccines to children aged 0-6 in different municipalities ranges from 20 – 90%. The coverage of Roma children aged 7-15, when vaccines are administered during the school period, is at worrying level and accounts for 35-93%. According to the research findings, this situation results from the fact that some of the Roma children do not regularly attend school or do not attend school at all¹⁴. In view of the condition for regular attendance of school, according to the Roma inclusion index, the percentage of Roma students who complete primary education accounts to 73%.¹⁵ These data illustrate that many families cannot exercise the right to parental allowance, i.e. can also lose the respective right.

Access to gynecological services for some Roma women is inappropriate. It was established that gynecological dispensaries in small urban areas, especially in Roma settlements are inexistent. With regard to antenatal care, 21% of Roma women did not take any medical check-up during pregnancy¹⁶. Roma who do not possess personal identification documents are confronted with special problem concerning the exercising of these rights.

Furthermore, the right to parental allowance mainly belongs to the mother, but not to the father, which, to certain extent, leads to discrimination, especially discrimination against the father. The father may exercise the right to parental allowance only under conditions when the mother is deceased, abandoned the child and cannot take care of the child due to justified reasons.

¹⁴ Foundation Institute Open Society – Macedonia, Coverage of Roma children with vaccination and preventive health services: Situation, Problems and Solutions, 2014.

¹⁵ Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation, Roma Inclusion Index – 2015, 2015.

¹⁶ ESE. Pavlovski. B. Situational assessment about sexual and reproductive health and rights of the population in RM. 2012.

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The application of these provisions of the law entails the principles for protection of child rights to life and development, protection of the child's best interest, ensuring minimal standards for every child under equal conditions, exclusion of any form of discrimination, respect for the child's right to liberty and security of person, right to own opinion and free expression, association and education, healthy living conditions and realization of other social rights and freedoms of the child. Any form of discrimination shall be prohibited, on the ground of race, skin color, language, religion, political and other affiliation, national, ethnic and social background, cultural and other origin, property status, disability, birth or other status of the child or his/her parent or legal custodian.

The state and the institutions are obligated to take all necessary measures to secure the rights of the child and to prevent all forms of discrimination and abuse, irrespective of the place where those occurred, as well as the severity, intensity and duration. Direct discrimination, within the meaning of Article 13, shall be any act when the applicant or beneficiary of rights to child protection was put to less favorable position to other beneficiaries in comparable situation on the ground of racial, ethnic or other background. Indirect discrimination, within the meaning of this law, shall mean when certain neutral provision, criterion or practice puts the applicant or beneficiary of rights to child protection, in less favorable position to other people, on the ground of racial, ethnic or other background, unless the criteria and practices are objectively justified with a legitimate goal and the means to achieve the goal are appropriate and necessary.

ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions were used in this project as one method to collect field data from Roma people in six (6) municipalities. The following thematic analysis is generated from the answers of focus group participants. Focus group discussions were conducted in the municipalities of Suto Orizari, Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Stip and Gorche Petrov in the period from 23 to 30 November. The participants' profile was based on a sample of 10 participants, i.e. 5 men and 5 women, including participants who are no longer entitled to some of the benefits concerning child rights to social protection. Also, participants belong to various geographic areas, and various settlements in the town or municipality. Focus groups were facilitated by Romalitico with support from local civic organizations who helped to provide the participants based on the research targeted profile. Also, FGs were facilitated based on previously drafted guide with questions that include aspects of social protection.

The guide, in addition to the introduction part and setting the rules, included three sets of questions which specifically consider the participants' responses. The first set of questions referred to the extent to which participants are informed. It included four (4) specific questions, as follows:

1. Could you briefly explain where did you get information about exercising rights to social protection?
2. What is/was your experience with the person who provided the information?
3. Were the criteria regarding the right to child allowance, special allowance or parental allowance clear to you?
4. Were you informed on which grounds some of the above stated rights can be annulled/terminated?

The second set of questions referred to the approach of the staff towards the FG participants. This set included three (3) specific questions, which were addressed to the participants, that is:

1. Which was the approach/attitude of the staff at the Centre for social work when you met?
2. Please state three things that you really liked/or not really liked during the meeting at the CSW?
3. Which were the challenges that you faced when you got the information, the application process, and submission of documents?

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The third and last set of FG questions referred to the support received in exercising the rights to social protection. This set included three (3) specific questions, which were addressed to the participants, that is:

1. Could you please describe whether during the application process/ obtaining information or submission of documents, you requested support from NGO or any other institution?
2. Which was your experience with local NGOs/RICs?
3. Could you please describe the 3 steps that you would take if you received incorrect information/or you were improperly informed/ treated by the institution?

At the end of each focus group discussion, there was one section about conclusions and comments, which was not included in the guide, but was considered relevant in order to hear the conclusions and comments from the participants in support of this analysis. From the analysis of the first question, it is concluded that participants from different municipalities get information from different sources. According to one participant from Kumanovo, non-governmental organizations are the most frequently used source for information and assistance during the application process. He said:

“Just one piece of paper and going to various organizations, which means we need to come here or to another organization to tell us what to do, because many people are illiterate.. “

(Participant from Kumanovo)

The same is also noticed in the municipality of Gorche Petrov, where one participant specifically pointed out to an NGO and the process of mutual information sharing. According to him:

“We get information from LIL, no one else is providing information [...] Through neighbours and among ourselves“

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

The same source of information was pointed out in Stip, while participants from Suto Orizari receive information through CSW and institutions. In Prilep, the institutions and the access to information were criticized, where one participant said:

“We have not received information from anyone so far, someone should come to tell us... We do share somehow information among ourselves, but we don't get it from institutions “

(Participant from Prilep)

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Finally, one of the participants from Bitola used the momentum and criticized the staff from CSW and their approach to Roma people in Bitola. He said:

"[...] they have no interest for the population from Bair... They neither discuss or talk, they would just say "I am not the one to decide", and if he is not the one to decide, then he should sent us to the people who decide, so that we can talk to them [...]"

(Participant from Bitola)

On the second question from the first set of questions, participants generally have negative experience with the staff from institutions that are responsible to provide information. According to one participant from Kumanovo, who was shocked because he used to receive social assistance for two years and now he is supposed to return the funds. In his words:

"I got a phone call, they say that they are from the social services and I should urgently go there, I asked "What is the problem?", they say there was a decision that I am rejected for social assistance "Why am I rejected?", "Because you have sold something and it is seen on your account and therefore you are rejected." I say "Listen, I received social welfare for two years and you did not identify that I was selling something, and now you find this after two years, how can this be true, so, if you are illiterate you should not sit on a computer, and now it turns out that you gave me social welfare for two years, I used to take 2000 MKD, and now the court says I should pay back 1000 Euro, how can I return that money"

(Participant from Kumanovo)

In continuation, one of the participants from Bitola was more critical and said:

"People in Bitola are most endangered and they suffer from mistreatment; whenever we go to the social services, our people are illiterate, and they always show bad manners to us, they would say -Go see Petko, go see Trajko, etc. How can our people know that there are social donations or money for assistance... We need to fight to have our staff at the CSW, since there is place for 4 staff, one should be for Roma"

(Participant from Bitola)

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In the same way, participants from Gorche Petrov point out that information does not reach everyone, and therefore, some of the people lose their rights. One of the participants said:

“When I go to submit an application, they tell me which documents are required, and tell me that I need to submit the documents until 31 March, otherwise, they will cancel the benefits, and then another procedure starts“

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

Participants from Stip, also shared their experiences as problematic with the CSW. According to one of the participants:

“They do tell what is needed, but you can beat your head against the wall if you think that you can collect all the documents, “

(Participant from Stip)

Opposite to these experiences, the participants in Prilep and Suto Orizari shared positive experiences concerning the information and assistance they get in the process of obtaining social assistance. According to one participant from Suto Orizari:

“I have had not problems with them, so far, I get allowance for a third child, and have been receiving this assistance for three years now. I receive it regularly on the 25th or 26th every month, I don't have any problem, and I am not sure about other people... I have no problems because I have all the required documents. They helped me and now I do everything by myself... I was alone and they helped me“

(Participant from Suto Orizari)

While another participant from Prilep said:

“I receive permanent financial assistance for thirty years now... They do give information, that is not a problem, if children go to school we get a certificate, otherwise there is no certificate... I have all the documents, and they still do not give me“

(Participant from Prilep)

On the third question from the first set of questions, the participants generally provided short answers. From all the negative answers, only one participant

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from Gorche Petrov had positive answer and said:

“Yes, it was clear to me. I was informed from TV news... I prepared the documents myself“

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

Unlike all other towns, i.e. municipalities where the participants are usually uninformed, and do not exercise the right to child allowance, special allowance or parental allowance, one participant in the focus group in Kumanovo, briefly answered:

“No, that is very difficult, no one here gets such allowances“

(Participant from Kumanovo)

Participants in Bitola were not informed at all about the existence of the right to child allowance, special allowance or parental allowance. The participant said:

“No, I don’t even know what is that“

(Participant from Bitola)

On the fourth and last question from the first set of questions, participants were divided regarding the answers. The answers were negative in four (4) and positive in two (2) out of six (6) municipalities. According to the participants from Kumanovo, Bitola, Stip and Prilep, information about rights and possibilities to cancel or terminate the assistance were not communicated to them. One brief comment by a participant from Kumanovo:

“They do not give information, they just say “You are rejected, go out!“

(Participant from Kumanovo)

In continuation, one participant from Bitola said:

“We asked for assistance for our children and they gave us nothing, they said we are not entitled, but why? Nobody would tell“

(Participant from Bitola)

The answers were similar by the participants from the focus groups in Stip, i.e. Prilep who said:

“I am not being told anything“

(Participant from Stip)

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“They would not inform us, first they reject and then inform us”

(Participant from Prilep)

The answers in the other two (2) municipalities were positive concerning the timely information about their rights and the possibilities to cancel or terminate the assistance. According to the answers from Suto Orizari and Gorche Petrov, the participants said:

“Everything is OK, one gets informed individually, no one would knock on my door to tell me to ask for assistance for a third child”

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

“Yes, they do inform us, we do not have problems to fill out the documents... I was not informed that they would cancel the social assistance because I work, I am supposed to return the money, and unless I do that, I will not be able to receive social assistance”

(Participant from Suto Orizari)

The second set of questions includes three questions. In the analysis of the first question within the second set of questions, one can notice that all participants from towns or municipalities have negative experiences regarding the attitudes of the CSW staff.

According to participants from Bitola and Prilep:

“Everything is null, just mistreatment, they simply say – go away... I will always support Roma because they are discriminated against, when I go there I see that they treat Roma very poorly, I see that. The fact whether two three Roma people work there is not important, Macedonians should also treat Roma nicely, there should be no more barriers, we are people just like they are. If they approach us nicely, everything will be fine”

(Participant from Bitola)

“We apply all the time and they just throw away the papers, and do not inform us what we are supposed to do... I was told that they are not interested... They are kind of aggressive, this is a very bad behavior... Just because we are Roma”

(Participant from Prilep)

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Elements of discrimination may be also noticed in Stip, just like the participants indicated in the previous answers that they have been discriminated against. One participant in Stip said:

"They first finish the work with Macedonian, and Roma would wait for a whole day... When we need documents to be filled out, we come here to the municipality... Wherever Roma go, they are seen as indecent people"

(Participant from Stip)

One participant from Suto Orizari also shared the experience:

"They told me and my mother-in-law to go out, I wanted to add something but I was told to be silent, we submitted everything that was requested... They called me to bring the documents, I asked which documents and they told me. I submitted all the documents and asked if everything was fine. He replied that the date is not valid, that something is not correct, and bothered me for two hours to receive my documents"

(Participant from Suto Orizari)

One participant from Gorche Petrov also shared his experience concerning this question:

"It depends on the social workers, two or three of them are really nice, but there is one who works on the counter and he does not help [...]"

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

On the second question from the second set of questions, participants generally have poor experiences with the staff from institutions who are responsible for communication. One of the participants from Kumanovo said:

"Two or three of us cannot enter... They often tell us to go away... I gave them 1000 Euro and they started offending me, and because I got irritated I broke their window and attacked that man... They say, you Roma people are cheeky, you have no money"

(Participant from Kumanovo)

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The same was confirmed in Bitola, and one participant said they were mistreated when they asked for help. He said:

I don't like anything about it, they disrespect us, they tell us to wait and they would lock the door and sit inside... And when problems emerge and when we start raising our voice because we waited a lot, they start to threaten with police and security"

(Participant from Bitola)

One participant in Gorche Petrov was moderate and said that things are generally good, but the attitude of CSW staff towards Roma is bad. She said:

"Everything is fine, they do help and inform us, but their behavior is very bad... One would knock on the door and she starts shouting"

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

Participants from Prilep unanimously briefly answered the question as follows:

"So far, there has been nothing good, only bad things"

(Participant from Prilep)

One participant from Suto Orizari said that they have good attitude if they already know you. He praised the approach of some of the staff who knew him. He said:

"They know me, they would ask for my ID card and would settle the work immediately, so they know me, they show respect, and once I see their stamp, everything is different"

(Participant from Suto Orizari)

In the answers to the last question from the second set of questions, in general, in all municipalities, participants stated many challenges that they face when they apply or renew the social assistance. One participant in Kumanovo said:

"There is another problem about Roma; they know they are illiterate and not familiar with laws, and would simply say that we are rejected and shrug their shoulders, and that's it... My wife is paralyzed and I receive no allowance, I used to receive until 2013, but not afterwards...Now I applied

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again, and they say the documents are not complete, and the whole of Kumanovo knows who is my wife... I submitted all the documents, but they say she is alive and healthy... They would rather give social assistance or allowance for a third child“

(Participant from Kumanovo)

In Bitola, one participant spoke about one particular situation and the challenges that Roma from the settlement Bair face. In his answer, he said:

“In addition to manipulations, they would provoke me with some talk just to make contact to them, or there are some really vulgar problems and unpleasant situations, so their behavior is poor, catastrophic... Almost 90% of the population from Bair, live in fear every day, and if you ask why fear, it is because we owe money for water, utilities, we are all unemployed, we receive social assistance, and we are all suffering from illnesses and buy medicaments“

(Participant from Bitola)

The same was briefly noted in the focus group in Gorche Petrov. There was a comment which referred to the inferiority of Roma when they approach the institutions. The comment was as follows:

“I don’t like the conditions, their behavior is catastrophic, Roma population is always seen as lower than others“

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

Participants from Prilep unanimously stated that staff is aggressive towards Roma when they approach the institutions. One participant noted:

“They are kind of aggressive, they would receive us and say “Come another day“

(Participant from Prilep)

The same comment was made by the participants in Stip. One participant said:

“They would often tell me to write an appeal, and they do not ask me if I know how to do it, they simply say “Write an appeal“

(Participant from Stip)

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The last comment in Suto Orizari was focused on the language barrier and the approach of the staff to Roma. The FG participant said:

“Given the 40.000 inhabitants in the municipality and the language barriers that Roma face, as well as their insufficient education or lack of education, these people request assistance to fill out the forms and documents, and practically they are not interested in the attitudes... I can’t understand, given the fact that there are 20% Roma of the whole population, why staff do not address the Roma in Romani language”

(Participant from Suto Orizari)

The third set of questions focused on the support in exercising the rights to social protection. With regard to the first question, one of the participants in Kumanovo noted that language and ethnic background play major role in the attitude and support provided to Roma when they exercise their rights. He said:

“Usually there is no information, but for social matters they do provide help, they know that particular procedure; if something is missing they would tell me, if something should be renewed, one application, one letter of request... Our people there help us...When I speak Albanian, you should come to see how they help me, I immediately get all the information, but if I speak in Macedonian, they would say they don’t know or don’t understand... I tell them, we are Roma, we need to help each other, you receive a salary and if necessary you need to provide help”

(Participant from Kumanovo)

One FG participant in Bitola briefly stated the same:

“They would just say – Go and fill out the forms, and nobody knows how to do it; there was one child outside who would charge 10 MKD to fill out the documents”

(Participant from Bitola)

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A similar comment was made in Prilep. One participant confirmed the support provided by civic organizations and said:

“We can only approach the NGOs, there is not Roma staff at the CSW... If one has money for the application forms, then it is fine, otherwise, nothing can be done. I often go to the organization”

(Participant from Prilep)

While another participant from Suto Orizari briefly noted:

“They would write something on a small piece of paper, and you manage things yourself”

(Participant from Suto Orizari)

The FG participants, in general, provided short answers to the next-to-the last question of the third set of questions. They all noted that local civic organizations provide major support. Participants in Bitola noted:

“I think that everyone should say that Bairska Svetlina provided most of the assistance to renew the social assistance... They help us whenever we have problems”

(Participant from Bitola)

FG participants in Gorche Petrov noted the same:

“If it wasn’t for Lil, we would not have been informed”

(Participant from Gorche Petrov)

FG participants in Prilep briefly and unanimously supported the work of civic organizations and noted:

“Only non-governmental organizations”

(Participant from Prilep)

The same was stated in Stip and Suto Orizari:

“If it isn’t for organizations, it would be very difficult for us”

(Participant from Stip)

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“Yes, from Ambrella and Red Cross, they help about everything...Mostly Ljatifa, not the others”

(Participant from Suto Orizari)

On the last question from the third and last set of questions regarding recommendations to improve the extent of information and the approach of institutions, in general, the participants did not make any specific comments. On the question about the 3 steps they would take if they receive wrong information/have been inappropriately informed/treated by institutions, they all stated that they rely on the support from civic organizations.

The answers provided within focus group discussion in different municipalities are similar. This is indicative of the fact that Roma, in general, are discriminated against at the centres for social work, regarding the extent of information and services provided and the access to the rights to social protection. Another general conclusion may be derived from focus group discussions which refer to the support from civic organizations. Therefore, one can note that organizations play the role of service and assistance providers, which should be, in fact, provided by the institutions, i.e. the centres for social work.

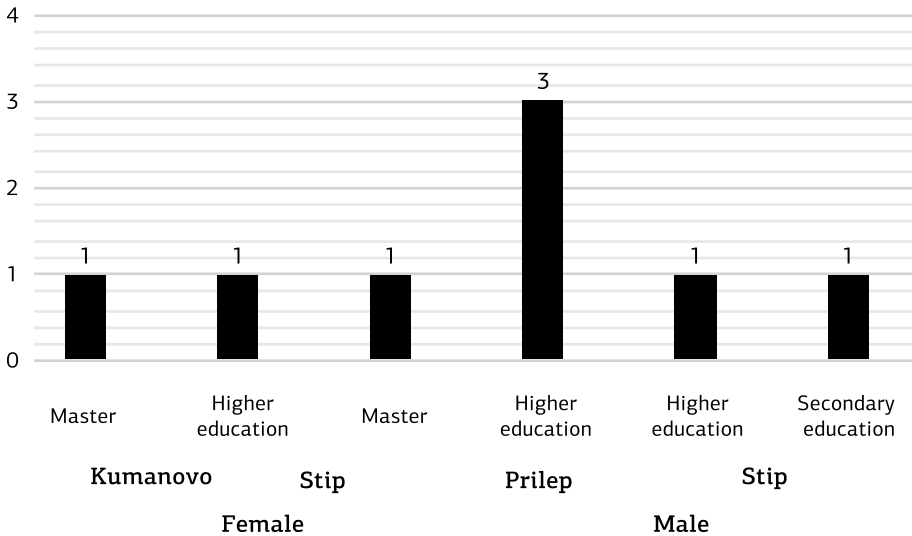
According to the input that FG participants made to the discussion, one can note cases when incomplete or no information was provided regarding the exercising of the right to child allowance, special allowance or parental allowance. In general, Roma are beneficiaries of social assistance, and there are also cases of exercising the right to parental and special allowances. On the question to state three things they like/or not really like about their meetings with CSW staff, almost all FG participants from all six (6) municipalities provided only bad comments and experiences. Beneficiaries rely on the trust they have in civic organizations and also concerning the changes to improve the extent of information provided and the approach, they think that those organizations can take some steps. However, there are individual examples when rights were exercised thanks to the good approach by CSW staff towards individual Roma. Nevertheless, most of the participants pointed out the bad treatment, discrimination and low extent of provided information.

ANALYSIS OF THE ATTITUDES OF THE CSW STAFF

In order to examine the attitudes of the staff at the centres for social work (CSW) regarding the access and the extent of information provided to the Roma community about child protection measures, Romalitico submitted a questionnaire (Annex 1) to the CSW directors in the municipalities included in the research. The analysis of the answers to the questions is provided further in the text. In spite of the fact that questionnaires were submitted to all centres for social work in the municipalities subject to this research, only three of the municipalities (Prilep, Stip and Kumanovo) provided the answers to the questionnaires. Therefore, all below stated findings are not considered as representative.

Graph 7 shows that total of 8 staff from the CSW provided answers to the questionnaire, whereby most of them are from the municipality of Stip. In view of the gender representation, 3 of the respondents are female, while 5 respondents are male. According to the educational degree, almost all respondents, or (7) have university degrees, and one respondent has completed secondary education. All the staff has more than 8 years of work experience.

Graph 7: Demographic characteristics



With respect of the extent to which information is provided, Table 5 illustrates that the CSW staff have the perception that Roma community in Stip and Prilep is relatively informed, while insignificantly informed in Kumanovo.

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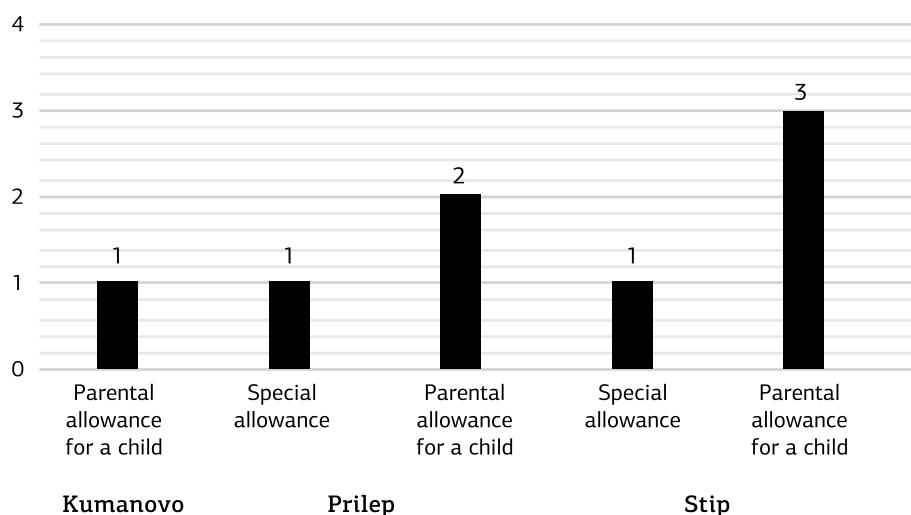
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Table 5: Extent to which Roma community is informed

Insignificantly informed	
Kumanovo	1
Very well informed	
Stip	1
Relatively well informed	
Prilep	3
Stip	3

According to the respondents' answers, bigger part of the Roma community exercises the measures for parental allowance in all municipalities. Some of them also use the measures for special allowance. Most of the staff believes that the number of submitted applications is similar to the previous years.

Graph 8: Utilization of benefits in the area of social protection



CSW staff stated that one frequent reason to cancel the measures for social protection refers to trend of immigration abroad, which can be noticed in all municipalities in the past years. The second most frequent reason is the disrespect for obligations arising out of some measures, which is especially characteristic for Prilep and Stip. Almost all of the staff think that there are no particular barriers or obstacles for access to services by the Roma community.

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Graph 9: Reasons for terminating of social protection measures

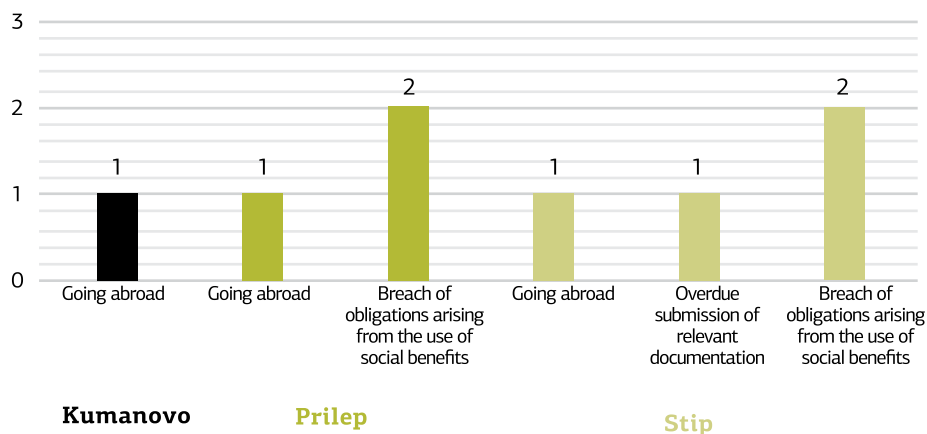


Table 6: Additional support to Roma families to exercise the social benefits for child protection

Kumanovo	
In the overall process (all above stated options)	1
Prilep	
With regard to respect for obligations arising from the use of social benefits for child protection	1
In the overall process (all above stated options)	2
Stip	
During the filling out of the application form and preparation of documents - the actual process of documents submission	2
In the process of documentation renewal	2

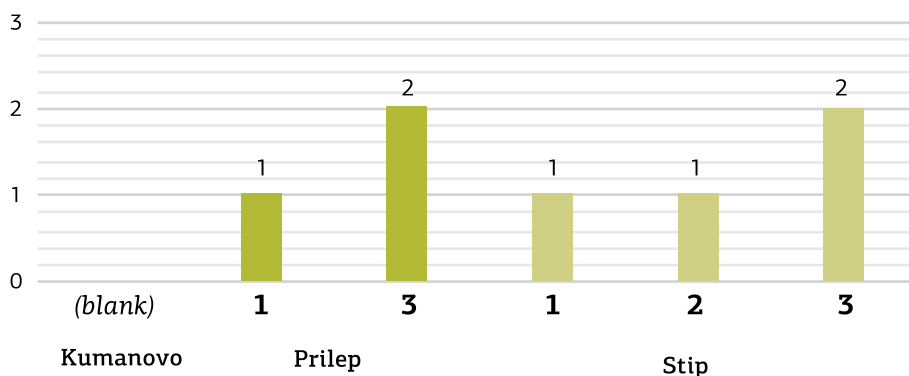
With regard to providing support to the Roma community, all CSW staff thinks that such support is needed for the overall process in Kumanovo and Prilep, while the staff from Stip think that assistance is required during the application process and documentation renewal.

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It is worth noting that all staff share the opinion that costs for documentation are minimal, and that the centers dispose of all resources to respond to all additional requests. Furthermore, CSW staff stated that Roma citizens individually approach the CSW, without being accompanied.

Graph 10: Evaluation of CSW staff about their experiences with Roma community



Graph 10 shows that CSW staff did not evaluate their experiences as positive i.e. the experiences from the work with Roma community in Stip and Prilep are negative. From the analysis of the following question on improvement of the relations between the CSW and the Roma community, most of the staff stated that such relations may be further improved by enhanced morale and ethics on both sides. Also, some of them think that relations would be improved if a Roma person is employed at the CSW. All CSW staff stated that they have received no complaints from the Roma community.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The general conclusion from this report is the existent trend of decline in the number of beneficiaries of all social protection measures with regard to child rights, except for the parental allowance in 2015, compared to 2014. The analysis of the exercising of these measures based on the ethnic background shows that there is significant decline in the number of beneficiaries from the Roma community, especially regarding the special child allowance and one-off financial allowance, in comparison with non-Roma, while more significant decline is noticed in the number of beneficiaries of child allowance among non-Roma. Increase in the number of beneficiaries is only noticed regarding the parental allowance; however, such increase is mostly noticed among non-Roma. However, from the aspect of allocation of budget funds, there is a prevailing trend in increase of social benefits for child protection. Major share in the increase of budget funds refers to parental allowance for third and fourth child, which is increased by 22%. According to the announcements made for 2016, it is expected that the parental allowance shall be mildly reduced, while the foreseen budget is bigger compared to the previous year.

As far as the legal framework and bylaws are concerned, one can conclude that the measures for immunization, regular attendance of school and regular gynecological check-ups are introduced as accompanying measures to exercise rights to financial benefits, which ultimately aim to improve the standard of living in the long run. Still, certain communities inhabited by Roma population, lack gynecological services and patronage services for immunization, and given this fact, this group of people cannot meet the above stated conditions, which means inability to exercise the right to parental allowance or possibility to lose the respective right. Such is the example of the municipality of Suto Orizari, where the gynecological dispensary does not exist for many years in the past, and prevents several thousand of Roma women to see gynecologist on regular basis. Also, one can notice that the centres for social work not always notify the beneficiaries from the Roma community about the deadlines for exercising the rights from the Law on Child Protection, which is why they often lose the right due to failure to meet deadlines. In addition, from the analysis of the focus group discussions, one can single out the perception about discriminatory attitude towards Roma by the CSW with regard to extent of information and service provision and access to the rights to social protection. On the other hand, although the data from the questionnaires filled out by CSW staff are not representative, yet, it is stated that there have been no complaints from the Roma community, but their experiences with the Roma community are negative.

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Nevertheless, both the Roma community and the CSW staff indicate the need for providing support to the beneficiaries during the overall process, especially regarding documentation renewal.

As one can notice, there is existent gap between adoption of certain measures for social protection and the implementation of the respective measures and the effects thereof. As result, many children, especially from the vulnerable categories, are unable to realize their full potential. Child protection measures should be beneficial and purposeful for the citizens, especially for the poorest people, so that they can achieve their effect and improve the wellbeing of those families.

In this context, creators of policies for social protection of children need to ensure more effective measures, in particular, aimed to reduce poverty, under conditions when almost one third of the population lives in poverty. The recommendations in this part shall refer to all stakeholders who make their contribution and work in the sphere of social protection of children and inclusion of marginalized groups in the society.

Recommendations for policy creators – MLSP:

1. Provision of the necessary infrastructure (gynecological services, mobile patronage service etc.) in order to ensure that the conditions, concerning the right to parental allowance, are fulfilled.
2. All stakeholders, policy creators and implementers should conduct an evaluation of the measures for social protection of children and prepare a report on the effectiveness of the measures for poverty reduction and creation of social security.
3. Enable the exercising of the right to child allowance by parents who are beneficiaries of social assistance, who also have very low income, in order to ensure equal conditions for children with respect to their basic needs in everyday life.
4. Increasing the financial allowances which are provided on the basis of all above stated rights, which are also adjusted to the consumption basket of a family, in order to ensure decent and quality life for every child.
5. The financial assistance related to the child allowance, as specified by law, should be exercised by all children in one family, without restriction based on the number of children in a family, and the maximum amounts should be properly adjusted. The financial

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allowance, according to the Law, should be exercised by all children in the family without discrimination, and minimal amounts need to be adjusted. Given the fact that the minimal amount which can be exercised by one family for a child allowance amounts to 1800 MKD, the measure for child allowance should be redesigned as it does not include families with more children who attend school. There are many Roma families with more than three children who attend school; however, due to certain restrictions, the amount awarded to the third child is lower than the amount awarded for the other two children, while the fourth child is not entitled to such allowance. Therefore, the benefits from child allowance should be available to all children in one family while they attend school on regular basis. The minimal amount, specified by law, should not be an obstacle for equal distribution of funds.

6. Reduced administrative barriers for the application process and simplification of the procedure for document renewal to extend certain right to social protection
7. The subprograms reveal that the state allocates insufficient amounts to cover the rights to child protection, and therefore the payment is always delayed. Given the principle of the child's best interest, the state should always consider this principle as priority and allocate sufficient funds in the budget preparation, accordingly, and also avoid any delayed payments.

Recommendations for the centres for social work

1. Introduction of an Open day, every month at the centres for social work for the purpose of providing information. That would also require some cooperation with the Roma Information Centres concerning the implementation of outreach campaigns.
2. All centres for social work should provide information about the manner and process of filing appeals on any decisions made by the centres for social work. Introduction of transparent complaints mechanism at all counters, so that beneficiaries of rights or applicants can evaluate the work of civil servants.
3. Employment of Roma at the centres for social work in order to increase the trust of Roma community in the state institutions.
4. Informative meetings among CSW and Roma community in order to bring closer the changes and amendments to the beneficiaries concerning procedures/rulebooks on the rights from social protection, and because of the short timeframe in which they are adopted and being not shared with the beneficiaries, this may result in termination of rights

Recommendations for civic organizations

1. Civic sector should proceed with outreach and campaigns, public debates and round tables on monthly level with the Roma community in order to provide more information on the conditions and criteria for financial allowances.
2. Provision of free legal aid and representation of the beneficiaries of financial allowances before the institutions whenever there are cases of inadequate treatment by the institutions and violation of the rights to social protection.
3. Civic sector should actively monitor the work of institutions, both on national and local level, concerning the implementation of measures for social protection of children, application of rulebooks and initiatives for changing the criteria.

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Recommendations for the beneficiaries of social allowances from the Roma community

1. Reporting cases of discrimination to the state institutions or civic organizations.
2. More active participation in obtaining information on the criteria for realization and extension of the right to social benefits and timely submission of required documents and any changes of data.

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