

The inequities of a pandemic: Spain's illustration of socioeconomic vulnerability and disease

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Apartment block in Spain. Credit: Alamy

New research, led by the University of St Andrews, highlights that the Spanish Roma (Gitano) community suffer disproportionate

socioeconomic and health factors that make them extremely vulnerable during the current pandemic.

The research, led by social anthropologist Dr. Paloma Gay y Blasco from the School of Philosophical Anthropological and Film Studies and Maria Félix Rodríguez Camacho, Universidad de Alicante, Spain, warns that Roma, one of the most marginalized and poorest minorities in Europe, with the poorest health and lowest life expectancy, are likely to suffer the impact of [coronavirus](#) in extreme ways.

Spanish Gitanos, like Roma elsewhere in Europe, have entered the pandemic from an exceptionally disadvantaged position. More than 80% of Gitanos live in poverty, with almost 50% having a monthly income of less than €310. Gitanos experience greater levels of COPD, obesity and diabetes, and they are more likely to suffer serious health conditions which may impact whether individuals survive COVID-19. Substandard housing conditions in inner-city areas or in slums, residential segregation in purpose-built ghettos, and overcrowding all affect the Gitano community disproportionately. More than 60% of Gitanos live in multi-generational households, with two or more related nuclear families living together in small apartments, which makes the avoidance of contagion through self-isolation extremely difficult. Additionally, almost 44% of Gitano men and 27% of Gitano women earn their income through street vending, either in open-air markets or on foot. The compulsory quarantine makes it impossible for large numbers of Gitano families to earn a living. Additionally, many Gitano families have poor access to the limited financial aid the Spanish government is providing for the self-employed.

All these factors combined place large sectors of the Gitano community in a highly vulnerable situation. According to a statement issued by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano on the 24th March 2020, approximately 47,000 people lack basic food or supplies necessary for survival.

Qualitative data gathered by Dr. Gay y Blasco and Ms Rodriguez Camacho also reveal the desperate conditions that many Gitano families are facing.

Dr. Gay y Blasco also highlights the negative stereotyping of the Gitano community in some sectors of the media, which characterizes them as disorderly outsiders to Spanish society, unfairly portraying them as less willing to adhere to government policies and to the enforced lockdown imposed to combat the pandemic.

NGOs and some governmental bodies have mobilized their resources to assist. Yet the authors warn that, "Without quick, decisive and inclusive action in the part of local and national state institutions these initiatives will be insufficient. This action must be taken and the suffering that so many Gitano families are undergoing must not, once again, be treated as an 'unfortunate given rather than an intolerable failure.'"

More information: COVID-19 and its Impact on the Roma Community: The Case of Spain: [somatosphere.net/forumpost/cov...oma-community-spain/](https://somatosphere.net/forumpost/covid-19-impact-on-the-roma-community-spain/)

Provided by University of St Andrews

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