



THE STATE OF EMERGENCY IN THE LARGE MINORITY NEIGHBORHOODS, MARCH 13 – MAY 13 2020

Executive summary

The report *State of Emergency in the Large Minority Neighborhoods, March 13 – May 13 2020* summarizes data collected through a gathered by blitz closed questions survey and additional in-depth interviews. The survey was conducted on the territories of the suburbs Stolipinovo, Plovdiv and Fakulteta, Sofia between 9-13 May, 2020, by Nikola Venkov, PhD in Anthropology, on behalf of the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives.

A full version of the report can be seen [HERE](#) (in Bulgarian)

The main issues on which the opinion of the local residents was documented include:

- Their perception of the corona virus threats;
- Their perception of a special (discriminatory) treatment of their neighborhoods in the imposition of emergency measures;
- Their personal experience with the presence of police in the neighborhoods;
- Their experience with declining means to make up the living for their families;

The analyzes of Stolipinovo residential area are based on questionnaires filled-in by 100 residents in total, supplemented by in-depth interviews, while in Fakulteta residential area the reference survey was conducted with a smaller group of respondents.

Society's reaction to the COVID-19 threat was by intensifying the division and segregation along long-established gaps. In the first few days after the beginning of the state of emergency "Roma" were portrayed as a handicap in the protection of the health of the nation from the new danger. Local authorities succumbed to heedlessly "strict" and "punitive" measures like secession with the police of the minorities' residential areas and implementation of harsh forms of control. The survey registered the first tendencies which

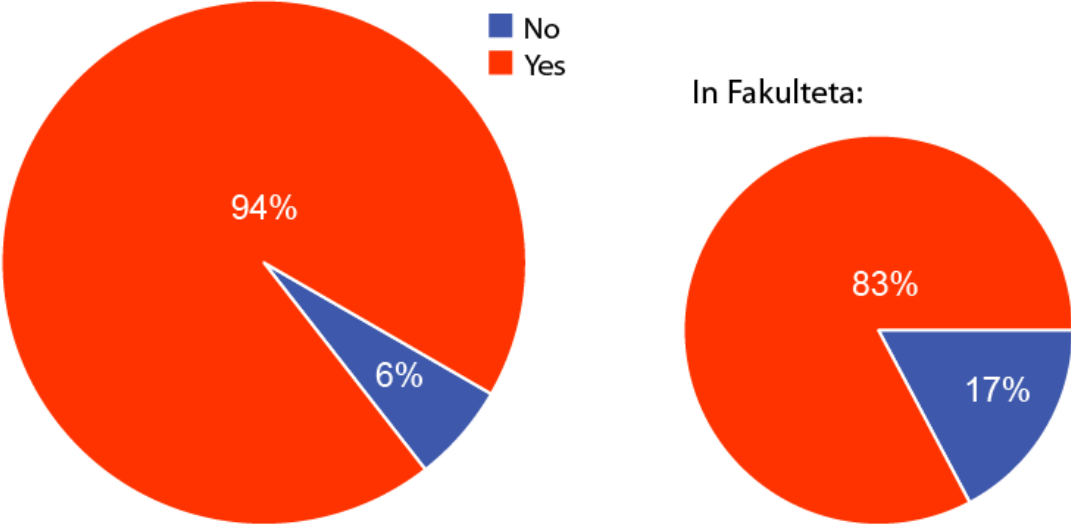
came as a consequence of these actions of the authorities, and what we have observed is an exacerbation of the problems of poor communities:

- Subjection to humiliation and harassment by state authorities.
- Bringing to the brink of physical survival.
- As a result - a huge chasm of mistrust and disbelief in the authoritative source of decisions and questioning the very knowledge about the reality thereof.

Outcomes

Minority neighborhoods in Bulgaria have faced a much stricter disciplinary regime than other parts of the cities. The questionnaire shows the residents are clearly aware of that.

Were measures in Stolipinovo different in comparison to neighbouring areas?

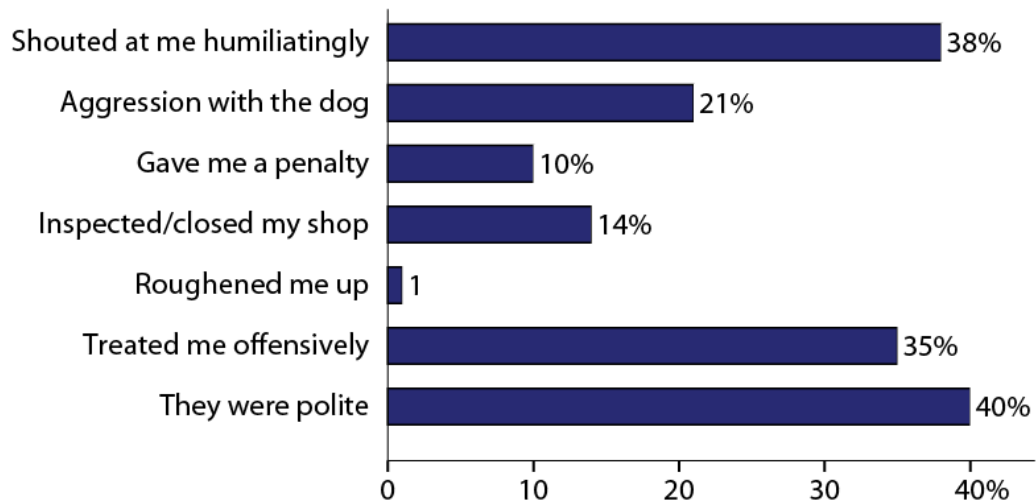


The securitization of the problem and the emphasis on police operations in residential areas entail some very real effects - resident's everyday encounters with rude or abusive treatment by law enforcement officers or misuse of the of the excessive power they have received. Almost two thirds of the questioned residents of Stolipinovo had unpleasant interactions with patrolling police officers. Despite some officers' kind attitude in most of the situations a rude and degrading behavior was demonstrated and in some cases even a violent one.

How did the police on the streets treat you?

Stolipinovo neighbourhood, Plovdiv, 9-10 May 2020

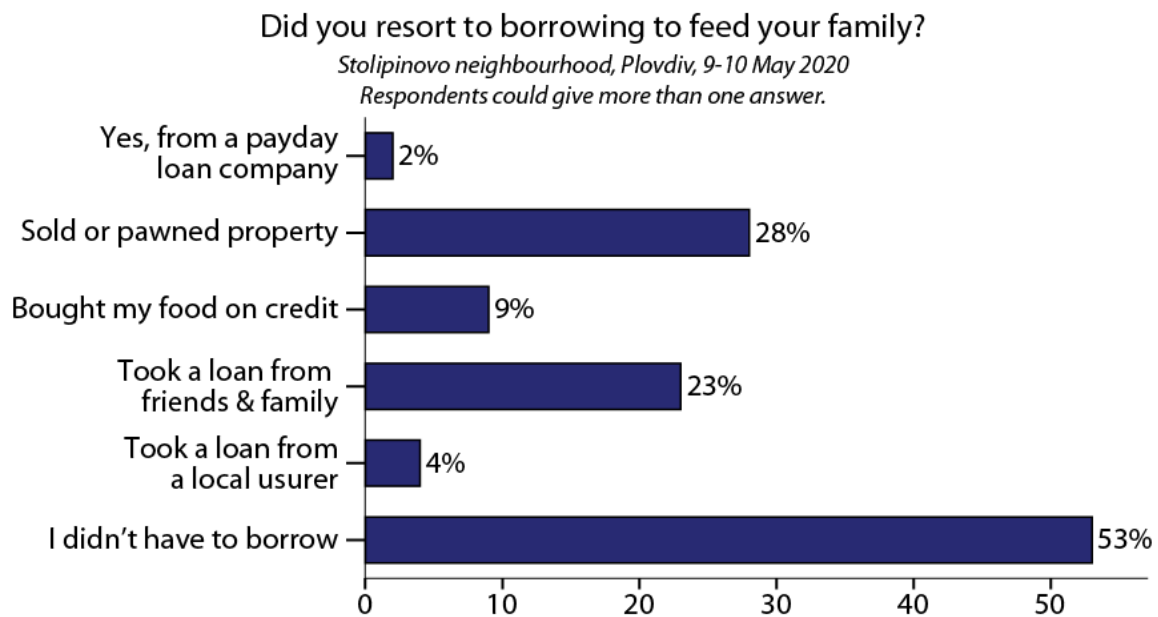
Respondents could give more than one answer.



The law enforcement's measures didn't hinder resident's access to their workplace if they were contractually employed, but they were detrimental to those employed informally, which is the dominating form of work in the minorities' residential areas. Private travel was also affected even in cases when it was essential, such as a visit to a doctor for example.

The survey in Stolipinovo residential area reports a collapse in the income of all categories residents. Responder's own assessments of their income before the state of emergency and at the time of the survey (in the beginning of May) were summarized, with formal and informal income specifically stated. Before the state of emergency the median income in the sample of Stolipinovo residential area was 650 lv. (appr. 325 Euro), after its occurrence it decreased to 250lv. (appr. 125 Euro). Only incomes coming from the public sector were not seriously affected: salaries of employees in municipal enterprises and pensions. In all other categories of employment, a dramatic reduction in financial inflows is visible. The collapse is most significant among workers employed by construction companies (often without a contract) and small entrepreneurs in the residential area and it's absolute for those, forced to survive by collecting garbage around the city.

With the average income of the whole community falling below the official poverty line, families manage to survive mainly with savings, by taking different forms of credits or with the help of relatives in Western Europe. In a total of 47% was noted some form of indebtedness. The main response to the crisis was a severe minimization of needs and costs.



The complete absence of the state in terms of support is striking. In this regard community takes the main role as a leading actor. In Stolipinovo residential area a total of 84% responders point out that self organization of the local community did most to help coping with the difficult period. The main activity of the local groups was to raise funds from the community itself to buy food and distribute it among the poorest.

The last block of questions examines the perception of the pandemic the segregated communities have. It is worrying that a significant number of respondents (24 – 31%) believe that the virus does not exist. These perceptions are intertwined with the distrust towards the authorities and with the suspicion that residents will be declared sick even when they are not.

Despite that the vast majority of residents follow the recommendations to change their daily habits in order to prevent transmission of the disease. In Stolipinovo residential area more that 90% of the respondents have taken personal measures, such as hand washing, disinfection of homes and wearing mask. Approximately one fifth of the residents have intentionally limited their social contacts.

The atmosphere of fear and distrust is most evident in the reactions to the question “Would you like to be tested for corona virus?” – 93% declare that they will refuse to be tested. A whole range of doubts plays a role here – from the uncertainty of what would happen to the neighborhood to the fear of counterfeiting of the tests.

As long as measures against minority communities remain only restrictive, the medical threat will continue to become more and more unrealistic to them. It is one thing to have physical survival as a priority and another – to perceive the anti-epidemic measures, the state institutions and the virus itself as targeted tools for punishing the minority.