

Safeguarding the Roma Community in Ukraine and as refugees in Poland, Romania, and Moldova

Intolerance and discrimination, including harmful discourse and stereotyping, have affected Roma communities in the Eastern European region for centuries. It continues to be a concern for Roma communities fleeing the war in Ukraine.

About 100,000 refugees fleeing from Ukraine to Europe are estimated to be Roma (1). During the refugee outflow into neighbouring countries, Roma have faced discrimination at borders, ethnic profiling, and verbal abuse. Some families have been refused assistance. Roma refugees have been left stranded in railway stations, placed in makeshift camps or segregated in overcrowded reception centres. Authorities and others claim that Roma fleeing war are not 'genuine refugees', they're just crossing the border for access to humanitarian assistance.

What do we know about safeguarding risks for Roma Refugees from Ukraine?

Inside Ukraine

- The estimated 400,000 Roma living in Ukraine before the war faced high levels of poverty and lack of access to employment, education, and health care (2). They also faced prejudice, hate speech, and violent attacks that authorities did not investigate (3).

Ukrainian Borders

- There have been reports that some Roma families have been repeatedly denied exit from Ukraine at the border crossing near Beregovo on the Hungarian border (4).
- After facing discrimination and being denied humanitarian aid in Hungary, many Roma refugees are returning to Ukraine despite the risks (2).

Discrimination of Roma refugees is not new

In 2000, during the conflict in Kosovo, despite being refugees fleeing war, coordinated pogroms, burnings, rapes and killings, Romani asylum claims were met with scepticism and suspicion by various authorities. They were classed as bogus economic migrants, nomads on the move and scam artists. The UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) housed displaced Romani women, children and men in toxic, lead-contaminated camps for a decade. Following this forced migration of tens of thousands of Roma, EU member states initiated forced removals and returns of Roma to Serbia and Kosovo. The abuse and mistreatment of Roma fleeing conflicts is one more manifestation of antigypsyism. "What we witness today is a continuation of a brutal and largely unknown history of repression of Roma going back several hundreds of years".

Source: Excerpt of a speech delivered in Stockholm at the International Conference on the Genocide of the Roma and Combating Antigypsyism, 20-21 October 2022.

Moldova

- Roma who crossed Moldova's border find themselves in ethnically segregated reception centres with poor living conditions (3, 5).
- People without identification documents are being denied exit at border crossings in the south-western region of Zakarpattiya, home to one of the largest Roma communities. Many are at risk of statelessness through lack of identity documents (5).
- A member of the border police at Palanca, the main border crossing from Ukraine, accused Romani people of trafficking, particularly in children and children's organs, with no evidence to substantiate his claims. Others echoed the discriminatory belief that Romani people engage in human trafficking (3).
- Staff at a refugee reception centre allegedly told Roma refugees: **"I am fed up with you disgusting gypsies. I want to get rid of you once and for all."** Refugees including older people and children were sprayed with tear gas (6).
- The Moldovan government has taken steps to improve the treatment of Roma refugees by establishing a Roma community mediator as part of its Joint Crisis Management Centre with UNHCR, and a Roma Task Force to work directly on issues concerning Roma refugees (7).

Poland

- Many Roma refugee women have husbands fighting in the war and are traveling alone. Roma refugees are discriminated against by private housing providers and apartment owners. They are often stuck in reception centres across Poland (8).
- Roma refugees often face discrimination from other refugees. "When they see Roma at the reception point, the other refugees loudly tell each other to hide

their belongings. Roma in Ukraine are used to facing discrimination, and what they experience in Poland is the continuation of this." (8)

- Most relief for Roma refugees has been coordinated by self-organised individuals and NGOs according to a group of volunteers **Poland-Roma-Ukraine**. (8)

Romania

- In Romania, the Roma refugees often face the same discriminatory treatment as Roma who live in the country.
- Romanian Roma rights campaigners say the refugee crisis has shone a light on the kind of hostility Roma people are still facing in present-day Europe.
- A large group of Roma refugees was denied meals at a humanitarian help point in Bucharest and was kicked out of the establishment for being 'loud' and for 'eating too much'. Staff at the centre turned them away saying "You're not Ukrainian, you're Roma, go away!" (9)

Some specific concerns with regards to safeguarding

- A consistent problem for many Roma people from Ukraine is a lack of identity documents, like passports and birth certificates.
- Roma youth experience unequal access to opportunities, including education.
- Roma women have even more limited access to opportunities, due to multiple forms of discrimination they face because of their ethnicity and gender.
- The COVID-19 crisis saw an increase in hate speech against Roma communities, including women and girls. Rates of domestic violence soared. Difficult access to digital learning increased the risk of girls leaving school, heightening their likelihood of early/forced marriages.

Organisations working on Roma concerns:

ODIHR: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI)
www.osce.org/odihr/romaand-sinti

European Roma Rights Centre

in Romani and English

<http://www.errc.org/>

Avenue de Cortenbergh 71, 4th floor / 1000

Brussels, Belgium

E-mail: office@errc.org

Romea.cz

<https://romea.cz/en/about-romea>

English and Czech language website on Roma news

Romania:

Aresel

Bucharest-based Roma civic education initiative

<https://aresel.ro/en/>

E-Romnja:

Romani Women's Organization

<https://e-romnja.ro/>

Carousel

office@carousel.org

Agencia Împreună

office@agentiaimpreuna.ro

Moldova:

Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor

Coaliția Vocea Romilor - Valeriu Caldararu

+37368757605 valeriu.caldararu@mail.ru;

Asociatia Vocea romilor - Marin Alla -

+37369162200; vocearomilor@gmail.com

Fundația pentru Dezvoltare

Babriela.ojog@fam.med

Poland:

Poland - Roma - Ukraine

grupa wsparcia / support group / Група підтримки

Facebook: Poland-Roma-Ukraine

roma-poland-ukraine@protonmail.com

Methodology:

Compiled from desk research of news clips and statements in English.

Sources:

1. [Ukrainian Refugees are not welcome everywhere across Europe.](#)
2. [Faced with discrimination, Ukrainian Roma Refugees are going home.](#)
3. [Moldova: Romani Refugees in Ukraine Face Segregation.](#)
4. [Border Guards Accuse Roma of 'Wrongdoing' in Hungary.](#)
5. [Ukrainian Roma in Moldova face Segregation and Poor Conditions.](#)
6. [Anti-gypsyism after the Holocaust.](#)
7. [Roma Refugees from Ukraine face European Winter with added burden of hostility and discrimination.](#)
8. [Ukraine's Roma Refugees Face Closed Doors in Poland.](#)
9. [A CNN Report says Roma Refugees Fleeing war in Ukraine face Discrimination and Prejudice in Romania.](#)