



FURTHER INTO THE MARGINS

A regional report on Roma communities displaced by the Ukraine crisis

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This research report examines the experiences of Roma communities who have been displaced by the war in Ukraine. Roma in Ukraine and in Europe have historically faced discrimination and prejudice due to widely held stereotypes among the non-Roma majority. This report highlights how Roma internally displaced persons and refugees are discriminated against, and how, whereas many Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed with open arms in European countries, the same welcome has not been extended to Roma. The report also highlights the role of Roma-led organizations in supporting displaced Roma and reinvigorating the fight for the rights of Roma communities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This regional assessment presents the key findings and recommendations from Ukraine, Poland and Romania on the situation and particular challenges facing Roma internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Even before the invasion, Roma communities in Ukraine lived in dire conditions marked by high levels of poverty, segregation, sub-standard and overcrowded housing, and lack of access to essential services such as health and education. The report documents the differential impact of war and displacement on Roma compared to other Ukrainian refugees and offers recommendations for EU and national policymakers, donors, NGO staff and volunteers on both short-term responses and long-term advocacy. Data for this assessment was collected through interviews and focus group discussions in April–June 2023 in Ukraine and Romania and in 2022 in Poland. Interviewees included Roma refugees and IDPs, representatives of Roma-led organizations, representatives of international and national NGOs, and authorities.

KEY FINDINGS

- Roma communities in Ukraine face persistent inequality, discrimination and marginalization. Their most significant challenge is obtaining legal identification such as birth certificates and passports. The lack of such documents is the result of a combination of factors, including lack of awareness, institutional bias and poverty.
- The lack of identity documents affects Roma communities' access to basic services such as housing as well as life-saving humanitarian assistance, both in Ukraine and in refugee-receiving countries.
- Key socioeconomic indicators (income, health and education) among Roma communities in Ukraine, which were already dismal, have been further exacerbated in the wake of the war.
- The biggest concern for Roma women is securing employment. Their involvement in family-run trading and selling businesses in Ukraine is not easily translatable to their new contexts. Consequently, many Roma women are first-time employees. A lack of formal work experience or education, and an inability to speak the official language, are barriers to their professional integration. In addition, the lack of childcare support is a significant barrier to women's formal labour market participation.
- Discrimination significantly affects Roma IDPs and refugees' access to protection, basic services and general wellbeing. Roma refugees in Poland and Romania have faced racial discrimination from not only authorities and officials, but also volunteers and fellow refugees, along the evacuation routes, at border crossing points, and upon arrival in safe states.
- Unlike the open-armed welcome that many Ukrainian refugees received, Roma refugees were openly discriminated against when renting accommodation from private citizens in Romania and Poland. Even when, as in Romania, government schemes made accommodating large Roma families financially lucrative, the withdrawal of such programmes swiftly changed the attitudes of property owners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support to Roma communities requires a transnational, flexible and coherent approach that accommodates their particular histories, experiences, needs and perspectives. There remains an urgent need for an institutionalized, transnational network that can offer comprehensive assistance and support to the Roma people – both refugees and hosts, who are ethnic minorities in Europe.
- Roma communities in Ukraine urgently require administrative and legal support which allows them to access basic services. Civil society actors must continue advocating for support to Roma communities through legal aid programmes and increased social benefits. Aid actors must also ensure that Roma communities can access services without identity documents.
- The localization of humanitarian responses requires financial support from donors and international NGOs to Roma organizations, activists and platforms who continue to be the main help for displaced Roma and who raise awareness about the communities' needs. Support is also needed in building coalitions and partnerships, and in negotiating with authorities.
- To effectively address the specific needs and concerns of Roma refugees, it is essential to involve them directly in decision-making processes. This means not just consulting with them, but actively including their voices and perspectives in shaping policies and programmes.
- A proactive approach is needed to address discriminatory attitudes and practices among all those working with refugees. Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity training for volunteers and staff involved in humanitarian assistance to promote empathy and respect towards all individuals, regardless of ethnic and racial background, is essential. Roma-led organizations have more experience in the field and their collaboration could ensure effective outcomes in training and professionalizing volunteers and staff.

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