

International response to the Roma situation

The Roma people living in Ukraine have been subjected to discrimination and disenfranchisement for decades. According to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) hate speech, negative stereotypes and prejudice against the Roma is widespread in Ukraine. The vast majority of Roma do not possess identity documents, for which they are denied basic social rights. They are also not counted into national census, and they do not have the right to vote¹. According to the European Roma Rights Center, the Roma face severe discrimination in housing and are subject to constant forced evictions². Roma children also face discrimination in education, and many are unable to enroll in schools due to lack of identification documents³. Anti Roma-pogroms with masked armed men who terrorize Roma settlements and set fire to Roma dwellings are often ignored or tolerated with lax responses by law enforcement agencies and Ukrainian government officials⁴. The US Dept of State's 2012 human rights report on Ukraine noted that Roma women were faced discrimination in medical care and lacked access to information on health issues⁵.

From a media coverage standpoint, the plight of the Roma in Europe is largely covered by international human rights organizations and some community-led social justice groups (apart from occasional coverage on mainstream media). Roma community-led media organizations have presence in TV (example [A1 WebTV - Шyтeл](#)), radio (example [Radio Romano | Sveriges Radio](#)), internet (example [Három szólamra | MédiaKlikk \(mediaklikk.hu\)](#)) and print media (example [Romane Nevimata](#)). While they cover news and socio-cultural programs, they are not exclusively focussed on human rights. The European Roma Rights Center is one of the few Roma-led organizations that focus exclusively on human rights issues reporting regularly⁶. Additionally, international organizations like Amnesty⁷, Oxfam⁸, HRW⁹ and the UN's OHCHR¹⁰ cover human rights issues facing the Roma community from time to time. With the onset of the Russian invasion of

¹ [ECRI - Country monitoring in Ukraine - European Commission against Racism and Intolerance \(ECRI\) \(coe.int\)](#)

² [Domestic Cases: Access to Housing - European Roma Rights Centre \(errc.org\)](#)

³ [Lack of birth certificates leaves Romani children in Balkans at risk of statelessness and without healthcare or education - European Roma Rights Centre \(errc.org\)](#)

⁴ [Anti-Roma pogroms in Ukraine: on C14 and tolerating terror - European Roma Rights Centre \(errc.org\)](#)

⁵ [UKRAINE 2012 Human Rights Report \(state.gov\)](#)

⁶ [ERRC.org - European Roma Rights Centre](#)

⁷ [Serbia: World Bank-funded digital welfare system exacerbating poverty, especially for Roma and people with disabilities - Amnesty International](#)

⁸ [Roma | Oxfam International](#)

⁹ [Hungary | Country Page | World | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

¹⁰ [Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Commend Croatia on Increased Health Insurance Coverage for the Roma, Ask about the Prosecution of Hate Speech and the Segregation of Roma Students in Elementary Education | OHCHR](#)

Ukraine, coverage of the plight of Roma in Ukraine has been largely overshadowed by news on Ukraine. A Google search result under news tab yields only 18,300 hits for “Roma people”¹¹ while it gives 43,000,000 results for “Ukraine”¹².

From an international policy response perspective, the European Commission released the New Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030¹³ as the first direct contribution to the EU Action Plan Against Racism¹⁴. The strategy has a three-pillar approach aimed at fostering equality, inclusion and participation, in addition to the pre-existing four-sector approaches in education, employment, health, and housing under the previous framework. In 2021 the European Council adopted a recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation, increasing member states' commitment to fight discrimination against Roma and to promote their inclusion in the key areas of education, employment, health, and housing¹⁵. Additionally, the European Commission continued its support to other programs such as Inclusive Schools: Making a Difference for Roma Children¹⁶, the EU4Health programme to help prevent diseases and facilitate vaccination among vulnerable population such as the Roma¹⁷, the Housing and Empowerment of Roma pilot project¹⁸, the high level group on combatting hate speech, antigypsyism and anti-Roma rhetoric¹⁹ and the ROMACT program to build political will and understanding of Roma inclusion in local and regional levels²⁰. For the Roma in Ukraine, most of the above policies' implementation would bring indirect results, i.e., their fellow Roma or family members residing in neighboring EU states would avail from them. The programs on combatting hate speech, antigypsyism and anti-Roma rhetoric on media and online platforms does, however, have the potential to bring cross-border benefits.

From an international economic response perspective, the European Social Funds Plus budgeted €99.3 billion for the 2021-2027 period to address key social inclusion areas that effect the European Roma community. The social inclusion areas include education & training, youth employment, reduction of child poverty, and food assistance²¹. Additionally, the European Investment Fund along with Open Society Foundations have allocated €4.65 million in loans to

¹¹ [roma people - Google Search](#)

¹² [ukraine - Google Search](#)

¹³ [The new EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation \(full package\) \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁴ [Action Plan to turn the tide in the fight against racism \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁵ [pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁶ [About the project - Inclusive schools Making a difference for Roma children \(coe.int\)](#)

¹⁷ [eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0522&from=ENEU4Health Programme](#)

¹⁸ [Housing and Empowerment of Roma \(HERO\) Pilot project | European Microfinance Network \(european-microfinance.org\)](#)

¹⁹ [Combating hate speech and hate crime \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁰ [About ROMACT | ROMACT \(coe-romact.org\)](#)

²¹ [Understanding EU action on Roma inclusion \(europa.eu\)](#)

micro-enterprises in Roma communities through the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative²². Furthermore, through the EU support to Roma Integration in the Western Balkans initiative, the European Council has set aside²³: €3 million to support implementation of government policies to reduce the socio-economic gap endured by the Roma; €4.5 million for increased education support and opportunities for Roma students; €1.1 million to empower Roma women to enhance their capacities for civil society participation; €6.5 million for promotion of good governance and Roma empowerment at local level; and €6.8 million for support to reintegration of Roma returnees in the western Balkans. For the Roma minority in Ukraine, the only way they can avail from the above is through migration into an EU state, which in itself comes with tremendous challenges (as noted in paragraph below).

The European civil society response towards Roma minorities fleeing war in Ukraine has been nothing short of discriminatory. The Oxfam report²⁴ from Sep 2023 notes that while many Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed with open arms in European countries, the same welcome has not been extended to the Roma minorities from Ukraine. Another report from the New Eastern Europe²⁵ observes the double standards host countries hold towards refugees even at times of war and destruction. It notes that “unlike non-Roma Ukrainians who have generally felt welcomed when seeking refuge in Ukraine’s neighbouring Eastern European countries, Roma Ukrainians have oftentimes faced prejudice and distrust.” An NPR article²⁶ on the situation of Roma Ukrainians in neighboring Moldova says that the Roma, Azerbaijanis and other minority people are housed separately in worse conditions away from the vast majority of Ukrainian refugees. Similarly, Ukrainian Roma families in Poland²⁷ have alleged that they were provided with less food at the reception centers, received less humanitarian assistance, and lacked equal access to transportation. An account of a Ukrainian Roma refugee in Romania²⁸ quotes derogatory treatment from housing staff saying, “if you Roma were educated, you would not be so stupid to be here.” Even in Hungary where many dedicated Roma community organizations have been engaged in responding to the needs of refugees, the newly arrived continue to experience exclusion and marginalization while accessing healthcare, education, and employment services²⁹. In the Czech Republic a Roma was allegedly stabbed to death by a Ukrainian refugee in what is believed to be a hate crime³⁰.

²² [Supported by OSF-RIO and the European Investment Fund, REDI will provide 4.65M EUR in loans to micro-enterprises in Roma Communities from 4 countries - Portal REDI NGO \(redi-ngo.eu\)](#)

²³ [EU support to Roma integration.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

²⁴ [Further into the Margins: A regional report on Roma communities displaced by the Ukraine crisis - Oxfam Policy & Practice](#)

²⁵ [Roma refugees from Ukraine face additional adversity - New Eastern Europe](#)

²⁶ [Roma refugees who fled from Ukraine to Moldova are now in limbo : NPR](#)

²⁷ [Roma from Ukraine Face New Hardships After Fleeing | HIAS](#)

²⁸ [Five ways to tackle discrimination against Roma people displaced by war in Ukraine - Views & Voices \(oxfam.org.uk\)](#)

²⁹ [Recommendations on Roma Inclusion in UKR Refugee Response - Hungary \(May 2023\) \(2\).pdf](#)

³⁰ [Roma pushed to turn on Ukrainian refugees in Czech Republic | Roma | Al Jazeera](#)

As a consequence of the discrimination and unwelcome treatment, many Ukrainian Roma returned back to war-torn Ukraine despite all the risks³¹. Many Roma men in Ukraine have even joined the fight against the Russian occupation. The Roma taking up arms is historically not unprecedented: for example, they fought in the Balkan wars following the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, despite their sacrifices, Roma soldiers and their families were still treated with discrimination after the war ended³².

³¹ [Faced with discrimination, Ukrainian Roma refugees are going home – EURACTIV.com](#)

³² [Roma in Ukraine: Joining the fight against Russia's invasion while facing prejudices \(brusselstimes.com\)](#)