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REPORT

ORGANISATION AND LOCAL  
OF ROMANISATION AND LOCAL  
IN POLAND AND ROMANISATION AND LOCAL  
POLAND AND ROMANISATION AND LOCAL  
UKRAINE SUPPORTING ACTIVISTS  
FORCED MIGRANTS OF THE WAR  
IN THE FACE OF THE WAR  
IN UKRAINE



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# **National and local mobilisation of Roma and non-Roma organisations and activists in Poland supporting Ukrainian Roma forced migrants in the face of the war in Ukraine**

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Report

**National and local mobilisation of Roma and non-Roma organisations and activists in Poland supporting Ukrainian Roma forced migrants in the face of the war in Ukraine.**

**Summary**

This report delves into the first-hand accounts of both Roma and non-Roma activists who have been actively involved in assisting Roma forced migrants from Ukraine. While the 'Special Act' and its amendments outline specific forms of support for forced migrants arriving in Poland from Ukraine, the survey as well as narratives from these activists shed light on the need for a more personalized and tailored approach, particularly for the most vulnerable groups among the forced migrants.

A crucial aspect highlighted in this report is the recognition of the unique experiences of both Roma and non-Roma activists, emphasizing their role in supporting Ukrainian Roma forced migrants. This acknowledgment is essential for shaping future policies geared towards social cohesion and the inclusion of minority groups. Remarkably, this study is the first to explore the efforts of Roma organizations and activists operating in a wartime context on behalf of Roma from Ukraine.

The challenges faced by Roma organizations in Poland in dealing with refugees and migrants were initially daunting, requiring a rapid learning curve. However, these organizations quickly adapted, developing innovative mechanisms and communication strategies. The report emphasizes the importance of documenting and learning from these evolving processes.

The primary impetus for Roma involvement in aiding Roma refugees stems from a shared sense of community and ethnic identity. The awareness of discrimination and resentment faced by Ukrainian Roma fuelled a collective commitment to advocating for their rights. Recognizing the persistent anti-Roma sentiments in Poland, exacerbated by the arrival of Ukrainian Roma, the report underscores the necessity for non-Roma individuals to understand Roma culture and the specific challenges faced by Ukrainian Roma, both in Ukraine and on exile.

The demanding nature of crisis work, particularly in the context of assisting forced migrants, is acknowledged, with the associated high levels of stress, depression, and emotional strain leading to professional burnout and potential post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The report recommends preventive measures, including supervision, training, and workshops focused on mental health hygiene, to alleviate the impact on activists.

An intriguing observation is the transformative effect of including Roma from Ukraine in assistance efforts on the functioning of Roma organizations and activists. This process has led to professionalization and specialization in advocacy work, as well as increased intra-group mobilization. The expertise and knowledge gained by Roma activists and organizations have become valuable assets, utilized by public services and international humanitarian institutions through training workshops and participatory projects. Strengthened organizations are now thriving through collaborations with various partners, both within Poland and internationally, creating support networks and developing shared tools and strategies.

### **Thank you**

Valuable contributions from people associated with various organizations and institutions played an important role in the research. We thank the Central Council of Roma in Poland, the Dom na Pograniczu Foundation, and the Towards Dialog Foundation, representatives of the Municipality of Krakow, as well as dedicated managers of reception centres and engaged staff and volunteers from various human rights, migrant and refugee assistance organizations involved in supporting Ukrainian Roma. We would like to extend our gratitude to dr. Barbara Jancewicz from the Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, who provided us with feedback on all stages of the research. We express our sincere gratitude to all these experts for their dedication and valuable contributions to this report.

## Introduction

This report is a result of research commissioned by the ERGO Network and funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) of the European Commission. The aim of this project was to document the involvement of civil society actors (Roma and non-Roma) in humanitarian relief and support for Ukrainian Roma forced migrants.

It has been almost two years since Roma and non-Roma civil society actors in Poland with the support of humanitarian organisations engage in dialogue with state and local institutions, especially local governments, with an aim to mediate, facilitate and intervene when needed, in order to support Ukrainian Roma forced migrants. The situation of Ukrainian Roma forced migrants proved to differ in many respects when comparing to other non-Roma forced migrants from Ukraine. Based on the observations of Roma NGOs and civil society actors, we can say that volunteers, aid institutions in Poland, but also other Ukrainian migrants and refugees arriving did not always identify and treat Roma as either Ukrainians nor as forced migrants fleeing war and in need of protection. It very quickly became apparent that the support system set up by the state perceived Ukrainian Roma fleeing the war simply as those who wanted to take advantage of the aid system, without noticing or ignoring their Ukrainian citizenship (which has been pointed out by reports of Roma organizations<sup>1</sup>). These responses in many cases, as we claim, were set in motion by mechanisms of stereotyping, discrimination and antigypsyism, something which Polish Roma and Roma elsewhere in Europe experience both historically and in present, especially in during social upheavals and crisis<sup>2</sup>.

There has been a great number of Roma and non-Roma involved since the first day of full-scale war in humanitarian support, many of whom remained active and continue their work, among them dozens of Roma assistants<sup>3</sup> and trained volunteers, who work with Roma forced migrants in different cities all over Poland, and especially in the cities near the border with Ukraine. The ability of those various actors to mobilize, cooperate, build

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<sup>1</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz E., Talewicz J., Kołaczek M. (2022). Human rights, needs and discrimination - the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland. Report on research and intervention activities. Central Council of German Sinti and Roma in cooperation with the Jaw Dikh Foundation and the Foundation Towards Dialogue. <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/en/publication-about-the-situation-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine-in-poland/>; Durjasz A., Sarian J., Kołaczek M., Piórkowska P., Talewicz J, Vaidalovych O. "They are not refugees; they are travellers". Situation of Roma Refugees from Ukraine in Podkarpackie Voivodeship". Monitoring report 2022-2023, Foundation Toward Dialogue, 2023 <https://eriac.org/roma-for-roma-documenting-the-oral-history-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine/>

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Romani communities, in: y Blasco, P. G., & Fotta, M. (Eds.). (2023). *Romani chronicles of COVID-19: testimonies of harm and resilience* (Vol. 6). Berghahn Books.

<sup>3</sup> Roma assistants work where there are larger communities of Polish Roma and where there is the will of the local authorities to employ them. They are employed by the education departments and schools and financed from the state budget. Their work is of different nature depending on the place and community in which they work, it looks different in cities and villages. After the war broke out they were the first to be engaged by the local authorities to help Roma refugees, they also got involved themselves, they simply knew how to work with the Roma. On a national scale, it is about 80-90 people, which is an inadequate number for the needs.

coalitions and partnerships during exceptional challenges since February 2022 deserve thorough analysis.

Against this background, this research's purpose was to learn more about how Roma organisations and activists as well as non-Roma activists organised themselves, communicated, with whom they built partnerships and coalitions in response to a crisis they faced from the beginning as a full-scale war in Ukraine. We wanted to research what we observed: the potential, efficiency and agency of Roma community, Roma NGOs as well as experiences of Roma and non-Roma activists in supporting Ukrainian Roma.

In order to better understand how they operate in fast changing social realities, we also asked about their experiences and modes of participation and capacity building when engaging in support and humanitarian response to arrival of forced migrants from Ukraine. To date, no one has studied the experiences of Roma and non-Roma organisations and activists supporting Ukrainian Roma during the ongoing war. As such, this report is the first attempt of Roma NGOs to provide a comprehensive account of the experiences of Roma and non-Roma civil society actors in supporting Ukrainian Roma forced migrants, and to recognise their efforts and challenges within the existing national framework for supporting Ukrainian forced migrants.



## Methodology

The study employs methodologies emphasizing a collaborative approach with experienced researchers and activists with in-depth knowledge and experience of working with Roma communities. All of the authors have long experience in researching Polish Roma migration from to and within Poland, while Elżbieta Mirga-Wójtowicz and Monika Szewczyk are also deeply embedded in the Romani networks both professionally and personally. The main goal of this research is to document the experiences of both Roma NGOs and individual Roma, but also non-Roma, who have been actively involved in supporting Ukrainian Roma forced migrants. The research is also intended to provide insight into the challenges they faced, the strategies they employed, and the overall impact of their work on their personal and professional lives. The research team implemented an outreach plan, using both personal and organizational networks to connect with potential study participants and builds on previous communication, exchange and knowledge circulating among various actors.

To capture experiences of supporting Ukrainian Roma and reflect on grassroots mobilization in Polish Roma communities and their transnational networks as well as non-Roma activists, we designed an online survey in a simple and accessible form (we used Webankieta.pl). The construction of the survey was a collaborative effort, involving consultation with qualitative and quantitative researchers and field experts working at the Centre of Migration Research at University of Warsaw. These consultations included not only methodological insights into designing a survey, but also utilised vast knowledge of Roma NGO activists and researchers related to Roma and non-Roma efforts in supporting Ukrainian Roma in a round of consultations and discussions.

An ethical dimension was taken into account throughout the research process. The study followed established ethical guidelines for social research with refugees, forced migrants and vulnerable populations (even if the vulnerable group, i.e. forced migrants from Ukraine, was not a subject of the research per se<sup>4</sup>) with special focus on recommendations that should be applicable when conducting research in humanitarian emergencies<sup>5</sup>, ensuring dignity and respect for all parties involved.

This was a small-scale research and has several limitations such as the size of the sample, short timeframe for conducting the research and reaching a larger number of respondents and conduct more in-depth interviews, as well as language barrier (the survey was only in Polish). However, given the vast experience of the research team with the topic, ongoing communication with the main actors in the field, deep understanding of the complex

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<sup>4</sup> Code of ethics: <http://iasfm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/IASFM-Ethics-EN-compressed.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Deps, P. D., Rezende, I., Andrade, M. A. C., Collin, S. M. (2022). Ethical issues in research with refugees. *Ethics, Medicine and Public Health*, 24, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jemep.2022.100813>

realities of the support system and the fact that two of the researchers-activists are coming from Roma community, we believe it minimizes these shortcomings, and altogether ensure the accuracy of the findings, providing some essential insights into the research problem. After initial analysis of the survey results, the research team proceeded with a set of qualitative in-depth interviews with selected group of respondents who agreed to be contacted for the further discussion about their experiences and support provided over the recent months. Eight respondents (Roma leaders and/or activists, non-Roma activists, civil servants, Roma assistants, volunteers) were selected for in-depth interviews. These interviews delved into selected key topics, providing a qualitative dimension to the research. Diversity was a priority in the selection process, aiming to cover the spectrum of perspectives and experiences of the Roma community.

The data collected, both from surveys and in-depth interviews were analysed, using quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover patterns, themes and insights that contribute significantly to our understanding of the situation of Roma and non-Roma civil society actors providing support to Ukrainian Roma forced migrants.

### **Characteristic of the respondents**

The survey was distributed and completed online by respondents. We used various channels - mailing list, personal contacts and social media channels for reaching out to potential respondents. We were collecting the responses from the end of September until end of November 2023. The available statistics show that during that time 134 people responded to the survey but did not complete it, while 60 people completed the entire survey and this is the number of our respondents. The vast majority of the questionnaires were completed by women (43 questionnaires), 14 men took part in the survey, while 3 people did not answer about their gender.

The analysis focuses on the activities and support offered by both Roma and non-Roma, and attempts to identify the key elements for those interviewed regarding the provision of support, their motivation and perception of the situation, as well as the impact of the activities on their career development.

### **Age groups.**

In terms of age groups, the largest number of people supporting Ukrainian refugees of Roma origin was in the age range of 36 to 50 years - 25, and the smallest age group was those in the range of 18 to 25 years - 6 people.

Figure 1. Age and gender of respondents identifying as Roma and non-Roma

Age	Roma	Non-Roma
18 years - 25 years	0	5
26 years - 35 years	3	13
36 lat - 50 lat	6	19
over 50 years old	3	11
Gender:	Roma	Non-Roma
woman	10	33
men	1	13
I do not want to say	1	2

### National and ethnic origin of respondents.

The questionnaire was mainly addressed to people living, working and active in Poland. It was only available in one language (Polish), so it is not surprising that the majority of respondents supporting Ukrainian refugees of Roma origin were Polish citizens - 55 people. However, it should be noted that among the respondents there were four citizens of Ukraine and one citizen of Belarus.

The group of respondents was diverse in terms of ethnic and national origin. Six respondents indicated the following ethnic groups/national minorities with which they identified: Silesian, Jewish, Ukrainian, Belarusian, while 12 people identified as Roma. Of these, four respondents identified themselves as belonging to the Polish Roma group, five respondents identified themselves as belonging to the Carpathian Roma<sup>6</sup>, group and three respondents simply identified themselves as belonging to the Roma community without specifying the group.

### Experience of work with and support to forced migrants

Half of our respondents had previous experience (before the outbreak of full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022) of supporting and helping vulnerable people, including refugees. The 30 respondents (including six who identified as Roma) who said they had such experience supported and worked with the following groups:

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<sup>6</sup> The question on Roma identification was open-ended, people could decide for themselves which group they belonged to, resulting in the following names given [originally in Polish]: Bergitka, Bergitka Roma or Romowie Karpaccy, which for the purposes of this analysis we group under one name - Carpathian Roma. Roma in Poland identify with the following groups: Polska Roma, Carpathian Roma (also known as Bergitka Roma), Kalderash, Lowari and Sinti.

- Romanian Roma (EU citizens since 2007), arriving in Poland before Romanian EU accession but also under EU freedom of movement;
- refugees from Afghanistan, Belarus, Chechnya, Syria, Tajikistan and other countries going through the Polish asylum system;
- persons in the asylum procedure who are in guarded centres for foreigners;
- refugees on the Polish-Belarusian border;
- migrants and refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Poland after Russia's attack on Donbas and Crimea in 2014.

This means that this part of the respondents had different experiences and knowledge of the forms of support, problems and challenges faced by different categories of refugees in different legal and living conditions - from closed detention centres for asylum seekers, through support for people on the move at the Polish-Belarusian border during the ongoing (since summer 2021) humanitarian crisis, to comprehensive integration activities in Poland - in the field of education, employment, legal aid, etc.

Of the respondents with a Roma background, six stated that they had previous experience in assisting migrants and refugees, while after 24 February, 11 respondents with a Roma background stated that they had also assisted non-Roma forced migrants from Ukraine.

### **What voivodships and type of place the support was provided?**

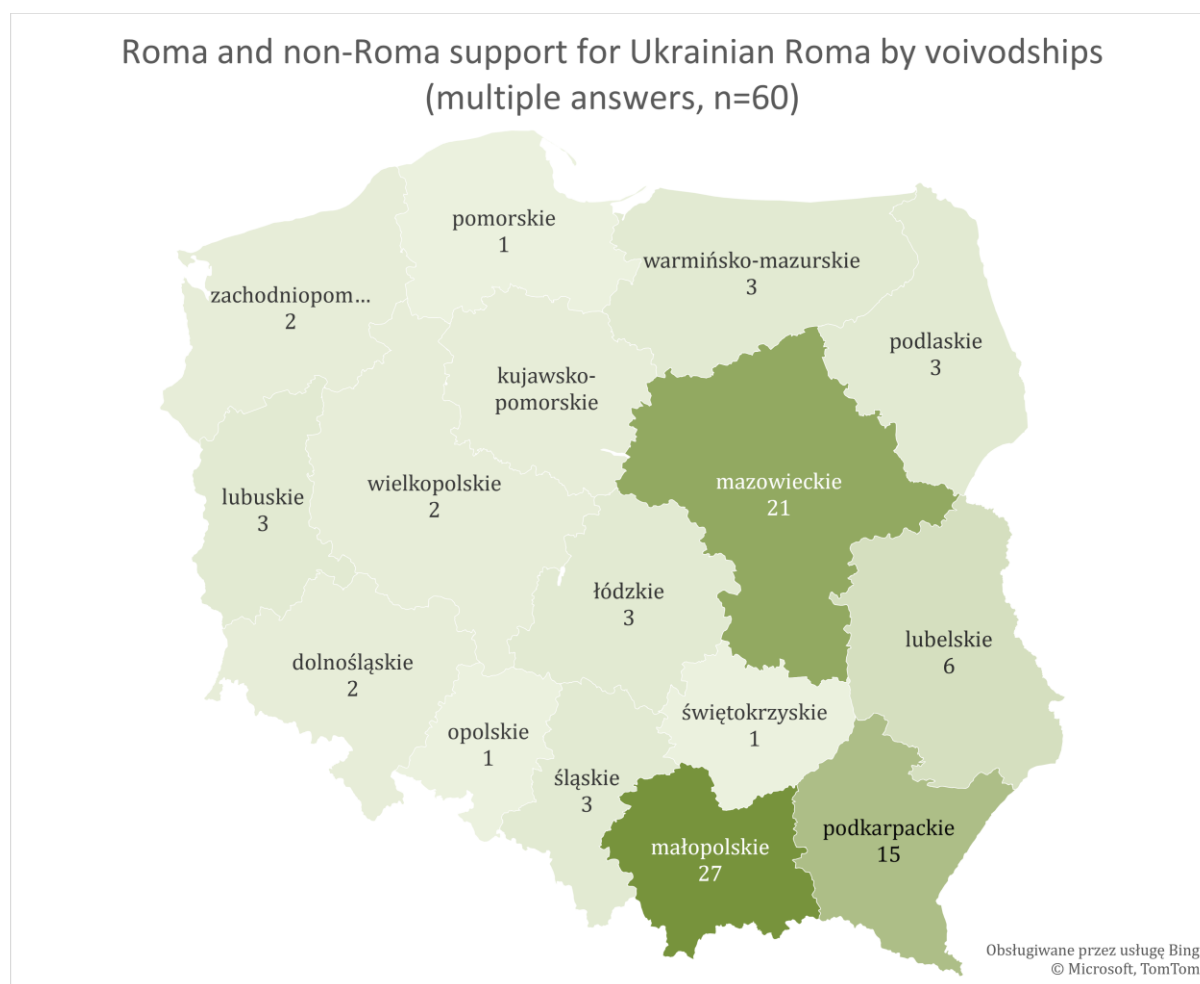
In terms of geographical location, the largest number of those who responded to the questionnaire provided support to Ukrainian Roma in the following voivodships <sup>7</sup>:

- 1) Małopolskie voivodship (27 persons, including 6 persons declaring Roma origin),
- 2) Mazowieckie voivodship (21 persons, including 3 persons declaring Roma background)
- 3) Podkarpackie voivodship (15 persons, including 3 persons declaring Roma background).

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<sup>7</sup> One person could be active in more than one voivodship.

Figure 2. Roma and non-Roma support for Ukrainian Roma by voivodships



These are the three provinces of Malopolska, Podkarpackie and Mazowieckie<sup>8</sup>, which received the largest number of forced migrants from Ukraine after 24 February 2022, with the situation of Podkarpackie Voivodship, as a border and intended by the authorities as a transit, being quite unique here<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, data from NGOs, especially Roma

<sup>8</sup> The territorial distribution of Ukrainians (including those who arrived before February 24, 2022 and forced migrants) settling in Poland is characterized by concentration in provinces with large urban agglomerations. The most popular regions are the provinces of Mazowieckie - 21% of people, Dolnośląskie - 11% of people, Wielkopolskie - 11% of people, Małopolskie - 10% and Śląskie - 9% of people:

<https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/zezwozenia-na-pobyt-dla-obywateli-ukrainy-objetych-ochrona-czasowa>

<sup>9</sup> More about this voivodship and its special role and situation following the arrival of refugees from Ukraine in e.g.: Durjasz A., Jarosz S., Kołaczek M., Piórkowska P., Talewicz J., Vaidalovych O. "They are not refugees; they are travellers". Situation of Roma Refugees from Ukraine in Podkarpackie Voivodeship". Monitoring report 2022-2023, Foundation Toward Dialogue, 2023; <https://eriac.org/roma-for-roma-documenting-the-oral-history-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine/>; W punkcie wyjścia. Monitoring zbiorowego zakwaterowania uchodźców z Ukrainy, Konsorcjum Migracyjne i Centrum Badań nad Prawem Migracyjnym Instytutu Nauk Prawnych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2023; Jarosz S., Witold Klaus, red. (2023). Polska Szkoła Pomagania. Przyjęcie osób uchodźczych z Ukrainy w Polsce w 2022 roku, Konsorcjum Migracyjne, Fundacja Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami, Centrum Badań Migracyjnych, 2023

organisations, show that these provinces have received the largest number of people of Roma origin from Ukraine<sup>10</sup>. This means that Polish Roma are involved in humanitarian aid and the response of local aid structures to the arrival of Ukrainian Roma, and this is reflected among the respondents to the questionnaire, taking into account, of course, the limited number of responses and the barriers in reaching out to other potential research participants.

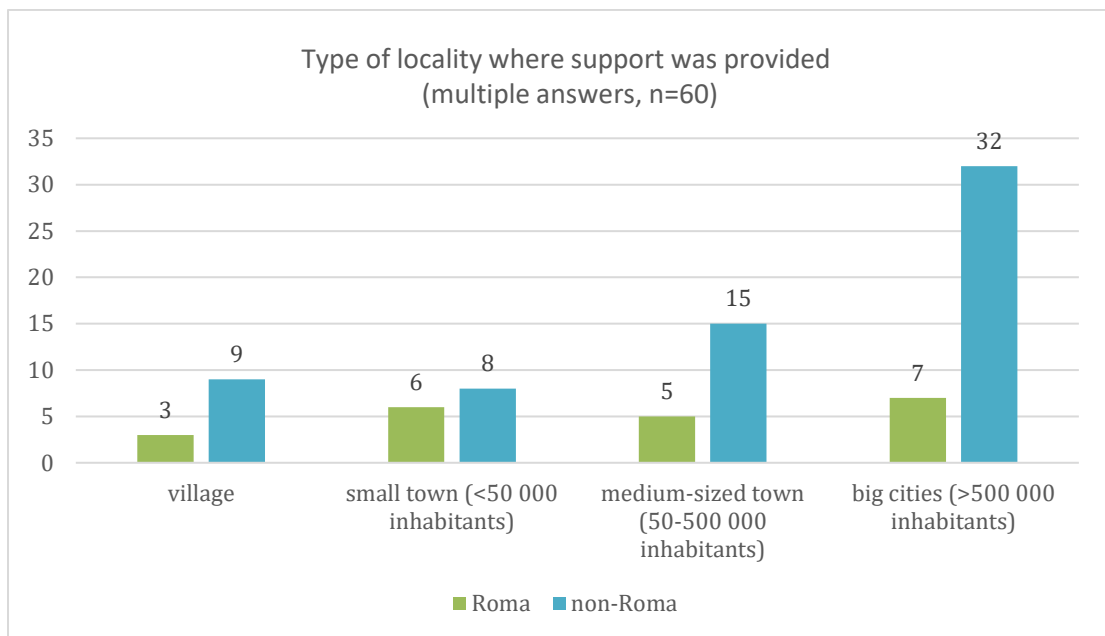
When asked about the type of place where assistance was provided, there were several possible options. According to our experience, assistance usually reached several places, following the people and their needs (thus this was a multiple answers question). The majority of respondents said that they provided help and support in large cities (over 500,000 inhabitants), 12 respondents were active in villages, 14 respondents said that they were active in small towns (up to 50,000 inhabitants), while 20 respondents said that they were active in medium-sized towns (50-500,000 inhabitants).

Among Roma respondents, three worked in villages, seven in cities of over 500,000 inhabitants, five in medium-sized cities (50-500,000 inhabitants) and six in small towns of up to 50,000 inhabitants.

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<sup>10</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz E., Talewicz J., Kołaczek M. (2022). Human rights, needs and discrimination - the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland. Report on research and intervention activities. Central Council of German Sinti and Roma in cooperation with the Jaw Dikh Foundation and the Foundation Towards Dialogue. <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/en/publication-about-the-situation-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine-in-poland/>; Mirga-Wójtowicz E., Fiałkowska K., 'Be careful out there, in that Gypsy district' - antigypsyism in a war situation, May 2022, <https://pl.boell.org/en/2022/05/16/uwazajcie-tam-w-tej-cyganskiej-dzielnicy-antycyganizm-w-warunkach-wojny>; Durjasz A., Jarosz S., Kołaczek M., Piórkowska P., Talewicz J., Vaidalovych O. "They are not refugees; they are travellers". Situation of Roma Refugees from Ukraine in Podkarpackie Voivodeship". Monitoring report 2022-2023, Foundation Toward Dialogue, 2023

Figure 3. Type of locality where support was provided by Roma and non-Roma



## **State of the art - situation of the Ukrainian Roma forced migrants in Poland since full scale war in Ukraine**

The war in Ukraine has triggered one of the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. Nearly 16.8 million Ukrainian<sup>11</sup> citizens have entered into Poland since February 24, 2022 (with Poland being not only a destination but also a transit country), and while there are signs of a return movement (more than 15 million recorded border crossings to Ukraine via Poland), the war continues and the number of returns (permanent or temporary) as well as arrivals can change following the fast-changing realities in Ukraine. Just before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the number of Ukrainians residing in Poland has been estimated at around 1.3-1.5 million<sup>12</sup> and already in March 2022 this number was estimated at 3.2 million and was on the rise in the following months. Data for Poland indicates that the number of forced migrants from Ukraine in 2022 ranged between one million and two million people. According to UNHCR data from February 2023, there were about 1,563,000 people fleeing the conflict in Poland<sup>13</sup> and this was the figure 1000 larger than the granted protection in the preceding years (between 2012-2023)<sup>14</sup>. According to information provided by the Polish Government, as of June 12, 2023, the number of Ukrainian citizens registered under temporary protection in Poland (under the special act of March 12, 2022) was over 993,000 (while at the end of summer 2022 it was nearly 1.5 million citizens). According to government authorities in February 2023 "women and children make up about 87 percent of this group. Children and adolescents make up about 43 percent of Ukrainian citizens with PESEL numbers. Among adults, by contrast, women account for 77 percent of those"<sup>15</sup>.

Amidst the overwhelming influx of information surrounding war and arrival of hundreds of thousands of forced migrant, a crucial aspect often overlooked by the public is Ukraine's rich tapestry of ethnic and cultural diversity. Contrary to a prevailing assumption, not all of its inhabitants identify as ethnic Ukrainians. Among this diverse ethnically and religiously population are also Roma. Our estimations indicate that a considerable number (around 50 000) of Roma individuals from Ukraine have sought refuge in Poland, or

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<sup>11</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

<sup>12</sup> Duszczyk M., Górny A., Kaczmarczyk P., Kubisiak A. (2023). War refugees from Ukraine in Poland – one year after the Russian aggression. Socioeconomic consequences and challenges, accessed from: <https://rsaiconnect.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rsp3.12642>

<sup>13</sup> UNHCR (2023). Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/99072>

<sup>14</sup> Łukasiewicz K., Pachocka M., Yeliseyeu A. (2023). Poland country report. Government responses to increased influx of protection seekers in 2015/16 and 2022/23. NIBR Working Paper 2023:110, Centre of Migration Research UW, Published by: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, OSLO Metropolitan University

<sup>15</sup> gov.pl (2023). Detailed statistics on persons registered in the register of citizens of Ukraine and members of their families who have been granted the status of a foreigner on the basis of the special law. <https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc/obywatele-ukrainy-w-polsce--aktualne-dane-migracyjne2>



crossed through Poland into other countries. As of April 2022, the European Commission has projected an exodus involving at least 100,000<sup>16</sup> Roma fleeing Ukraine. It's essential to acknowledge the fluid nature of these statistics, subject to substantial fluctuations, mirroring the dynamic mobility of Ukrainian refugees. Recognizing this complexity is vital for a comprehensive understanding of the situation.

Ukraine is a multicultural country that recognizes minorities. According to official census (most recent in Ukraine was conducted in 2001), population of Roma in Ukraine accounts for about 47,587 people, however these numbers do not reflect the reality, and estimates of activists and NGO sector says that between 200,000 to 400,000<sup>17</sup> citizens are of Roma origin. It is worth noting that Roma communities experience various forms of marginalisation and exclusion in Ukraine, e.g. up to 8% of Roma population living in Ukraine lack identity documents proving Ukrainian citizenship or a certain status, one of the numerous problems facing Roma population in Ukraine, that prompted the Ukrainian government in 2013 to adopt the Roma Strategy 2020<sup>18</sup> (and which was extended to 2030 with interim evaluation foreseen in 2025 which now due to war seems impossible to implement). Lack of documentation reveals various cases of exclusion and discriminatory situations encountered by Roma while still in Ukraine but also proved problematic for those who fled the country.

Available data on number of Ukrainian Roma remain estimates and lack precision due to the complicated nature of collecting sensitive data and this is also a reality elsewhere outside of Ukraine, e.g. in Poland there is no collection of ethnic data among arriving forced migrants, which further complicates the accuracy of the estimates of number of Roma arriving to Poland. While a significant number of Roma crossed the border in the first weeks of war, there is also movement in the opposite direction, indicating a return to Ukraine. Observations by Roma organizations underscore the multifaceted nature of these movements. Many Ukrainians (incl. Ukrainian Roma) are crossing the border repeatedly, engaging in multiple movements, which results from many factors - wishes to visit family members who could not leave Ukraine (sick and elderly, men in the conscript age), visit their homes, proceed with some bureaucratic procedures and/or were unable to bear the cost of living outside of Ukraine.

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<sup>16</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement\\_22\\_2326](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_2326)

<sup>17</sup> Bocheva H., 'Roma in Ukraine - A Time for Action: Priorities and Pathways for an Effective Integration Policy'; Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE), May 2019, [https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MRG\\_Rep\\_Ukraine\\_EN\\_Apr19.pdf](https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MRG_Rep_Ukraine_EN_Apr19.pdf);

ECRI Report on Ukraine, 2012: <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-ukraine/16808b5ca5>

<sup>18</sup> STRATEGY promoting the realization of the rights and opportunities of persons belonging to the Roma national minority in Ukrainian society for the period up to 2030: <https://dcss.gov.ua/roma-strategy-2030-eng/>

To date, several report and various kind of investigations have been conducted across receiving countries on the situation of Ukrainian Roma<sup>19</sup>, also in the reports concerning the population of Ukrainian forced migrants, the situation of Roma is noted<sup>20</sup>. Most of this materials document the accounts of discrimination and antigypsyism that Ukrainian Roma are subjected to in particular countries. Challenges are described in terms of access to housing, education system for children and youth, access to the labour market, health care, security issues and broader integration<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz E., Kamila Fiałkowska K., 'Be careful out there, in that Gypsy district' - antigypsyism in a war situation, May 2022: <https://pl.boell.org/en/2022/05/16/uwazajcie-tam-w-tej-cyganskiej-dzielnicy-antyzyganizm-w-warunkach-wojny>; Zentralrat Deutscher Sinti und Roma (2022): Melde- und Informationsstelle Antiziganismus (MIA) verurteilt die Diskriminierung geflüchteter ukrainischer Roma, <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/melde-und-informationsstelle-antiziganismus-mia-verurteilt-diediskriminierung-gefluechteter-ukrainischer-roma/>; Mirga-Wójtowicz E., Talewicz J., Kołaczek M. (2022). Human rights, needs and discrimination - the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland. Report on research and intervention activities. Central Council of German Sinti and Roma in cooperation with the Jaw Dikh Foundation and the Foundation Towards Dialogue. <https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/en/publication-about-the-situation-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine-in-poland/>; Durjasz A., Jarosz S., Kołaczek M., Piórkowska P., Talewicz J, Vaidalovych O. "They are not refugees; they are travellers". Situation of Roma Refugees from Ukraine in Podkarpackie Voivodeship". Monitoring report 2022-2023, Foundation Toward Dialogue, 2023; <https://eriac.org/roma-for-roma-documenting-the-oral-history-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine/>; ERIAC Resources: <https://eriac.org/roma-for-roma-documenting-the-oral-history-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine/>; Further into the Margins: A regional report on Roma communities displaced by the Ukraine crisis: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/further-into-the-margins-a-regional-report-on-roma-communities-displaced-by-the-621547/>; <https://ccl.org.ua/en/news/ukrainian-roma-refugees-and-discrimination-a-call-for-action-on-international-roma-day/>; <https://minorityrights.org/programmes/library/trends/trends2022/ukraine/>; Roma Rights Under Siege: Monitoring Reports from One Year of War in Ukraine, ERRC, 2023: <http://www.errc.org/press-releases/war-in-ukraine-errc-monitoring-report-confirms-discrimination-against-romani-refugees>

<sup>20</sup> Jarosz S., Klaus W., red. (2023). Polska Szkoła Pomagania. Przyjęcie osób uchodźczych z Ukrainy w Polsce w 2022 roku, Konsorcjum Migracyjne, Fundacja Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami, Centrum Badań Migracyjnych, 2023

<https://konsorcjum.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Polska-Szkola-Pomagania-raport-1.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Raport: Czego nauczyliśmy się o budowaniu relacji i włączaniu społecznym osób uchodźczych 50+ z Ukrainy, Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych "ę" i Polskie Forum Migracyjne. 2023 <https://konsorcjum.org.pl/raport-czego-nauczylismy-sie-o-budowaniu-relacji/>; Uchodźcy z Ukrainy w Polsce: <https://www.amnesty.org.pl/uchodzcy-z-ukrainy-w-polsce/>; W punkcie wyjścia. Monitoring zbiorowego zakwaterowania uchodźczyń z Ukrainy, Konsorcjum Migracyjne i Centrum Badań nad Prawem Migracyjnym Instytutu Nauk Prawnych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2023; Jarosz S., Klaus W., red. (2023). Polska Szkoła Pomagania. Przyjęcie osób uchodźczych z Ukrainy w Polsce w 2022 roku, Konsorcjum Migracyjne, Fundacja Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami, Centrum Badań Migracyjnych, 2023 <https://konsorcjum.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Polska-Szkola-Pomagania-raport-1.pdf>

## **Legal framework – current framework of temporary protection at the EU and state level in Poland**

### ***European level***

European legal measures in the form of Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) have been implemented to meet the immediate needs of displaced persons fleeing the full-scale war in Ukraine<sup>22</sup>. The directive was triggered by the Council of the European Union in response to the Russian invasion and was used for the first time since it was adopted following the war in former Yugoslavia, to provide rapid and temporary protection for people who cannot return to their country of origin (Council Implementing Decision 2022/382, on March 4, 2022.<sup>23</sup>, launched the Temporary Protection Directive, recognizing the mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine and introducing temporary protection measures). In addition, the Commission provided operational guidelines for the implementation of Decision 2022/382 in March 2022, clarifying the procedures for determining the mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine and enforcing temporary protection, as defined in Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC. On September 27, 2023, ministers of the European Union member states reached a political agreement to extend temporary protection until March 4, 2024. Depending on developments in Ukraine, the temporary protection may be extended for another year, until March 2025<sup>24</sup>. The temporary protection is afforded first and foremost to Ukrainian citizens and to non-citizens (stateless persons and third country nationals other than Ukraine) under the conditions of residing legally in Ukraine before February 24, 2022, upon providing necessary documentation and upon decision of member states whether they will provide temporary protection to non-citizens of Ukraine or whether they should apply for protection within other existing humanitarian framework under national law.

### ***National level - Poland***

In the early stages of the war and forced migrants arrival to and through Poland, much of the assistance was organized from the bottom up by the individuals, NGOs, and local authorities. While state authorities gradually adapted to the situation, their responses were somewhat reactive. Both central and local government bodies treated all Ukrainian refugees universally, failing until recently to address the specific challenges faced by Roma refugees, either overlooking or choosing not to acknowledge these issues.

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<sup>22</sup><https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32001L0055>

<sup>23</sup><https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022D0382>

<sup>24</sup><https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/09/28/ukrainian-refugees-eu-member-states-agree-to-extend-temporary-protection/>

In Poland, on the basis of the "special law" (Law of March 12, 2022 on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict in Ukraine)<sup>25</sup>, the temporary protection and by this also a legal stay of Ukrainian citizens (and some of their family members) who have arrived in Poland since February 24, 2022 in connection with the hostilities on Ukrainian territory has been extended until March 4, 2024, and in some cases until August 31, 2024 or September 30, 2024. Under this law, the Polish government has introduced a number of measures to support forced migrants from Ukraine, including, by definition, those who identify as Roma: obtaining a PESEL (Universal Electronic System for Registration of the Population) that confirms the temporary protection status of a person and allows to become a recipients of financial assistance and health care support, access to labour market and/or inclusion in the education system. Essentially Ukrainian forced migrants as Temporary Protection Status beneficiaries under Polish law enjoyed full social rights expressed in access to the Polish welfare system<sup>26</sup>. Information campaigns on available support are available in Polish, Ukrainian and Russian language<sup>27</sup>. The perspective of nearly two years of assisting and supporting Ukrainian Roma in their life in Poland allow us to say that support framework built by government authorities in Poland do not sufficiently support the needs of most vulnerable populations among forced migrants from Ukraine, and Ukrainian Roma are among them. It is disturbing to observe the serious challenges facing Ukrainian Roma fleeing the war and the systemic discrimination they face<sup>28</sup>, not only in Ukraine, but also in neighbouring countries such as Poland. The discrepancy between officials' claims of equal rights and the harsh reality

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<sup>25</sup><https://www.gov.pl/web/udsc-en/the-law-on-assistance-to-ukrainian-citizens-in-connection-with-the-armed-conflict-on-the-territory-of-the-country-has-entered-into-force>

<sup>26</sup> Łukasiewicz K., Pachocka M., Yeliseyev A. (2023). Poland country report. Government responses to increased influx of protection seekers in 2015/16 and 2022/23. NIBR Working Paper 2023:110, Centre of Migration Research UW, Published by: Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research, OSLO Metropolitan University

<sup>27</sup> Online information and campaigns for Ukrainians on government websites:

<https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/informacja-dla-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy>; <https://pomagamukrainie.gov.pl/>

<sup>28</sup> Mirga-Wójtowicz E., Talewicz J., Kołaczek M. (2022). Human rights, needs and discrimination - the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Poland. Report on research and intervention activities. Central Council of German Sinti and Roma in cooperation with the Jaw Dikh Foundation and the Foundation Towards Dialogue.

<https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/en/publication-about-the-situation-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine-in-poland/>;

Mirga-Wójtowicz E., Fiałkowska K., 'Be careful out there, in that Gypsy district' - antigypsyism in a war situation, May 2022: <https://pl.boell.org/en/2022/05/16/uwazajcie-tam-w-tej-cyganskiej-dzielnicy-antygyganizm-w-warunkach-wojny>;

Durjasz A., Jarosz S., Kołaczek M., Piórkowska P., Talewicz J, Vaidalovych O. "They are not refugees; they are travellers". Situation of Roma Refugees from Ukraine in Podkarpackie Voivodeship". Monitoring report 2022-2023, Foundation Toward Dialogue, 2023;

<https://eriac.org/roma-for-roma-documenting-the-oral-history-of-roma-refugees-from-ukraine/>;

Further into the Margins: A regional report on Roma communities displaced by the Ukraine crisis: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/further-into-the-margins-a-regional-report-on-roma-communities-displaced-by-the-621547/>;

<https://ccl.org.ua/en/news/ukrainian-roma-refugees-and-discrimination-a-call-for-action-on-international-roma-day/>; <https://minorityrights.org/programmes/library/trends/trends2022/ukraine/>;

experienced by Roma communities underscores the urgent need to address deep-seated prejudices and provide adequate support.

The Ukrainian Roma we have met are very often unable to read or write. Oftentimes they are unable to fill out administrative applications for refugee registration independently and correctly. They are doomed to the will of officials who, as Roma often report, are unwilling to help them and show reluctance. In this situation, Roma activists and volunteers must get involved in helping them, often becoming their advocates. There were numerous accounts of antigypsyism reported by the NGOs and individuals, both in the response of the civil society as well as the built support system, which urgently needs to be tackled. The remainder of this report gathers the experiences of various group of individuals, Roma and non-Roma with experience of supporting Ukrainian Roma forced migrants, with the aim to highlight the obstacles, challenges as well as impact this work has had on their personal and professional trajectories.

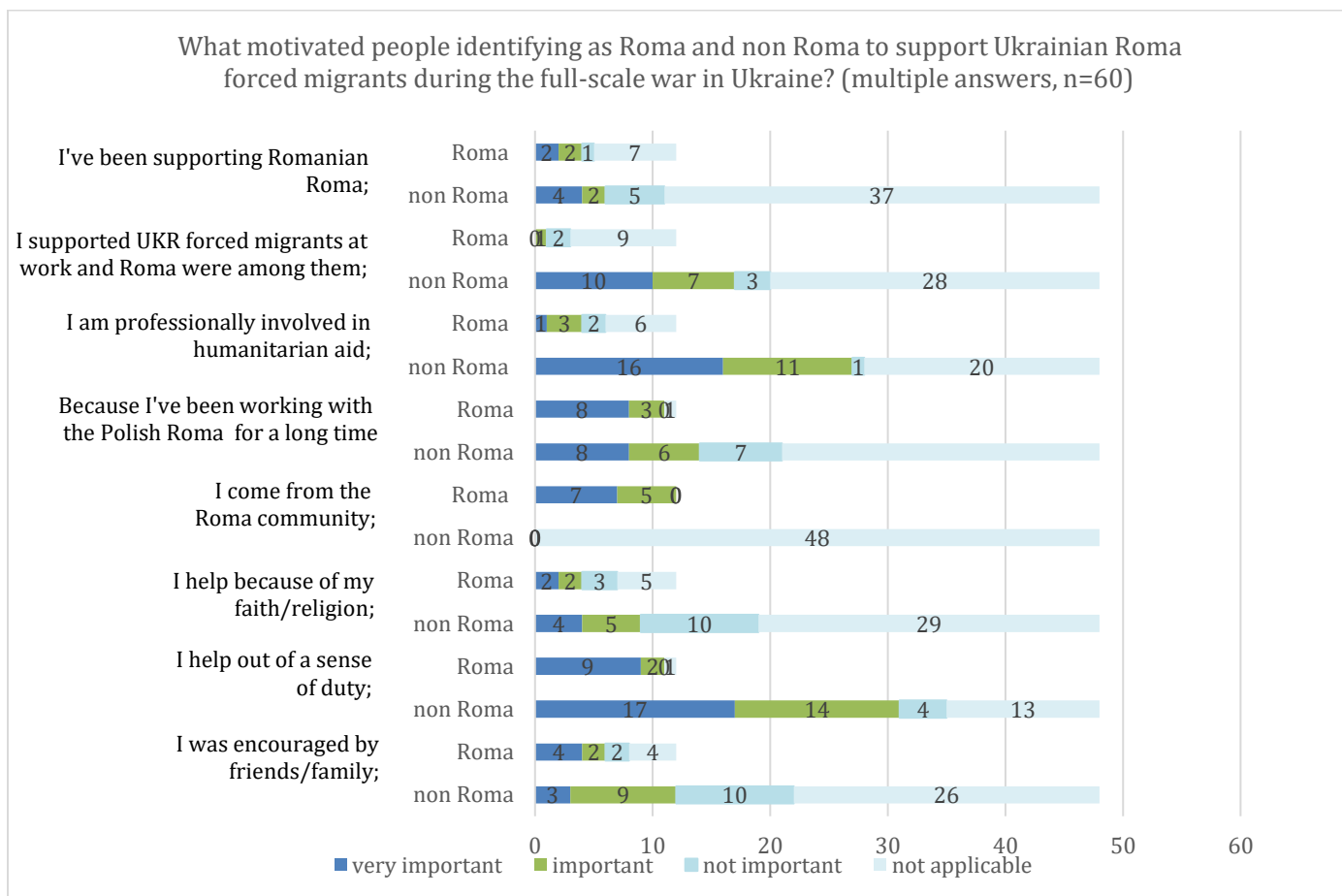
## **Experiences of supporting Ukrainian Roma forced migrants - results of the survey and in-depth interviews.**

### **Motivation to help and ways to get involved in supporting Ukrainian Roma**

The question about motivations to support Ukrainian Roma was a multiple answers question and responses of Roma and non-Roma respondents are signifying importance of either origin from the Roma community or cooperation with other Roma (as for non-Roma respondents).

All respondents who identified as Roma (12 respondents) indicated that a sense of shared Roma ethnic/group identity was a very important or important motivating factor for helping Ukrainian Roma. It should also be noted that 11 respondents who identified as Roma considered their previous experience of working with Polish Roma to be very important and important. This group included people such as Roma educational assistants, leaders of Roma NGOs or activists who have been working for many years to preserve Roma culture and tradition. They are the ones who, from the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine, organised themselves together with others, using existing networks in the Roma and non-Roma community, using social media to create, for example, Facebook groups, initiating and moderating communication and discussion on the most urgent actions and needs of forced migrants arriving in Poland.

Figure 4. Motivation to support Ukrainian Roma by Roma and non Roma respondents (multiple answers, n=60)



Among this group of respondents, the least significant impact on taking action in favour of Roma from Ukraine fleeing the war was either work placement or work in a humanitarian aid institution, which may indicate the low participation of Roma in humanitarian organisations, local government units and other institutions whose activities are focused on assisting refugees, migrants (and is consistent with our current knowledge on this issue). Roma do not usually work in local government units or other institutions, but they are recognised by these and other institutions and organisations dealing with minority policy and human rights at various levels of the state. Roma organisations, leaders and activists participate in the implementation of the Government's "Programme for the Social and Civic Integration of Roma in Poland for 2021-2030"<sup>29</sup>, where for many years already they realise various integration programmes for Polish Roma in the field of education, housing, health and work.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.pl/web/mniejszosci-narodowe-i-etniczne/programme-of-roma-integration-2021-2030>

For 31 respondents who identified themselves as non-Roma, a sense of duty was identified as a very important and important factor influencing them to take action to help Ukrainian Roma. In addition, working for humanitarian aid organisations was identified as very important by 16 and important by 11 respondents, and a referral to a service for working with Ukrainian forced migrants was identified as very important and important by 10 and seven respondents respectively. Among this group of respondents, eight of them said that previous experience of working with Polish Roma was very important and six said it was important, while four respondents also said that previous experience of helping Romanian Roma living in Poland was very important.

In addition, nine respondents who identify as non-Roma and four with a Roma identity considered religious values to be very important and important as a reason and motivation for action. 31 respondents considered helping as a civic duty and 12 were encouraged by family or friends.

Representatives of both groups were able to add their motivations to the catalogue of responses. Some of the additional responses duplicated responses that respondents could have chosen (such as affirming the importance of Roma identity or a sense of responsibility and duty to help). Other responses included a desire to help other non-white refugees from Ukraine, and the observation that while the majority of refugees from Ukraine are cared for, incoming Roma are often outside the mainstream of observed aid efforts, or there is no specific idea of how to help this group. There was also a fear that no one would help Ukrainian Roma. Other interviewees also identified observations of overt discrimination as an important additional factor motivating them to get involved. Observation of the injustice they had experienced and awareness that this was a group particularly vulnerable to social exclusion were other motivations cited by respondents.

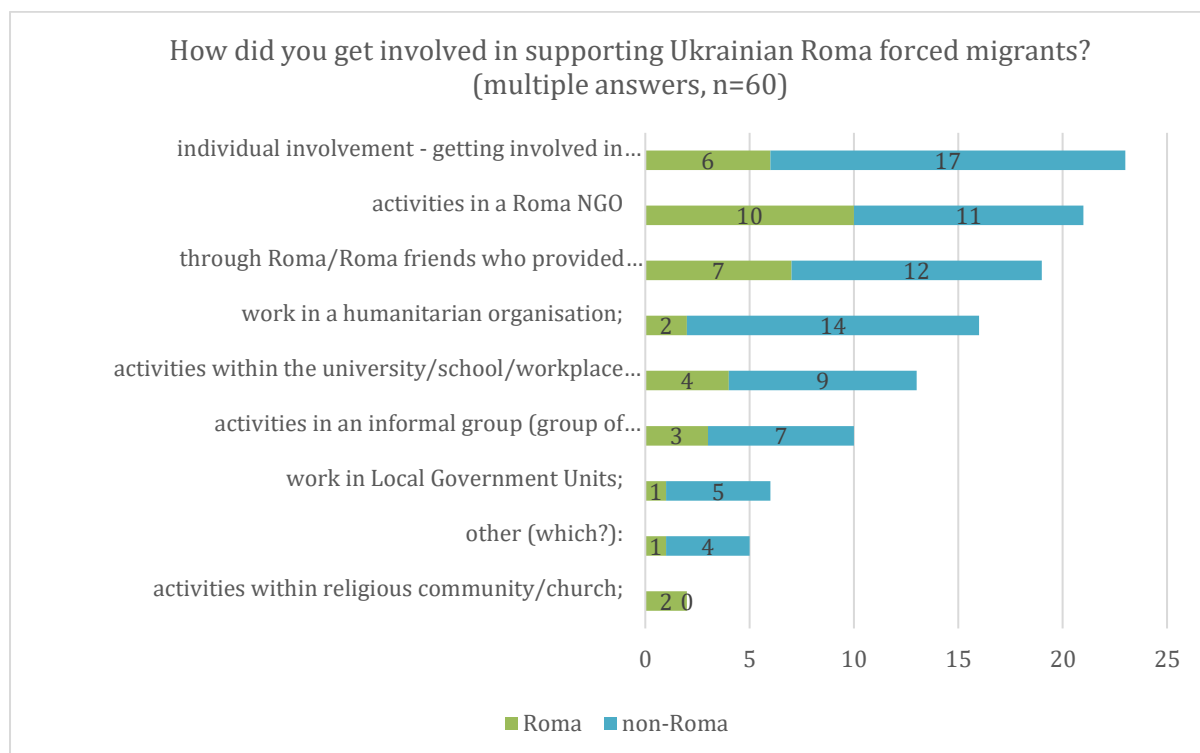
In addition, there were responses referring to general feelings of solidarity with their nation - which can be understood in two ways - with the Ukrainian nation or with Roma (we cannot determine the exact meaning of this response at this stage), a sense of decency and the importance of humanitarian values.

Knowing that the majority of respondents who identified as Roma mentioned the importance of cooperation with Polish Roma (eight responses - very important and three - important), it is not surprising that in the next question (multiple answers) about ways of getting involved in supporting Ukrainian Roma, 10 respondents mentioned activities within a Roma NGO. Seven respondents of Roma origin also mentioned the role of Roma friends who had encouraged them to get involved in supporting Ukrainian Roma (12 non-Roma gave this answer), and six respondents also took action on their own by getting involved in organising grassroots initiatives, e.g. taking food to the railway station, collecting clothes, cleaning products, lending a car (17 non-Roma have had this form of involvement). The largest number of respondents who did not identify themselves as Roma



cited their work in non-Roma NGOs as the place where they began to act on behalf of Ukrainian Roma (25 non-Roma, with five Roma).

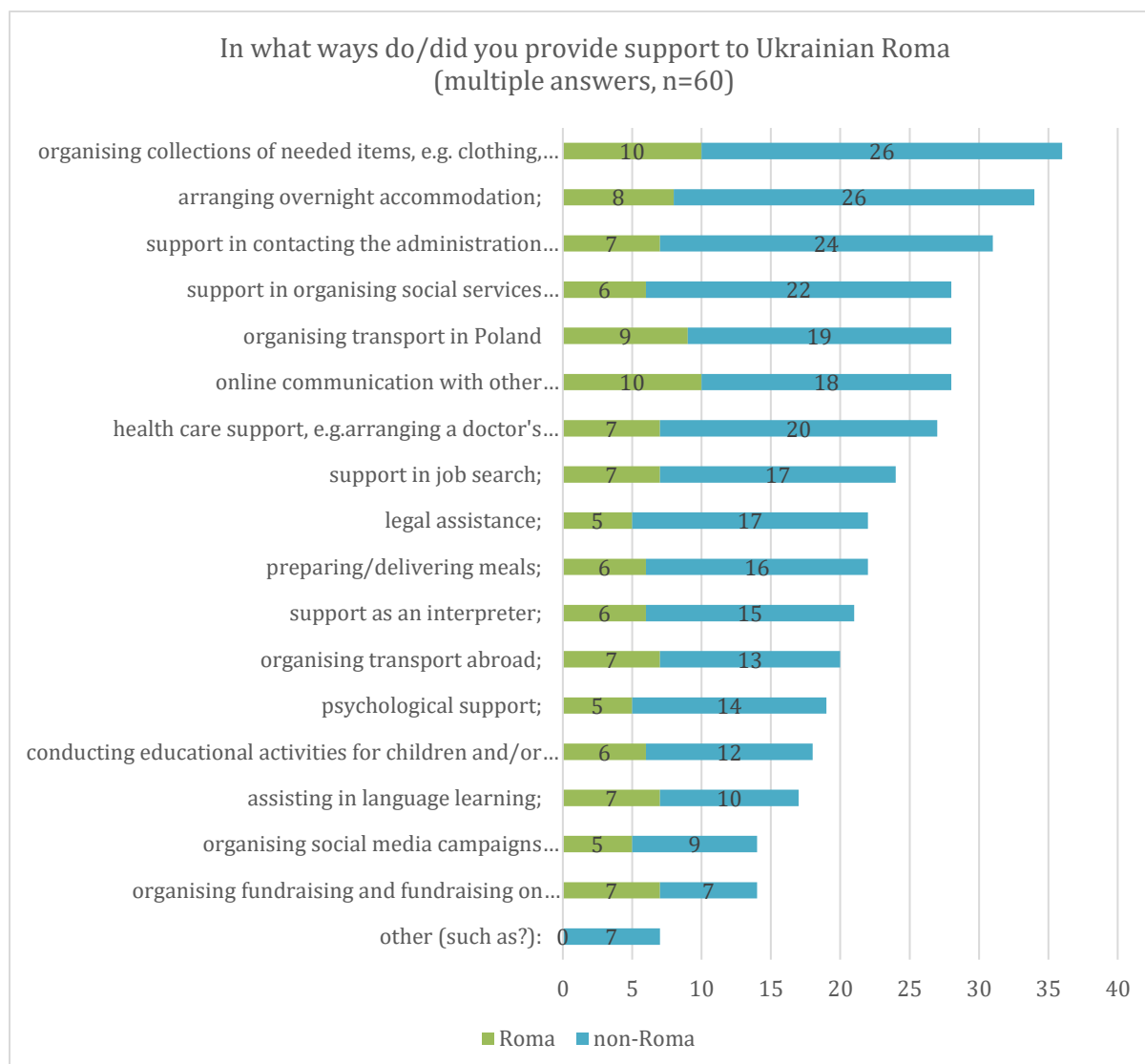
Figure 5. Ways to get involved in supporting Ukrainian Roma



**Forms of assistance – types of assistance, intensity, frequency**

When asked about forms of assistance, i.e. what forms and types of activities were undertaken to support Ukrainian Roma, our respondents indicate a wide range of activities (multiple answers). It should be noted that these individuals were involved in several or more activities.

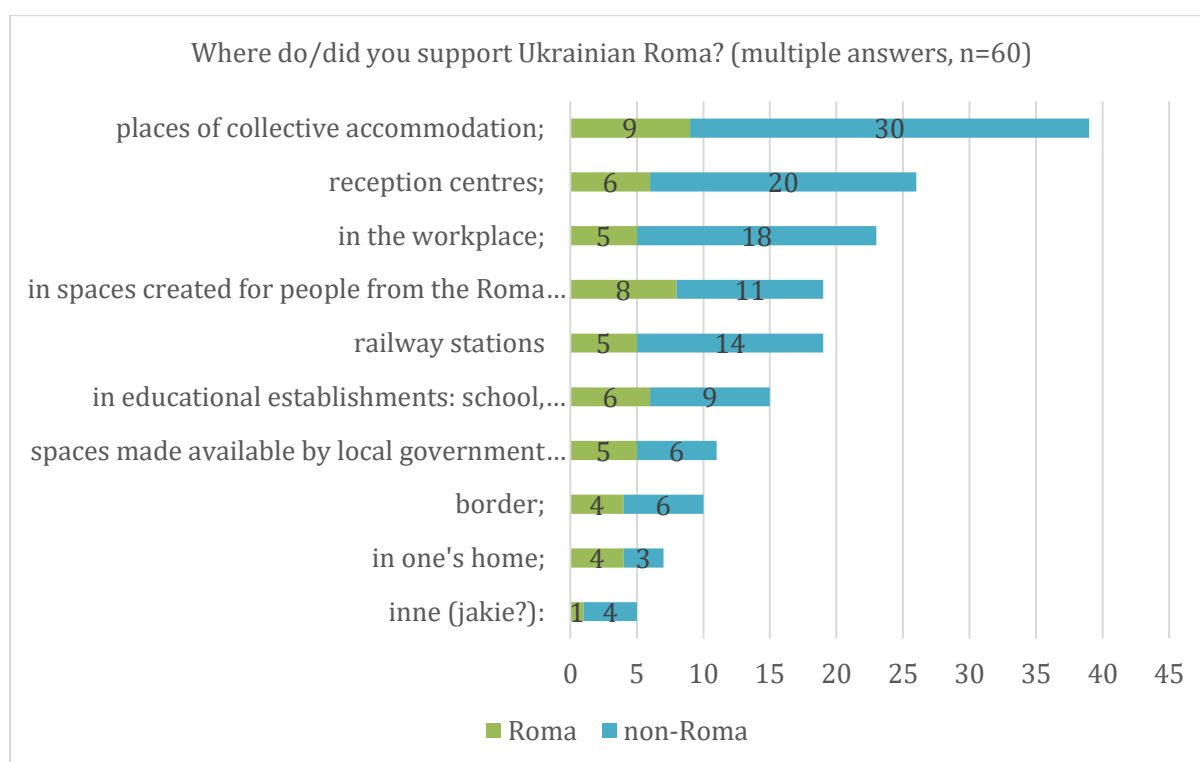
Figure 6. How Ukrainian Roma were supported



The most common activities were organising collections in kind of clothes, cosmetics and hygiene products (36 respondents), organising and intervening in the search for accommodation for Roma families (34 respondents), many were involved in administrative support in the form of help in filling in necessary documents (31 respondents), including consultation with social welfare centres (28 respondents) or contacting a lawyer (22 respondents). 23 respondents were helped to find a job, 27 respondents were helped to find medical care, and 19 respondents provided the necessary psychological support that is so important for people traumatised by war. Significant assistance was also reported in the area of helping Roma families with relocation and transport in Poland (28 respondents), but also in the war zone (7 respondents). Also important were initiatives in the area of

education for children, young people and adults (18 respondents) and campaigning on social media (14 respondents) or fundraising for Ukrainian Roma (14 respondents). In order to find out where support was provided, we offered some suggestions based on where, to our knowledge, support was provided to forced migrants from Ukraine (see Figure 7, multiple answers). Significantly - in the case of Ukrainian Roma, support was most often provided in collective accommodation centres <sup>30</sup> (39 respondents) and in reception centres <sup>31</sup> for forced migrants from Ukraine (26 respondents), followed by train stations and places organised by Roma NGOs (19 respondents each respectively), with the fewest respondents indicating their own home and activities at the border.

Figure 7. Where was the support provided



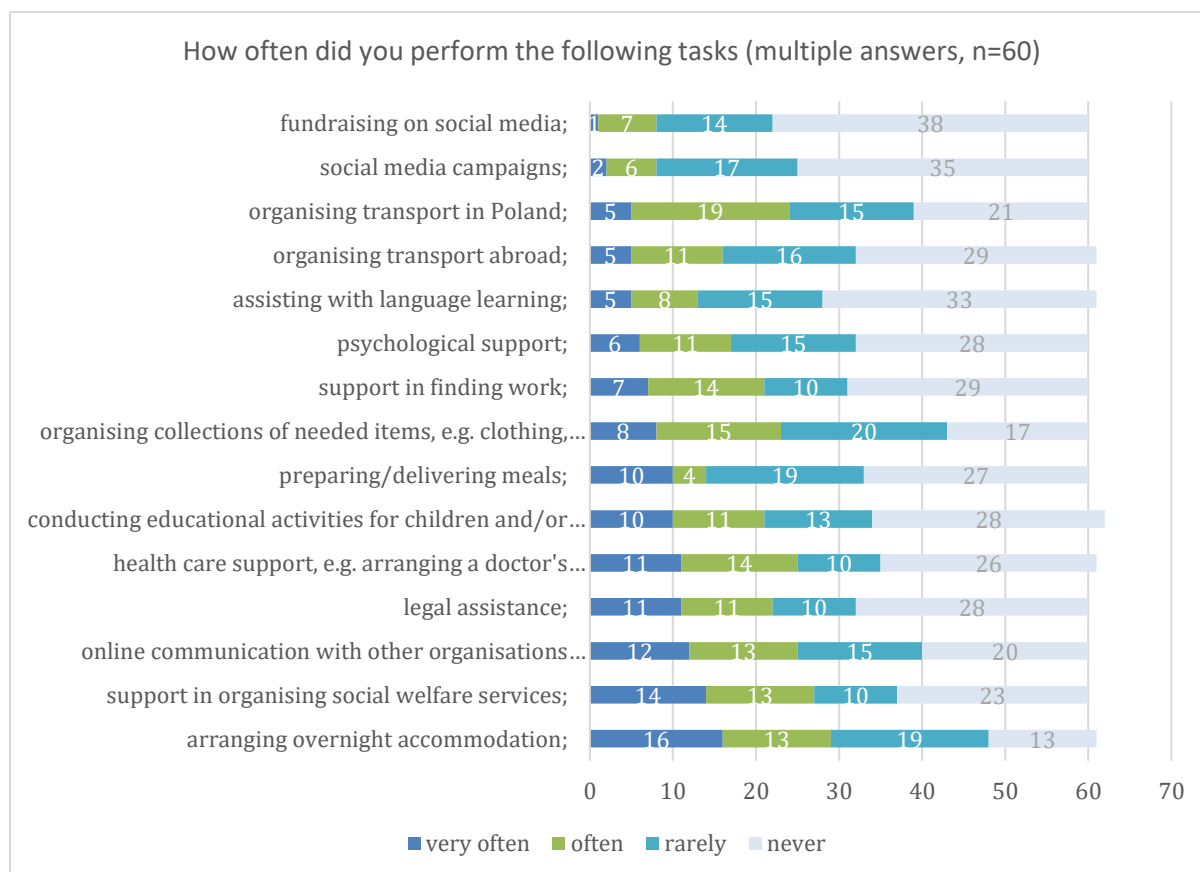
The other responses were either related to forms of support (collecting donations and handing them over to the Roma, creating online communication and organising transport issues, for example) or duplicated answers found in the possible answers to choose from (e.g. space created by NGOs).

<sup>30</sup> Collective accommodation centres - open space where refugees find accommodation for medium-term (up to 3 months) in existing buildings (which are unlikely to have been built as housing), for example in schools, factories, barracks, community centres, gymnasiums (GUS, Ustawa z dnia 2 grudnia 1999 r. o narodowym spisie powszechnym ludności i mieszkań w 2002 r. Dz. U. z 2000 r. poz. 1)

<sup>31</sup> The reception centres/centres receive asylum seekers and recognised refugees, individuals as well as families for temporary stay. Once the asylum application has been completed, asylum seekers are entitled to remain in the centre until the application has been processed (UNHCR, 2016)

We also wanted to find out which specific activities were most frequently performed by our respondents (Figure 8) and which activities respondents undertook in the three time periods highlighted (Figure 9): 24 February to August 2022, September 2022 to February 2023 and March 2023 to the end of the survey (November 2023).

Figure 8. Performance of the support activities - frequency



Although the overall situation of Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland has stabilized or improved (despite the persistent issues related to housing, children's education, access to healthcare, and other matters associated with functioning in the labour market), it means that they do not require additional, more engaging support from Polish authorities and institutions.<sup>32</sup> We cannot confirm this in the case of the Roma. From the survey, as well as in depth interviews with selected respondents, it is clear that the majority of support provided by our respondents still focuses on assistance in finding and ensuring stable accommodation and sustenance. From our daily work and observations, it is evident that Roma are mostly residents of collective accommodation centres and require constant assistance. This work is of recurrent nature, and resembles of the support provided to the

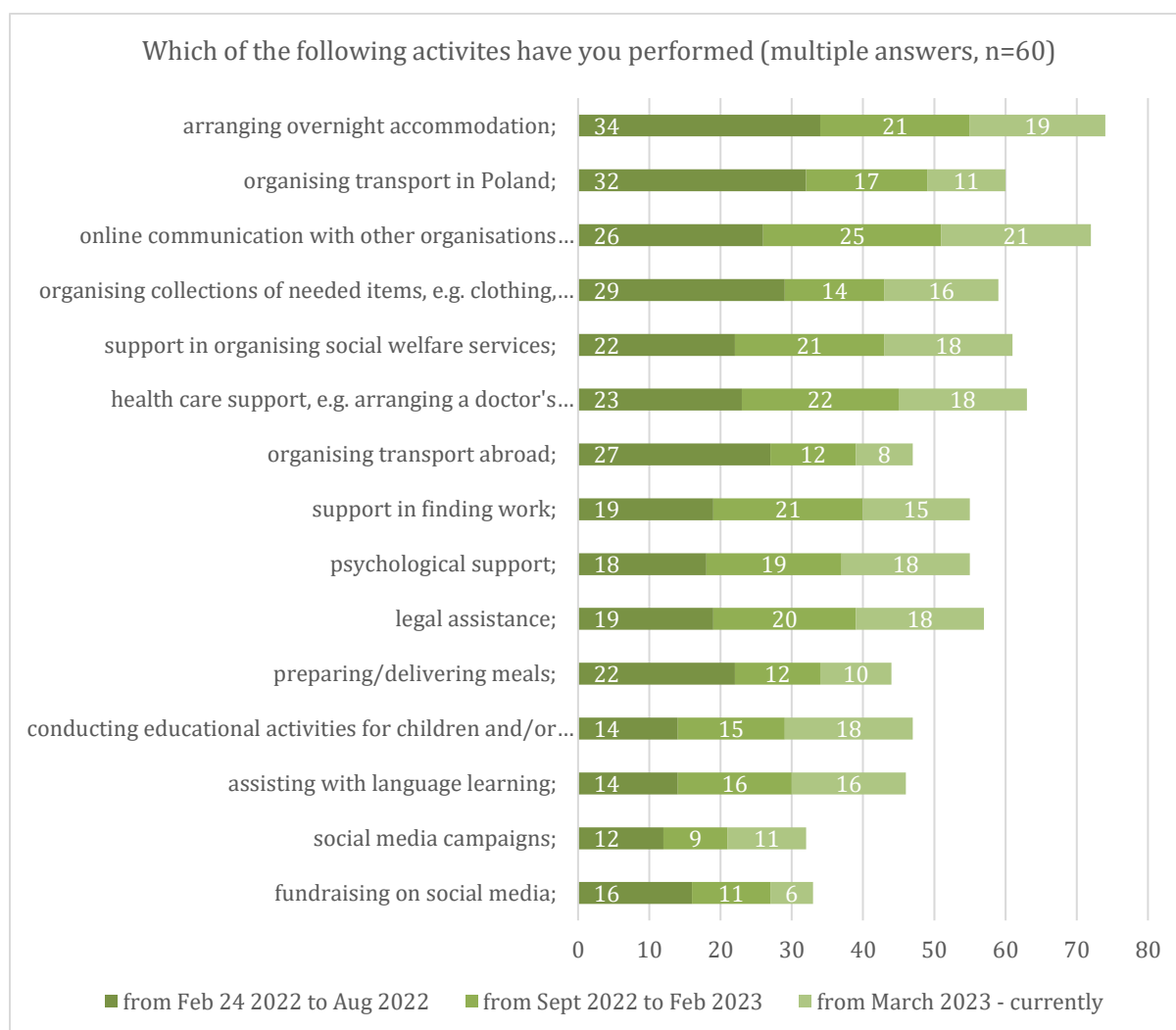
<sup>32</sup> Jaroszewicz M., Szeptycki A. (2023): I Polska, i Ukraina potrzebują uchodźców, Rzeczpospolita: <https://www.rp.pl/opinie-polityczno-spoleczne/art39440271-marta-jaroszewicz-andrzej-szeptycki-i-polska-i-ukraina-potrzebuja-uchodzcow>

forced migrants at the beginning of the full-scale war. A common issue that remains is the lack of identity documents (information from Roma refugees indicates that documents have been lost or destroyed during the journey), necessitating legal support. Roma also require language support, as well as educational activities for children. In other words, the type of support provided to Ukrainian Roma from March to November 2023 by our respondents did not differ much from what these individuals were involved in while supporting Ukrainian Roma in the early months of the full-scale war (Figure 9).

A fuller picture of the situation can be presented by Roma NGOs and Roma or non-Roma individuals collaborating with them and who work with Ukrainian Roma on a daily basis. In in-depth interviews, they also point to the significance of antigypsyism, Romaphobia, and the intolerance of Polish and Ukrainian societies, as well as the acquired traumas and mistrust of Roma from Ukraine towards the majority society. These factors, influencing each other and reinforcing a sense of exclusion and marginalization, make the integration process in Poland longer and require continuous assistance from Roma assistants and volunteers.

Our interviewees also indicate that comprehensive support for Roma generally requires more time, resources, and often different tools, precisely due to repeated and systemic exclusions, discrimination and neglect in many areas, while still in Ukraine (e.g. regarding documents, education, health, economic exclusion). It should be emphasized that among the Romani refugees from Ukraine, there are also individuals who actively engaged in activities supporting the integration process of other Ukrainian Roma. These are individuals whose skills were utilized by involving them in work for the benefit of forcibly displaced Roma, and some had previously received appropriate support and training to enhance their professional qualifications. We have documented such cases during our contacts and collaboration with various non-Roma entities active in humanitarian assistance, including IOM, UNHCR, Salam Lab, as well as Romani organizations such as the Central Council of Roma in Poland or the Foundation Towards Dialogue. Through research and in-depth interviews, we also know that in collective accommodation facilities in various regions of Poland, Ukrainian Roma are employed, significantly aiding the integration process of Ukrainian refugees in Poland.

Figure 9. What activities were carried out in the respective periods

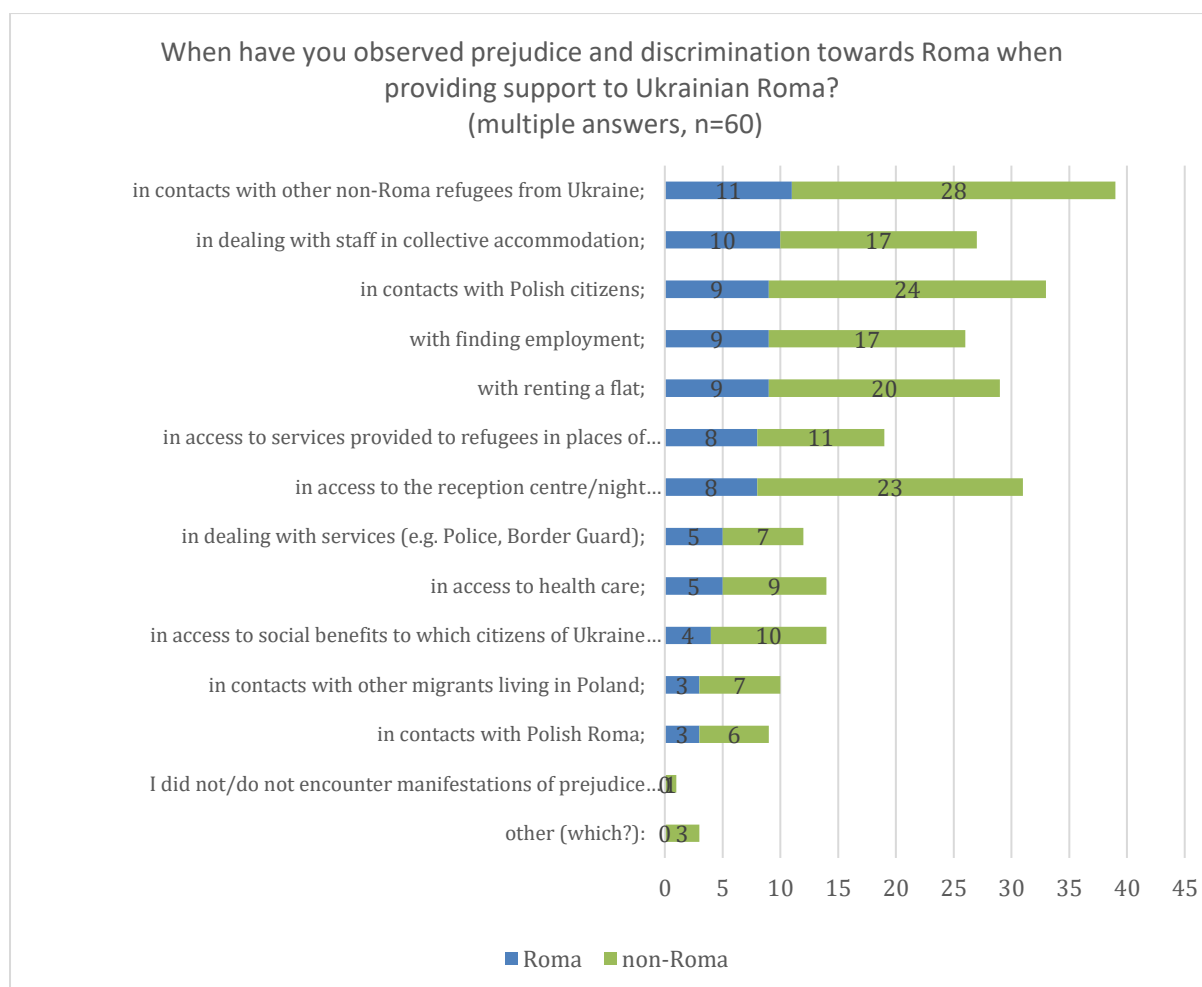


### Forms of prejudice and discrimination observed when supporting Ukrainian Roma

The majority of respondents, both among those identifying as Roma and non-Roma, encountered prejudice and discrimination against Roma during interactions with Polish citizens (33 respondents) and other non-Roma refugees from Ukraine (39 respondents). Subsequently, discriminatory behaviours and prejudices were noted in access to reception centres and other collective accommodation facilities – 31 respondents. 19 individuals indicated difficulties in accessing services provided to refugees in collective accommodation places, such as food distribution, clothing, and hygiene items. Survey participants (29 respondents) pointed out discrimination against Romani refugees in the housing market, indicating prevalent challenges in renting apartments in the open market. 26 respondents highlighted discrimination in the job market and difficulties in finding employment, while 14 individuals faced challenges in ensuring equal access to social

support provided under the special law, or to secure employment for Roma temporary protection holders in Poland. Several individuals (9, including 3 identifying as Roma) also mentioned encountering prejudice and intolerance from other Polish Roma towards Ukrainian Roma.

Figure 10. Prejudice and discrimination encountered by respondents when providing support to Ukrainian Roma



In the "other" responses, a direct case of discriminatory treatment was indicated at the Warsaw Central Station (regarding the administration of assistance at the station). Other respondent wrote about discrimination against Roma children and youth in the Polish education system, particularly at the primary level, including issues related to school access. Based on our experiences, we interpret this as a problem with enrolling Roma children in school.

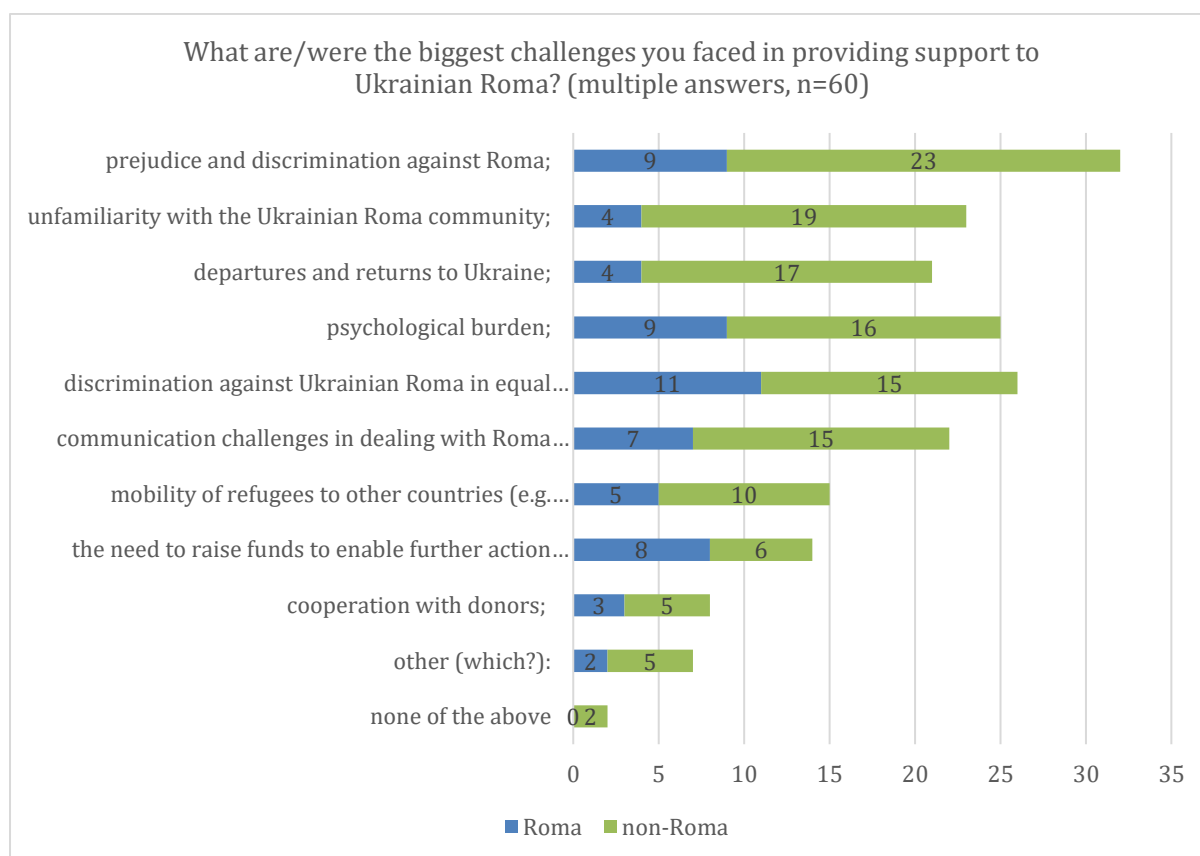
In response to the question about the greatest challenges faced by individuals supporting Ukrainian Roma in their efforts (Figure 11), both those identifying as Roma and non-Roma indicated that the biggest challenge was prejudice and discrimination against Roma (answers: 23 non-Roma and 9 Roma). Discrimination against Ukrainian Roma in equal access to support services was mentioned by 15 non-Roma and 11 Roma, respectively. Survey participants also pointed out that the work they were engaged in was associated with a high psychological burden (16 non-Roma and 9 Roma). A significant factor hindering the provision of assistance and support to Ukrainian Roma was the lack of knowledge about Roma culture and the specificity of the Ukrainian Roma community, as indicated by 19 non-Roma and 4 Roma. Proper language communication with Ukrainian Roma was also a serious problem (15 non-Roma and 7 Roma).

These responses highlight another characteristic that may be entirely unfamiliar to those who have not worked with Roma before (as it is not exclusively related to Ukrainian Roma) or with Ukrainian Roma specifically. Namely, Roma from Ukraine form an incredibly diverse community, consisting of culturally related groups with a common ethnic origin but differing in Romani language dialects. Not all Roma from Ukraine are fluent in Ukrainian or Russian, however, there are also those who communicate only in Ukrainian and/or Russian or Hungarian language. Inter-group relationships in such diverse communities, additionally originating from geographically distinct areas of Ukraine, are complex and unclear to those unfamiliar with the context. Hence, better understanding and collaboration with Ukrainian Roma are essential for developing inclusive strategies for action and support for these groups.

Out of 21 respondents, departures to and from Ukraine were identified as a challenge, while 15 individuals mentioned departures from Poland to the Western EU countries. With 14 respondents highlighting the challenge of securing financial resources for ongoing initiatives supporting Ukrainian Roma, this aspect is significant. Supporting individuals from this particularly vulnerable group, as noted above, requires more time and resources, including financial support. In the absence of such resources, along with the lack of systemic policies to combat antigypsyism (e.g., in the real estate rental market or the job market) and modest social support available to forced migrants from Ukraine under special law, Ukrainian Roma will seek places to live where they can secure basic needs. Facing challenges in this realm, some of them may choose to return to Ukraine.



Figure 11. Biggest challenges in providing support to Ukrainian Roma

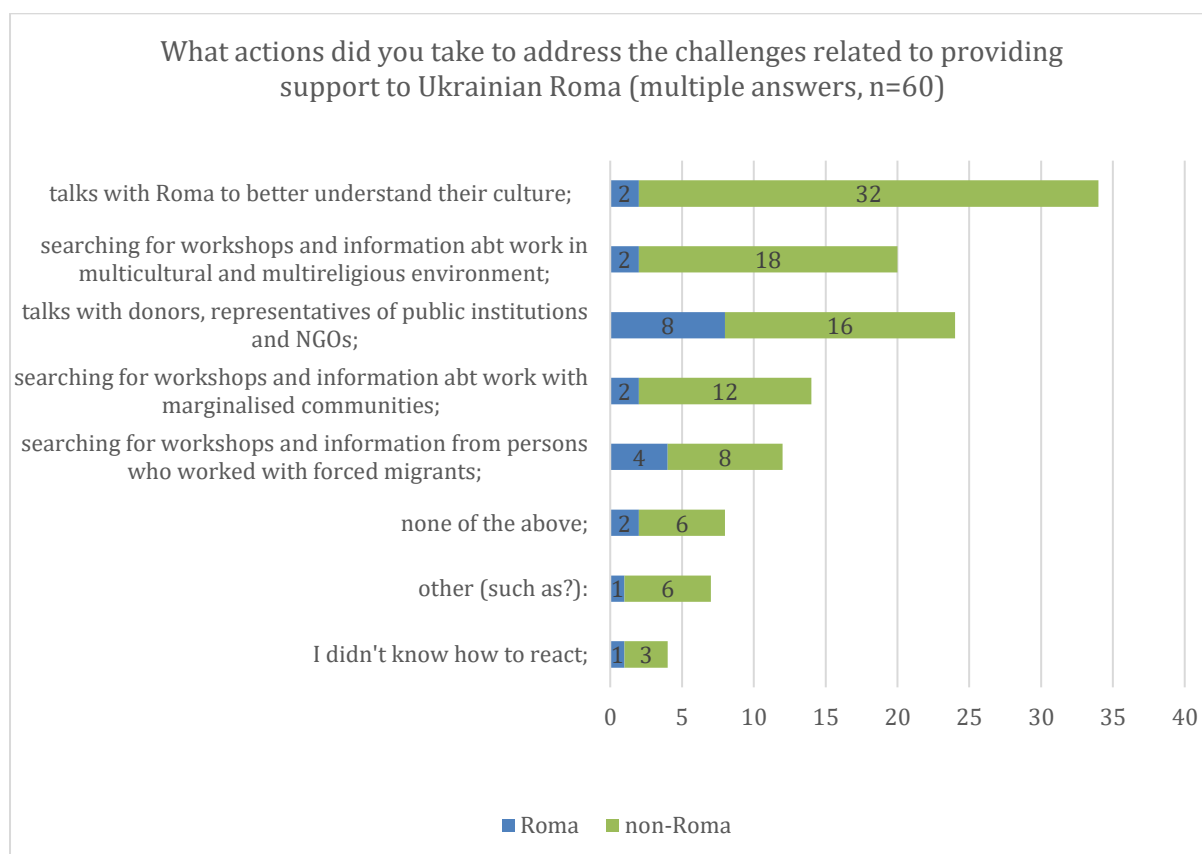


Importantly, both in the survey and in the conducted interviews, respondents supporting Ukrainian Roma noted frequent cases of Ukrainian Roma concealing their Romani identity. In the context of war and displacement, such a strategy is not surprising; for Roma who are commonly stigmatized, it becomes a survival strategy to escape discrimination. In some cases our respondents also observed, to their surprise, the mistrust of Ukrainian Roma towards Polish Roma. Therefore, as mentioned above, working with the Ukrainian Roma community requires more time and a special approach that takes into account not only the diversity of these communities but also the experiences of Roma life in Ukraine and the dynamics of relationships between the state and Roma, as well as the majority society and Roma.

Individuals supporting Ukrainian Roma attempted to cope with and overcome barriers that hindered them from providing support at a high level (Figure 12). Survey participants pointed to independently taken actions to enhance their knowledge about Roma and their skills in working with different social groups (multiple answers question). Specifically, 34 respondents engaged in conversations with Roma, recognizing that Roma themselves are the best teachers in understanding Romani culture and specificity. Additionally, 24 respondents established contact with representatives of non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and various donors. Twenty respondents sought training and information on working in a multicultural, multiethnic, and multireligious environment.

Respondents tried to understand the reluctance towards Ukrainian Roma by talking to individuals who displayed prejudice against the Roma communities. Others coped by collaborating with organizations experienced in working with Roma and working with the assistance of individuals from the Roma community. Among the respondents, there was a voice expressing the need for psychological and therapeutic support, as well as supervision, indicating that the survey participants are aware of the challenging conditions in which they work and the consequences it has for their mental well-being.

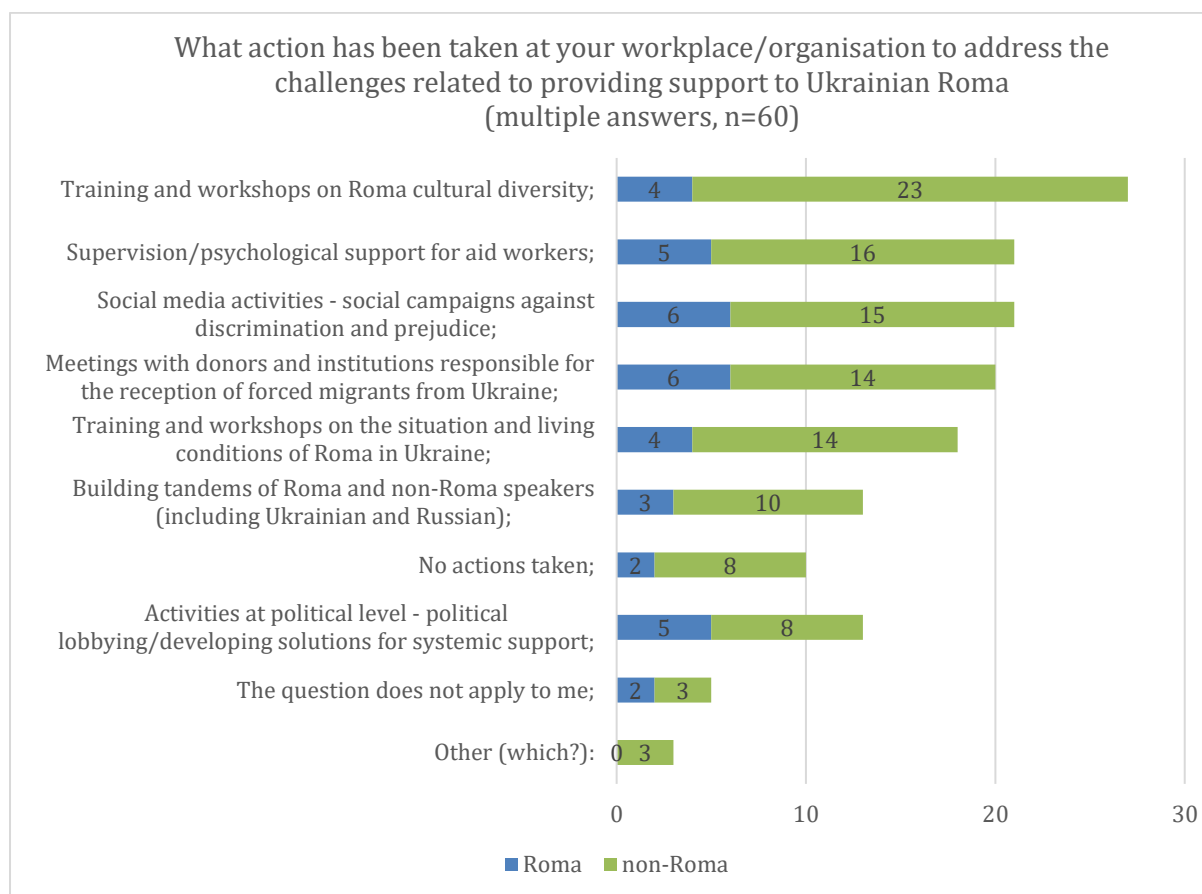
*Figure 12. Actions taken by respondents to address the challenges related to providing support to Ukrainian Roma*



These actions were reinforced by efforts undertaken within the organizations with which our respondents collaborate regularly or episodically (Figure 13). Survey participants indicated what actions had been taken in their workplaces or in organizations they cooperate with (e.g., through volunteering) to address the challenges associated with providing support to Ukrainian Roma, such as various forms of competence development, skills enhancement, knowledge improvement, and psychological support for those assisting Ukrainian Roma (multiple answers). 27 respondents mentioned that their employers/organizations organized training and workshops to familiarize them with the cultural diversity of Roma. 18 respondents participated in training and workshops

regarding the situation and living conditions of Roma in Ukraine. 20 individuals attended meetings with donors and institutions responsible for receiving forced migrants from Ukraine in Poland. 21 respondents supporting Ukrainian Roma received psychological support in the form of supervision. 13 respondents highlighted good practices in building participatory Romani and non-Romani teams, emphasizing the use of Romani, Ukrainian, and Russian languages. Another 13 respondents pointed out the need for advocacy actions at the political level, with some suggesting lobbying and creating recommendations to develop systemic solutions for supporting Ukrainian Roma refugees. 21 respondents mentioned that their workplaces actively engaged in social media actions countering discrimination and prejudices based on ethnic and national origin. However, 10 respondents responded that no actions were taken in their workplaces.

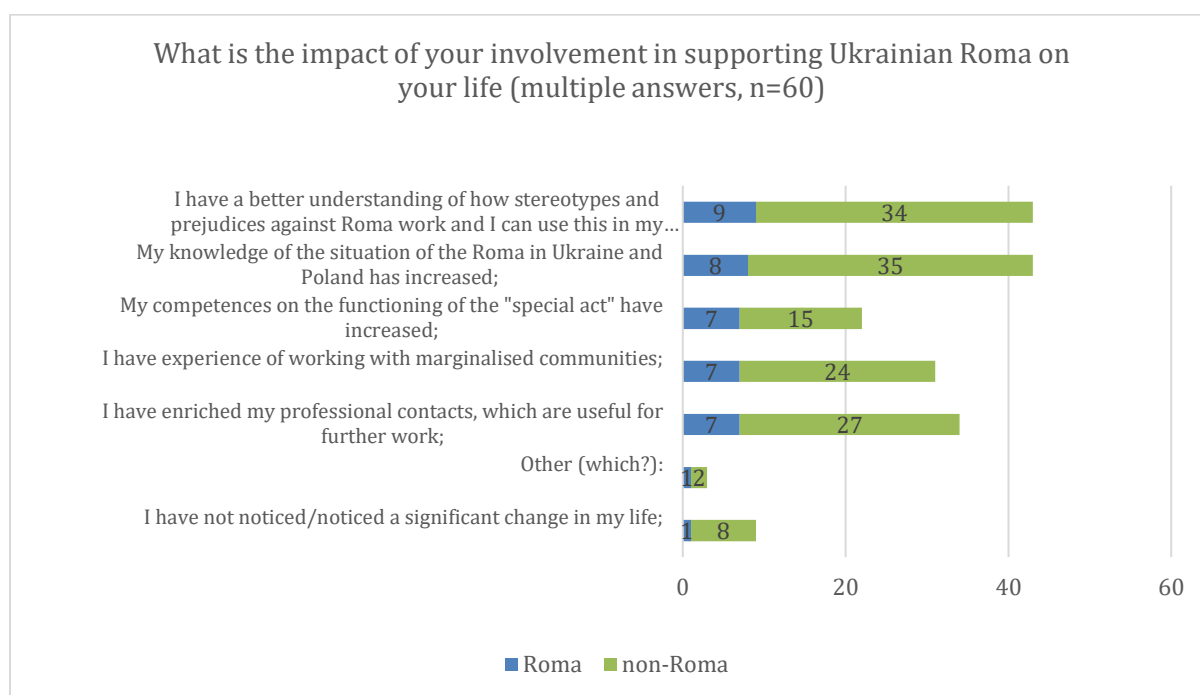
*Figure 13. Actions taken to address the challenges related to providing support Ukrainian Roma at respondents' workplaces/organisations they cooperated with*



Acquired specialized knowledge, practice, and experience have a tremendous impact on the development of competence in working in Romani environments and the professionalization of those supporting Ukrainian Roma. For many, it is a path of personal and professional growth. 43 respondents, including nine identifying as Roma,

acknowledged that they now better understand how stereotypes and prejudices operate against Roma and can use this understanding in their ongoing work. Similarly, the same number of respondents indicated that their knowledge about the situation of Roma in Ukraine and Poland has also increased. 34 respondents established new contacts, thus enriching their social capital, which they utilize in their work. 31 respondents gained experience in working with an excluded and marginalized group. 22 respondents pointed to an increase in knowledge and competence in understanding the provisions and implementation of the Law on Aid to Citizens of Ukraine. Nine respondents (including one identifying as Roma) stated that supporting Ukrainian Roma had no fundamental impact on their lives. Among the respondents, there were also voices (in the "other" responses) indicating that supporting Ukrainian Roma had a negative impact on their well-being and mental health, leading to changes in their professional and personal lives. One respondent wrote: "It broke my heart; I stopped working."

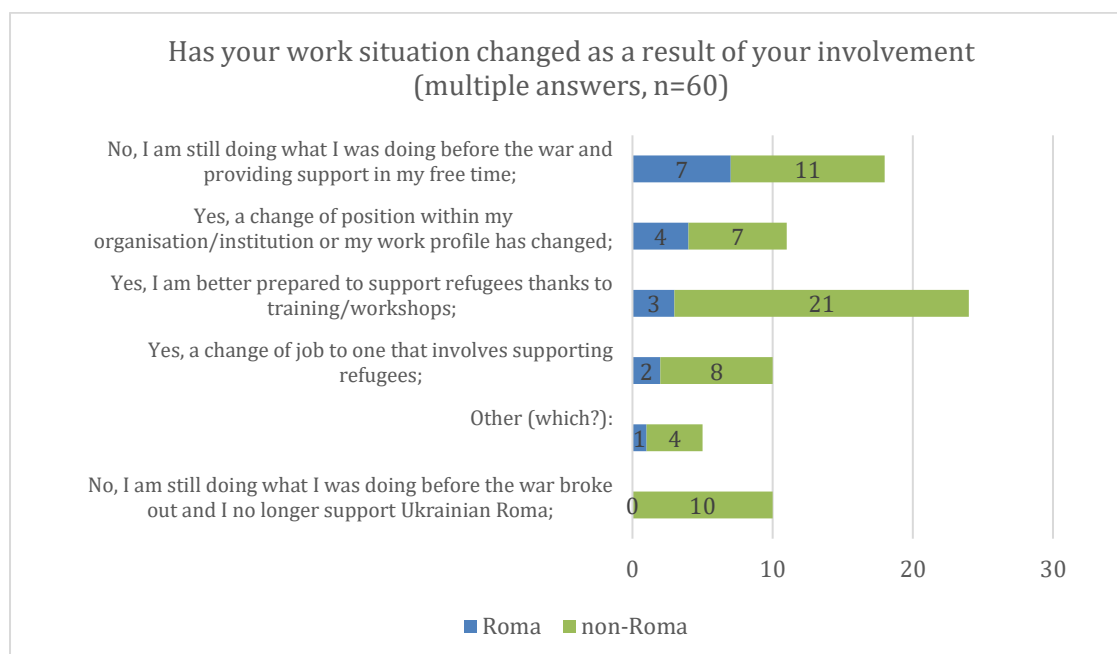
Figure 14. *Involvement's impact on respondents lives*



An important aspect of providing support is doing so in a professional manner. As mentioned earlier, some respondents have already had diverse experience working with refugees or individuals from particularly vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, humanitarian aid and support for Ukrainian Roma posed numerous challenges, and consequently, opportunities of enhancing qualifications, knowledge, and skills. Consequently, this has a meaningful impact on their professional development and, importantly, ensures that the support they provide is increasingly professional.

Respondents noted that their professional situations changed as a result of their involvement in work for refugees of Romani origin from Ukraine. Twenty-four of them emphasized that, thanks to training and workshops, they are better prepared to support refugees, enhancing both their professional and social skills. Such actions make them more specialized and competitive in the job market. Eleven respondents changed their positions within their organization or institution or shifted their job profile. Ten respondents indicated that their support for Ukrainian Roma led to a direct change in their work to one that is closely linked to the experience of assisting refugees from Ukraine. Survey participants highlighted that maintaining positive connections with organizations and activists working for Roma in Poland is an essential element of their personal and professional development. Respondents identified a new area of action where they could potentially advance their professional careers as human rights activists. Seventeen respondents pointed out that their involvement in assistance did not lead to changes in their current professional situation, and they continue to perform the same job as before the outbreak of the war, providing support in their free time. Ten respondents declared that their involvement in assisting Ukrainian Roma did not bring about any changes in their socio-professional situation, and they no longer engage in activities for Ukrainian Roma

Figure 15. Work-related changes due to involvement in supporting Ukrainian Roma



## **Findings and concluding remarks**

From the conducted survey and in-depth interviews, as well as our expert knowledge and experience working with Romani refugees since the beginning of the war, four fundamental issues emerge around which the collected experiences and information revolve, concerning individuals of Romani and non-Romani origin supporting Ukrainian Roma in Poland:

### **1. Broadly defined motivation to help Ukrainian Rom.**

The analysis of the gathered data reveals that the primary motivation for Roma to assist Romani refugees was the sense of community and shared ethnic identity. This was significant even despite significant intergroup and national differences. Both Polish Roma and Romani organizations were well aware of the discrimination and hostility faced by Ukrainian Roma, given their own experiences of oppression by the state and the majority society in their migration and refugee experiences from Poland. Antigypsyism and discrimination encountered by all Roma determine and trigger defence mechanisms, with other Roma showing solidarity and becoming advocates for their rights. Additionally, Polish Roma are under pressure from Polish public institutions, which urged them, including Romani organizations and activists, to take responsibility for Roma from Ukraine before the war. While this is justified in the context of supporting understanding and cooperation with this group of refugees, as experiences of activists have shown, too often interventions and actions of organizations involved demanding recognition of the rights of Ukrainian Roma to assistance and support, similar to what other Ukrainian refugees received in analogous situations. Polish Roma faced a double pressure, external from state institutions and internal, related to their origin, affiliation, and awareness of the unequal treatment and discrimination of Roma.

Many non-Roma individuals who joined in supporting Romani refugees were aware of the maladjustment and discriminatory nature of the aid system and its response to the arrival of Roma. As they argue in the surveys, this aroused their internal opposition and disagreement with the inhumane approach and unequal treatment of Roma. One respondent explicitly states, "I wanted to help non-white refugees from Ukraine, as the most excluded. I initially helped many other ethnic groups; at some point, most were taken care of, and the Roma kept coming, and no one had an idea what to do." Another person mentioned that it troubled them: "the awareness that this group was being overlooked during the assistance to refugees from Ukraine."

## **2. Barriers and Challenges in Supporting Ukrainian Roma.**

All respondents and interviewees repeatedly observed the process of "racialization" of war refugees. They draw attention to antigypsyism, discrimination, and unequal treatment experienced by Romani refugees and other non-white individuals. Polish Roma have realized that antigypsyism is still present in the majority society, and it is a systemic phenomenon triggered in crisis situations. The arrival of Ukrainian Roma in Poland has reignited anti-Roma sentiments in the country. The lack of familiarity with Romani culture and the specifics of Ukrainian Roma posed a barrier for non-Roma individuals in responding appropriately to anti-Romani racism.

## **3. Managing challenges and barriers in working with Ukrainian Roma.**

Research respondents and interviewees emphasized the need for intercultural education, supplementing knowledge about the history of Roma in Poland and Ukraine, as well as specific actions and policies of both countries in this regard towards the Roma. It is crucial to educate and convey knowledge about how stereotypes impact the perception and actions towards marginalized groups, in this case, the Roma. Purposeful efforts targeted at the education system, healthcare, and social support in working with individuals particularly vulnerable to exclusion and sensitive groups, such as the Roma, would be essential to equip these professional groups with competencies enabling them to better understand the complex situation of the people they work with. As indicated by survey respondents and the experiences of interviewees, this process must involve the inclusion of Roma individuals as participants and creators of these actions. State and civil society actions are necessary to enable the inclusion of ethnic and national communities in social life and structures. Consequently, this will lead to active participation, visibility, and a sense of agency for minority communities. Working in crisis conditions, especially in providing assistance to people fleeing war, is associated with high stress, depression, and emotional-psychological tension, often resulting in professional burnout and even PTSD. Therefore, preventive and prophylactic measures are necessary, including supervision, training, and workshops focused on mental health hygiene, contributing to the release of aggression, sadness, fears, and tensions.

## **4. The Impact of Ethnic Mobilization for Ukrainian Roma on Professionalization of Activities and Building Social Capital.**

It's worth noting that the process of involving Roma from Ukraine in assistance has brought about changes in the work and functioning of Romani organizations and activists. In response to the scale of challenges, many organizations have redirected their efforts to support Ukrainian Roma, leading to the professionalization and specialization of Romani organizations in terms of the types of support provided, interventions, and advocacy. In

addition to organizational structures, there is also intra-group mobilization. The experiences and expert knowledge, the "know-how" possessed by activists and Romani organizations, have increased. The practical application of skills and competencies held by activists and Romani organizations is now valuable and utilized by public services and international humanitarian institutions in the form of training, workshops, and new participatory projects. As a result, strengthened organizations are thriving, collaborating with various partners for the benefit of Roma in Poland and abroad, establishing support groups, and developing common tools and strategies. On the other hand, they are building their recognizable brand, social, and structural capital. Roma have become recognizable and visible through their activities and work.



## **Recommendations**

Based on the results of our research we recommend:

### **At the level of the national Government/ministerial institutions:**

- Develop a comprehensive migration policy that notices needs of Ukrainian Roma forced migrants and integrates them into its framework, ensuring their inclusion and addressing their specific needs. Essential component is to consult it with specialists, including Roma experienced in providing humanitarian support during ongoing war in Ukraine;
- Establish an Intergovernmental Working Group involving Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Sweden, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine focused on addressing the challenges faced by Roma refugees from Ukraine;
- Establish a transparent mechanism for sustainable financial assistance to support NGOs dedicated to working with Roma refugees, ensuring sustained and reliable aid and support;
- Institute the role of a special envoy within the Office of the Ombudsman tasked with monitoring and addressing cases of discrimination against Roma refugees, while streamlining policies to effectively tackle these issues;
- Public Awareness Initiatives: Initiate campaigns that spotlight the challenges and valuable contributions of the Roma community, aiming to challenge and diminish deeply entrenched stereotypes;
- Educational Initiatives: Introduce programs within schools to integrate a greater number of Ukrainian Roma migrants into the educational system.

### **Recommendation on specific measures to deal with the current situation and enhance successful advocacy:**

- Create robust support systems grounded in research and data monitoring concerning the situation of Roma refugees;
- Alongside intervention strategies, foster an environment conducive to integration by organizing workshops and training sessions for those assisting Roma refugees and educational staff. Develop language support systems tailored to the needs of Roma refugees;
- It's crucial to sensitize all stakeholders involved. This necessitates the development and dissemination of openly antiracist and culturally sensitive practices through organized campaigns, workshops, and events focused on the circumstances of Romani refugees;

- Activate national Roma programmes within individual states (like Poland's Roma Programme) to prioritize issues impacting Roma refugees, ensuring Ukrainian Roma are not excluded from state initiatives aimed at solving these challenges;
- Provide targeted training for individuals, including Roma activists, engaged in assisting Roma refugees from Ukraine. Offer detailed guidance on refugee reception procedures, current legislation, and potential challenges they might encounter;
- Support Roma community members involved in advocacy for Roma refugees at the national level, addressing the lack of financial resources, competencies, coalition-building abilities, advocacy skills, and communication with local authorities and international organizations;
- Engage humanitarian organizations working at borders and refugee reception centres by providing training and facilitating connections with Roma volunteers to sensitize them to the situation and specific needs of Roma refugees;
- Use the situation of Roma refugees as a catalyst to initiate a discourse on antigypsyism. Advocate for the formulation and implementation of a clear definition of antigypsyism in legal frameworks, as it remains unrecognized and inadequately addressed in many European countries;
- Transnational Advocacy: Cultivate cooperation between various nations to exchange best practices and synchronize endeavours in aiding Roma refugees;
- Gather and release documented personal narratives of Roma refugees, providing a humanizing view to both the general public and policymakers.

## **About the authors:**

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a researcher at the NCN research project: "Transnational life of Polish Roma - migration, family and ethnic borders in a changing European Union" (OPUS 16, UMO-2018/31/B/HS6/03006). Within the framework of the "Excellence Initiative - Research University" program, the UJ is carrying out the project "Dynamics of migration of the Carpathian Roma to the Western and Northern Poland. A Pilot Study. Implementer of many national and international projects on Roma issues. Her research interests include Roma migration, issues of national and ethnic minorities, the role of oral history in identity politics. She works for the preservation of culture, traditions, oral transmissions, including the Romani language as a carrier of the intangible cultural heritage of the Roma. She is the author of the publication "O Romach w Nowej Hucie słów kilka", the documentary film "Byli kowale, byli..." The film documentary was recommended by the Council of Europe within the framework of the European Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century and entered in the Golden Book of Good Practices as the protection of the intangible heritage of the Roma. Co-author of the book "Straight from the pot. Roma culinary traditions", the report "Krakow Roma - past, present, future" and articles and projects on Roma.

**The Jaw Dikh Foundation** was established in 2015 to promote and preserve Roma culture. Through art and informal education, it seeks to improve understanding and dialogue between Roma and non-Roma communities. The foundation supports a variety of activities, including art, science, education and culture, with a focus on social cohesion and integration. Actively involved in policy initiatives, it works with stakeholders such as NGOs at home and abroad. Involved in European Commission projects, such as the Roma Civil Monitor. Member of the ERGO Network and ERIAC. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the foundation has actively supported Ukrainian refugees, especially those of Roma origin. As a key partner in a coalition of Roma organizations, it addresses the challenges facing Roma refugees and works for their integration. In summary, the Jaw Dikh Foundation is committed to promoting Roma culture, fostering understanding and advocating for social inclusion and equality through a variety of activities and collaborations.



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