



# MONITORING OF THE SITUATION OF UKRAINIAN ROMA REFUGEES

in Poland, Hungary,  
Czechia, Romania,  
Moldova and Slovakia

FINAL REPORT



This report was prepared by Dejan Markovic, Coordinator for Ukraine with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network, based on an extensive data collection exercise among the ERGO Network national membership, carried out in 2023.

Members in Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia have provided direct evidence through in-depth country analysis. The following researchers were responsible for the country analysis:

Lilla Eredics - Hungary

Daniel Grebeldinger - Romania

Zuzana Havírová - Slovakia

Zdeněk Horváth - Czechia

Elena Sirbu - Moldova

Elżbieta Mirga-Wójtowicz - Poland

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[www.ergonetwork.org](http://www.ergonetwork.org)

Rue d'Edimbourg 26

1050 Brussels

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## SUMMARY

The war in Ukraine, commencing in February 2022, prompted a substantial refugee crisis in Europe, with 5,927,600 Ukrainian refugees, including approximately 100,000 Romani refugees. Activating the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) by the European Council, implemented through Decision 2022/382, provided temporary protection to those unable to return to Ukraine. This directive was extended until March 4, 2024, with the potential for further extension until March 2025, contingent on the situation in Ukraine.

In Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia, Roma refugees originating from Ukraine form a distinct cohort facing enduring discrimination rooted in cultural-historical issues, presenting unique challenges not commonly encountered by other refugees. Discrimination takes various forms, hindering access to crucial resources like housing, employment, information, and support services.

While the introduction of Temporary Protection (TP) and subsequent enhancements at the European and national levels were valuable, they did not fully alleviate the challenges faced by Roma refugees. Namely, despite the overall improvements in conditions for refugees, the vulnerabilities of the Roma community within refugee populations, characterised by cultural differences, discrimination, and limited education, remain evident. Roma refugees have consistently faced subpar conditions and discrimination over the period covered in this report. Issues related to illiteracy and language barriers persistently hindered their access to essential resources.

The report focuses on Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia, examining the country context, status of Roma refugees, housing conditions, education, healthcare, employment, and social security. It also addresses discrimination, antigypsyism, and personal safety.

Drawing from diverse data sources, this report provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Roma refugees in those countries, with a primary focus on assessing the circumstances of Roma refugees within different settings. Reports about Moldova and Slovakia cover only the period until February 2023, while other reports cover the period until June 2023.

The report underscores the imperative for sustained attention and targeted interventions to effectively address the unique challenges confronted by the Roma refugee community. The report emphasises the need for ongoing attention and targeted interventions to address the specific challenges faced by the Roma refugee community.

### Major findings

The Roma refugee crisis unfolded in two distinct periods: the initial phase when Roma refugees entered Eastern and Central European countries and the subsequent period where some temporary measures were replaced by new ones addressing prolonged refugee status.

Scrutinising both similar and distinct features between these periods, concrete measures taken by individual countries are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the situation and addressing further challenges particular to the Roma community's position,

Roma refugees from Ukraine face multifaceted challenges in their journey across Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Moldova, and Slovakia. Rooted in cultural-historical issues, discrimination permeates crucial aspects like housing, employment, and support services. While these challenges manifest differently in each country, there's a common thread of antigypsyism, historical racial marginalisation, and ongoing complexities that demand sustained efforts and targeted interventions.

In Poland, the collective approach of Roma refugees seeking security exacerbates challenges for activists facing substantial personal, financial, and societal pressures due to antigypsyism. Hungary, grappling with historical racial marginalisation, necessitates a comprehensive strategy, emphasising the need to address prolonged shelter stays and align with EU guidelines.

The Czech Republic sees Roma refugees mainly as transient, demanding urgent attention for their long-term integration. Despite a robust legal framework, Romania confronts challenges with changes in support programs, highlighting ongoing complexities in housing, education, employment, and healthcare.

Moldova, while making efforts, contends with persistent disparities in housing, employment, and healthcare for Roma refugees. Concerns deepen with the discontinuation of key support mechanisms, emphasising the need for concerted efforts to bridge gaps in access to services, combat discrimination, and enhance advocacy initiatives.

The Slovak Republic actively assisted Ukrainian refugees through a well-established system, providing Temporary Shelter that encompassed housing, education, employment, and healthcare support. While the report acknowledges efforts to help Roma individuals from Ukraine, it highlights instances of bias and challenges faced by Roma families, emphasising the need for continued attention to their specific needs within the broader refugee context. Overall, Slovakia's legal framework and support measures, although comprehensive, reveal areas where targeted interventions are crucial to address discrimination and ensure equitable treatment for all refugees, including the Roma community.

Across these countries, the shared struggle against discrimination calls for sustained efforts to ensure meaningful inclusion and address the distinct challenges faced by Roma refugees in their journey.

In sum, while certain aspects, such as advancements in legal frameworks and increased awareness, offer positive aspects, socioeconomic problems, discrimination, and barriers to employment persist.

Indeed, the activation and extension of the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) signify ongoing efforts to address the immediate needs of displaced individuals. This initiative establishes

a legal framework for temporary protection, potentially enhancing the legal status and rights of Roma refugees. However, the 'colour-blind' approach of service providers exacerbates the situation by overlooking institutional antigypsyism and other challenges faced by the Roma refugee community despite notable improvements.

There is a noticeable increase in awareness regarding the discrimination faced by Roma refugees. This heightened awareness has prompted advocacy and awareness campaigns, fostering improved understanding and collaboration among stakeholders. While immediate impacts may not be fully realised, these efforts lay the groundwork for positive changes in the long term.

However, the prolonged armed conflict has intensified challenges within Roma communities, affecting socioeconomic indicators and hindering access to essential services. This suggests that, despite efforts, the overall situation for Roma refugees remains challenging, with the conflict amplifying existing difficulties and introducing new hurdles.

Persistent barriers to employment, particularly for Roma women, highlight ongoing challenges in accessing job opportunities. Limited educational access and language barriers continue to be formidable obstacles for Roma women seeking employment, indicating the need for targeted interventions.

Discrimination against Roma refugees, particularly in Central and Eastern European countries, remains pronounced. Prejudice and distrust persist as significant challenges in the current context, demanding focused efforts to combat discriminatory practices and promote inclusivity.

The report emphasises the need for targeted interventions, ongoing monitoring, and adaptive strategies to address the distinct challenges faced by the Roma refugee community and ensure their meaningful inclusion and well-being.

Recommendations for addressing the situation of Roma refugees include implementing comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, streamlining asylum and refugee processes, providing free legal counselling, launching public awareness campaigns, ensuring equitable healthcare access, offering language and integration classes, developing job placement and vocational training programs, supporting NGOs, fostering collaboration and networking, and establishing data collection and monitoring mechanisms. These recommendations aim to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Roma refugees, explicitly addressing their unique challenges.

### **Recommendations for international organisations**

It is strongly recommended that the initiative undertaken by the Council of Europe in forming the Roma Coordination Group<sup>1</sup>, which brings together various international organisations to address the specific needs of Roma refugees from Ukraine, evolves into a sustained and ongoing activity.

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<sup>1</sup> Fostering coordination among international stakeholders on rights of Roma people in Ukraine, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/fostering-coordination-among-international-stakeholders-on-rights-of-roma-people-in-ukraine>



This collaborative effort, fostering regular exchanges and synergies among partners, drafting comprehensive plans, implementing joint activities, and safeguarding the rights of Roma individuals, mainly focusing on vulnerable groups, should continue beyond its initial phase. The sustained engagement of the Roma Coordination Group is crucial for addressing discrimination issues at the societal level and ensuring continued support for the Roma community. Furthermore, the valuable contributions expected from thematic meetings conducted by UN WOMEN with relevant stakeholders should be integrated into the ongoing efforts, emphasising the need for a continuous and coordinated response.

It is strongly recommended that UN agencies, particularly UNHCR, collaborate closely with the Roma community to ensure their active participation in discussions and decisions affecting their futures. Given the historical context of Roma exclusion and discrimination,

### **Recommendations for the European Union**

EU countries should exercise heightened awareness of the challenges faced by Roma refugees fleeing Ukraine, actively working to respect and protect their rights. A crucial recommendation is the application of the Temporary Protection Directive to all refugees escaping Ukraine, aiming to mitigate discrimination against vulnerable groups, including third-country nationals, Roma refugees, stateless persons, and individuals previously seeking asylum or holding international protection status in Ukraine.

EU member states should adopt promising initiatives observed in certain EU countries and consider their implementation across the region. These initiatives involve providing daily updates to the government on Roma-related border situations, collaborating with relevant civil society organisations, translating key documents into Romani, offering practical support for transportation, registration, and medical assistance, and deploying monitoring teams at border crossing points. Embracing and expanding such practices can contribute significantly to ensuring the well-being and rights of Roma refugees.

Furthermore, to comprehensively address the situation of Roma refugees, a multifaceted approach is **recommended both at the EU and the national level**:

Establish and enforce a robust legal framework explicitly addressing and penalising all forms of discrimination faced by Roma refugees. Ensure that the legislation encompasses both public and private spheres, providing comprehensive protection against discrimination in housing, employment, education, and other essential areas.

Implement measures to streamline and expedite the asylum and refugee status determination processes specifically for Roma refugees. Assign dedicated personnel with cultural competence to handle Roma refugee cases, ensuring a thorough and swift evaluation of their asylum claims.

Establish accessible and culturally sensitive legal counselling services, offering guidance to Roma refugees on asylum applications and appeals and navigating administrative procedures.

Collaborate with legal professionals and NGOs to provide comprehensive support, addressing language barriers and clearly understanding legal rights.

Design and launch targeted public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding Roma refugees. Collaborate with media outlets, influencers, and community leaders to amplify the campaigns, fostering a more empathetic and informed public perception.

Develop and implement policies that address language barriers in healthcare settings and combat discriminatory practices against Roma refugees. Establish cultural competency training for healthcare professionals to enhance understanding and sensitivity towards the unique healthcare needs of Roma individuals.

Design language and integration programs tailored to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Roma refugees. Collaborate with community organisations to provide practical and culturally relevant integration classes, facilitating effective communication and integration into host societies.

Conduct comprehensive skills assessments for Roma refugees and design vocational training programs aligned with their skills and aspirations. Establish partnerships with businesses to create job placement opportunities, promoting economic self-sufficiency and integration into the workforce.

Increase financial support for NGOs and community organisations actively assisting Roma refugees. Provide capacity-building initiatives to enhance organisations' effectiveness and sustainability in addressing the Roma community's diverse needs.

Facilitate structured forums and platforms for stakeholder collaboration, including state institutions, NGOs, community leaders, and relevant experts. Encourage the development of joint initiatives and resource-sharing to optimise support and ensure a holistic approach to Roma refugee integration.

Establish a robust and continuous monitoring system to collect accurate and up-to-date data on the situation and progress of Roma refugees. Regularly assess the impact of interventions and policies, using the collected data to inform evidence-based decision-making and adapt strategies as needed.

# Monitoring of the Situation of Ukrainian Roma Refugees in Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia

## Introduction

The Ukrainian conflict, which began in February 2022, has led to a significant refugee crisis in Europe, impacting millions of Ukrainian citizens and particularly affecting the Roma population. According to the latest UNHCR report, there are 5,927,600 refugees from Ukraine recorded in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The 2020 Strategy for the Protection and Integration of Roma National Minority into the Ukrainian Society, approved by the Decree of the President of Ukraine N 201/2013 of 8 July 2013, indicates that according to the latest Ukraine-wide census (2001), Roma population is estimated at 47600 people. However, international organisations and NGOs estimate that the Roma population in Ukraine is 200,000 to 400,000 people as of 2019<sup>3</sup>.

According to the various reports, there are approximately 100,000 Romani refugees who sought refuge in neighbouring European countries,

Roma refugees typically form groups ranging from 3 to 30 individuals, occasionally appearing in pairs or as solitary travellers and, alternatively, in larger congregations. Predominantly, these groups comprise women within the productive age range of 18-50 (approximately 30%), with children and adolescents constituting the majority (about 60%). A small percentage comprises seniors over 65 (about 5%) and adolescents aged 15-18 (approximately 4%). Adult men in their productive age are the least numerous (about 1%). These groups primarily consist of family members, with some including neighbours or residents from the same municipalities. Roughly 80% of incoming Roma originate from the western regions of Ukraine, particularly areas surrounding cities such as Lviv, Uzhgorod, and Lutsk, primarily from villages and settlements outside urban zones. The remaining 20% of Roma refugees come from central and eastern Ukraine, predominantly from Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhia.

Roma from the western regions commonly identify (in about 90% of cases) with the Hungarian-speaking Roma community prevalent in those areas. These Roma generally exhibit a low socio-economic status, often lacking identity documents and literacy skills. A significant portion speaks only Hungarian (approximately 70%), while some talk to Ukrainian or Russian (about 30%) and the Romani language (about 30%). They frequently rely on mass transportation, particularly trains, and often possess minimal financial resources.

In contrast, Roma from central and eastern Ukraine typically exhibit a higher socio-economic status. They are multilingual, speaking Ukrainian, Russian, and, in many cases, Romani

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<sup>2</sup> Ukraine situation Flash Update #60, 27 November 2023 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/105074>

<sup>3</sup> COE SPECIAL REPORT OF THE UKRAINIAN PARLIAMENT COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS - <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a13217>

(approximately 60%). This group often possesses identity documents and other supporting paperwork. They travel in smaller groups, up to ten people, using their vehicles and often have more substantial financial resources.

Before the conflict, Roma communities in Ukraine faced poverty, limited opportunities, and discrimination. Indeed, the Roma population in Ukraine faced heightened poverty levels and restricted opportunities for employment, education, and healthcare. Additionally, they were subjected to prejudice, hate speech, and violent attacks carried out by extremist groups.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, their position has been further complicated by the lack of documents. As per the Ukrainian Government's Roma Strategy 2030, adopted in 2020, up to 8% of the Roma population in Ukraine lack identity documents confirming citizenship or special status; the Roma people who have fled the war confront various exclusionary and discriminatory circumstances. Indeed, in contrast to non-Roma Ukrainians, who generally experience a sense of welcome when seeking refuge in Ukraine's neighbouring Eastern European countries, Roma Ukrainians often encounter prejudice and distrust similar to what they face in their homeland.<sup>5</sup>

Reports of the ERGO network, as well as the reports of organisations such as Oxfam and similar, suggested that the ongoing war has further amplified the already low socioeconomic indicators among Roma communities in Ukraine, compounding their struggles as they seek sanctuary.

European legislative measures, such as the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC),<sup>6</sup> have been enacted to address the immediate needs of individuals displaced by the conflict in Ukraine. The European Council activated this directive in response to the Russian invasion to provide swift and temporary protection to individuals unable to return to their country of origin. The Council's implementing Decision 2022/382, established on March 4, 2022, activated the Temporary Protection Directive.<sup>7</sup> It acknowledged the mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine and introduced temporary protection measures. Furthermore, the Commission outlined operational guidelines for implementing Decision 2022/382 in March 2022, clarifying procedures for establishing the mass influx of displaced individuals from Ukraine and enforcing temporary protection, as defined in Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC. On September 27, the temporary protection was extended until March 4, 2024. Depending on the evolution of the situation in Ukraine, temporary protection can be extended for another year until March 2025.<sup>8</sup>

However, Roma communities are facing challenges in accessing essential services due to issues like lack of legal identification. Namely, some of the most pressing concerns are the lack of legal

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<sup>4</sup> Ukraine: Fatal Attack on Roma Settlement. Stop Impunity for Hate Crimes", Human Rights Watch, 26 June , 2018, accessible here <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/26/ukraine-fatal-attack-roma-settlement>

<sup>5</sup> New Eastern Europe, Roma refugees from Ukraine face additional adversity 19 November, 2023

<https://neweasterneurope.eu/2023/11/19/roma-refugees-from-ukraine-face-additional-adversity/#:~:text=Following%20Russia's%20invasion%20of%20Ukraine,faced%20additional%20challenges%20and%20discrimination.>

<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32001L0055>

<sup>7</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022D0382>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/09/28/ukrainian-refugees-eu-member-states-agree-to-extend-temporary-protection/>

identification, such as birth certificates and passports, hindering access to fundamental services like housing and crucial humanitarian assistance. Roma refugee women encounter formidable barriers to finding employment in new environments. Challenges include a shortage of formal work experience, limited education, language barriers, and inadequate childcare support. Discrimination permeates not only from authorities and officials but also from volunteers, aid actors, and fellow refugees. This pervasive bias occurs throughout the entire refugee journey, at border crossings, and upon arrival in safe states, impeding access to protection and essential services and adversely affecting the well-being of refugees.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, a distinct form of discrimination unfolds in the realm of accommodation, with Roma refugees facing bias when renting from private citizens, particularly evident in Romania and Poland. Even in Romania, where financial incentives were initially offered to those hosting large Roma families, the withdrawal of such programs swiftly reignited hostility from hosts.<sup>10</sup>

## Methodology

The report draws from various sources, including desk research, interviews, focus groups, and the direct experiences of country report authors who have been involved since the onset of the refugee crisis. Despite efforts for equality, gathering specific data on Roma refugees remains complex, highlighting the need for more targeted approaches to address the unique challenges faced by this vulnerable population in the covered countries. Data for Moldova and Slovakia are valid from the beginning of the war in Ukraine to February 2023, while the report for other countries covers the period from the start of the war to June 2023.

Centering on Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania, the primary goal of this report is to offer a comprehensive assessment of the situation faced by Roma refugees from Ukraine. The findings are organised into five key chapters, delving into the country context, the status of Roma refugees in the host nations, their housing conditions, and access to education, healthcare, employment, and social security. The report also addresses instances of discrimination, antigypsyism, and personal safety where data permits. Furthermore, it offers an overview of the needs of Roma refugees and presents recommendations for future ERGO actions.

## Findings

### Poland

#### *Legal framework*

In response to the armed conflict in Ukraine, Poland enacted a "special law" on March 12, 2022,<sup>11</sup> extending the legal stay of Ukrainian citizens, including Roma refugees, until March 4, 2024, with potential further extensions. This law introduced several assistance measures, encompassing

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</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>

financial aid, support with obtaining a PESEL number, job placement, and inclusion in the education system. Information campaigns about these measures are conducted in Ukrainian.<sup>12</sup>

### *Findings*

**Housing:** Research covered several locations in the Malopolska province in Konary, Koninki, and Krakow. In Konary and Koninki, the Roma live in reception centres run by private individuals and financed under the Law of March 12, 2022, on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in that country. There are roughly 300 to 350 people in these two centres. Following the amended regulations post-March 1, Ukrainian war refugees residing in collective accommodation centres for extended periods will now pay half the fee, up to a maximum of PLN 40 (approximately 10 euros) per day. This fee was increased to PLN 60 on May 1, 2023. Those facing challenging circumstances will be eligible for exemption, a decision that regional authorities will determine. A significant number of Roma individuals from Ukraine are currently and will potentially be impacted by these changes.

The risk of homelessness remains a significant threat to Ukrainian Roma as large reception centres are being closed down. As in Warsaw, Roma are relocated to smaller towns when this occurs. The more resourceful Roma manage, but the majority struggle to adapt to the new situation, mainly due to restricted access to the job market, educational facilities, and the racist attitudes prevalent within these local small communities.

Currently, about 100–150 people reside in Krakow with varying intensity. Some live in private apartments, while others reside in non-licensed reception centres, which have closed recently. This situation causes Roma families to either move to Germany or return to Ukraine, or they travel to different regions of Poland.

Conducted interviews with several families, it turned out that they have a rich history of moving to different centers. One family moved nine times since the beginning of the war, and other families had similar stories. This shows the lack of stability in the lives of these families, impacting the fact that the children do not attend school, and it's challenging to find work, let alone maintain it.

Roma families have reported cases of discrimination and bias when trying to secure private housing, with higher levels of refusals and risks of (forced) eviction, compounded by misinformation about eviction and tenancy rights in Poland. High rental costs in urban areas have also discouraged families from pursuing private housing on the rental market, leading to no other options but to remain in collective accommodation, continue onward movement or return to Ukraine.

**Employment:** Access to the labour market for Roma refugees as possible, but discrimination persisted, mirroring challenges faced by Polish Roma. Illiteracy, early departure from education, poverty, and racial bias hindered Roma men from securing stable employment, engaging in marginalised job sectors, and raising concerns about unpaid work, health risks, and limited social integration. The sense of safety for Roma refugees was closely tied to their trust in fellow Roma, with Antigypsyism experienced in Ukraine making them suspicious. The presence of trustworthy

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<sup>12</sup> Online information and campaigns for Ukrainians on government websites: <https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/informacja-dla-uchodzcow-z-ukrainy>

Roma individuals was crucial for support. Integration challenges persisted across structural barriers in housing, work, education, healthcare, and legal procedures. Limited state assistance exacerbated vulnerabilities, relying on Roma activists and municipal actors for integration. Discrimination and racism persisted in everyday infrastructures, emphasising the vital role of international donors in supporting Romani refugee families.

Among the refugee families we encountered, men predominantly worked in iron and steel industries, manual labour in sorting plants, gardening, as taxi drivers, often operating in the shadows of the official labour sector, frequently resorting to illegal means. Ukrainian Roma, who work in Poland, commonly assist in reception centres, while women are employed as cleaners or kitchen assistants. A few individuals managed to engage in work within Romani Polish non-governmental organisations. However, the vast majority of Roma have not taken up employment, mainly due to caring for children who require care and attention. Employment opportunities are also hampered by the fact that many Romani women have not even completed their primary education. This means that the only source of income is very often from men's work, which might already mean an insecure economic status.

Overall, the combination of limited job prospects, uncertainty, health risks, and a lack of social connections exacerbates the challenges faced by Roma refugees in their pursuit of a more stable and inclusive life.

**Education:** Access to education for Roma refugee children varied by location, with smaller towns exhibiting swift enrolment. However, in Krakow and Małopolska, most Roma children lacked education due to housing insecurity, language barriers, and parental reluctance. Romani NGOs and assistants strove to enhance support networks, and governmental programs supported educational initiatives in certain areas.

**Healthcare:** In terms of healthcare, Roma refugees faced substantial needs, with reports of exhaustion, tuberculosis, and challenges for individuals with HIV in accessing medication. Accessing medical services was hindered by the strain on Poland's healthcare system, language barriers, and antigypsyist attitudes. Crucial support in navigating the healthcare system was provided by Roma assistants and volunteers, emphasising the need for targeted healthcare initiatives and cultural sensitivity within the Polish healthcare system.

**Media Reporting and Advocacy Impact:** The portrayal of Roma refugees in the media, both traditional and internal, played a positive role by highlighting key aspects such as antigypsyism, discrimination, support systems, collaboration, initiatives, interventions, and personal narratives. Media outlets also criticised the passive stance of Polish authorities and their delegation of responsibility, fostering discussions on societal inclusion and government responsiveness. Overall, the media played a crucial role in bringing attention to the challenges faced by Roma refugees, promoting a nuanced understanding of their experiences, and encouraging discussions on societal inclusion and government responsiveness.

*Discrimination and Antigypsyism:* Roma refugees from Ukraine encountered pervasive discrimination across various facets of their displacement. Traumatic experiences of war and violence in Ukraine, coupled with societal prejudice, left them deeply mistrustful, seeking security within their close-knit communities. Instances of discrimination were perpetrated by various groups, including volunteers, official helplines, non-Roma Ukrainian refugees, property owners, managers, the labour market, and local authorities. The discrimination spanned volunteers, administrators, officials, fellow refugees, property owners, employers, and local authorities, collectively highlighting the urgent need to address systemic biases and promote inclusivity for Roma refugees in their host country.

### *Conclusions*

Roma originating from Ukraine constitute a distinctive cohort of refugees, marked by their enduring experience of discrimination in both Ukraine and, subsequently, Poland. The discrimination they encounter is deeply rooted in profound cultural-historical issues, presenting challenges not commonly faced by non-Roma refugees from Ukraine. These challenges include various forms of verbal and non-verbal discrimination and social and cultural exclusion from crucial resources available to refugees, such as housing, employment, information, transportation, material necessities, and vital support, including psychological, legal, and educational assistance.

Faced with Antigypsyism and discriminatory treatment in both Ukraine and Poland, Roma refugees, grappling with the trauma of being displaced from a war-torn region, tend to gather in larger groups comprising several dozen individuals, often including women, children, and older people. This collective approach serves as a means to enhance their sense of security. However, this collective behaviour significantly complicates Polish society's and Roma activists' efforts to engage in voluntary activities to assist them.

Roma activists and organisations currently lead the primary efforts to assist Roma refugees. While Polish non-governmental organisations treat Roma as equals, their unique challenges sometimes surpass the capacity of already stretched volunteers. Consequently, Roma activists in Poland, along with the organisations they represent, are automatically burdened with the expectation of resolving the issues at hand, providing support to Roma refugees independently, and assuming sole responsibility for their well-being. Local authorities also mirror this similar attitude towards Roma refugees. These circumstances place substantial personal, financial, societal, and cultural pressures on organisations and Roma activists. Establishing a precise mechanism for financial support for NGOs working with Roma refugees and individual support services, such as psychological or legal assistance for activists, is crucial.

While explicit denial of services to Roma was not encountered, the official stance of service providers to be 'colour-blind' implicitly negates the existence of institutional antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma in Poland, thereby exacerbating the situation.



### *Recommendations*

**National Government/Ministerial Institutions:** The national government and ministerial institutions should prioritise the development of a comprehensive migration policy that explicitly integrates Roma refugees, addressing their unique needs. Establishing an Intergovernmental Working Group involving relevant countries is crucial to collaboratively addressing Roma refugees' challenges. National governmental and ministerial institutions must take proactive measures to combat discrimination against Roma, with a specific focus on refugees. Aligning the Governmental Programme on Roma with dedicated provisions for Roma refugees is essential, recognising their distinct circumstances within migration policy. Furthermore, a transparent mechanism for financial assistance to NGOs working with Roma refugees should be instituted. To monitor and address discrimination against Roma refugees, the establishment of a special envoy within the Office of the Ombudsman is recommended. Implementing systemic measures to ensure the inclusion of Roma refugees in the Polish educational system is crucial. Robust support for Roma NGOs and activists, including psycho-social assistance and legal expertise, is necessary for effective advocacy. Additionally, public awareness initiatives challenging stereotypes and educational programs for the integration of Roma migrants into schools should be launched.

**Specific Measures for Current Situation and Advocacy Enhancement:** A comprehensive monitoring and reporting system for discrimination against Roma refugees must address the current situation and enhance advocacy efforts. Robust support systems, informed by research and data monitoring regarding the circumstances of Roma refugees, should be created. Workshops and training sessions are essential to foster an environment conducive to integrating Roma refugees. Language support systems tailored to the needs of Roma refugees should be developed. Sensitising all stakeholders through antiracist and culturally sensitive practices is imperative. National Roma structures should be activated to prioritise issues impacting Roma refugees and ensure their inclusion in state initiatives. Targeted training for individuals assisting Roma refugees, addressing reception procedures and potential challenges, is necessary. Support for Roma community members involved in advocacy and managing financial, competency, and communication challenges is vital. Engaging humanitarian organisations through training and connecting with Roma volunteers is recommended. Advocating for a clear definition of Antigypsyism in legal frameworks and initiating discourse on the subject is crucial. Cultivating transnational cooperation for Roma refugee assistance is essential. Yearly conferences on Roma refugee matters should be arranged for continuous strategy updates, and documented personal narratives should be gathered and released to humanise the issue for the public and policymakers.

## **Hungary**

### *Legal framework*

The legal and administrative challenges confronting Roma refugees in Hungary can be categorised into three main areas. Firstly, disparities exist between implementing the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in Hungary and the national refugee care and social welfare systems. Secondly, a lack of accessible and accurate data on refugees poses difficulties in understanding

their needs. Thirdly, recent legislative changes in Hungary concerning refugee assistance affect their rights and support.

The TPD, designed for the rapid reception of displaced individuals, has varying administration across EU states and primarily benefits Ukrainian and certain third-country nationals, excluding undocumented, stateless individuals and those with dual citizenship. In Hungary, the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing oversees refugees' legal and administrative processes. Temporary protection (TP) holders are entitled to rights, including a subsistence allowance, but dual citizens face practical challenges in accessing benefits and healthcare.

Furthermore, the lack of realistic and official data on refugees in Hungary, exacerbated by the government's unwelcoming attitude, hinders the assessment of actual numbers, especially for Roma refugees. Legislative amendments aimed at reducing benefits for refugees have impacted institutional housing and daily allowances for vulnerable groups, raising concerns about family separation and housing issues for Roma families.

In summary, the legal and administrative issues encompass discrepancies in TPD implementation, challenges faced by dual citizens, a lack of realistic data, and legislative changes affecting refugees' benefits and housing.

### *Findings*

**Housing:** The housing situation for Ukrainian refugees in Hungary lacks a comprehensive state response, with care primarily organised by disaster management authorities and local governments. The central care centre, BOK-Hall in Budapest, closed in July 2023, raising concerns about the individualised and precarious process for refugees' arrival and accommodation. While information is now available at government counters in train stations, the closure of BOK-Hall means no centrally designated place for NGOs to ensure proper care.

Roma refugees continue to face marginalisation in housing. Discrimination in the private housing market limits access, leading many to reside in collective shelters and large facilities. The closure of refugee shelters and denial of access to monitoring raises concerns about the lack of information on Roma families under state control. Often established in civil, church, or municipal institutions, collective shelters are cramped and lack privacy. Most shelters also have limited capacity for social work and mental support.

Private housing for Roma refugees is typically accessed through solidarity offers from individual flat owners or civil organisations' housing programs. While reduced prices are offered, living conditions vary, with some families paying around HUF 100,000 – 200,000 (250–500 EUR). Families in workers' dormitories also pay around HUF 50,000 – 100,000 (150–250 EUR). Despite moving into private housing, Roma families often find themselves in overcrowded and inadequately equipped conditions similar to those in collective accommodations.

**Employment:** the Temporary Protection Directive allows refugees to enter the labour market and access education and medical care without legal complications. However, Roma refugees, despite having a clear legal status, often end up in informal and insecure positions, exposed to exploitative

conditions. Roma men typically work in construction and steel industries, facing unstable economic positions, exploitation, and overwork. The lack of safe employment programs hinders secure labour market integration for Roma men. Roma women, facing caring responsibilities, struggle to find work, often limited to seasonal and domestic positions.

In summary, both Ukrainian and Roma refugees in Hungary grapple with housing challenges, marked by closures of central care centres and discrimination in the private housing market. Employment opportunities are constrained, particularly for Roma refugees, leading to vulnerable and exploitative conditions.

**Education:** Children with refugee status or dual citizenship in Hungary are subject to compulsory schooling from the age of three if they stay for more than three months. They are entitled to the same educational services as Hungarian citizens, including nursery, kindergarten, school, and secondary school, with additional support such as free textbooks and meals for six months. The state provides 5 hours of tutoring per student per week to address language barriers.

Despite improvements, diverse educational experiences are reported for Ukrainian refugee children. Language barriers pose a challenge, and underfunded state schools struggle to organise language teaching. The lack of a centralised inclusion program and limited involvement of Ukrainian teachers burden educational institutions and civil society.

Roma refugee children face additional challenges due to accumulated educational disadvantages within the Ukrainian education system. Complicated bureaucracy and a shortage of teachers hinder the provision of extra education hours, while access to special education teachers or school psychologists is limited. Roma children often arrive with health problems and trauma.

Enrollment rates have improved compared to the previous year, but challenges persist. Non-enrollment reasons include family relocation, lack of help during enrollment, dropouts, and unofficial online education. Administrative problems, untreated school traumas, and failure to receive entitled benefits like free meals and textbooks contribute to non-enrollment.

While more Roma children are enrolling, their experiences in school vary across the country. Transgenerational experiences of segregation and poverty, local resources, and expert responsiveness influence children's experiences. Some face repeating grades due to curriculum differences, language barriers, and financial instability. Lack of material conditions, learning difficulties, conflicts, and bullying are reported problems.

Despite challenges, positive instances include some children excelling in Hungarian language education, with success stories like a child winning a drawing competition in a local school.

**Media Reporting:** In the media and public discourse, the government in Hungary promotes a pro-peace policy regarding refugees from Ukraine, avoiding differentiation among the refugee groups. This stance is reflected in the lack of realistic and available data on the number and situation of refugees, hindering a comprehensive assessment of their needs. The government's

communication does not address Roma refugees specifically, portraying the arrivals as homogeneous masses rather than communities and families with diverse social backgrounds.

Official pro-government press avoids coverage of Roma refugees, and the government refrains from acknowledging their unique vulnerabilities. For instance, during the UNHCR Refugee Coordination Forum, the Government Commissioner for Roma Relations focused solely on advocating for peace and a ceasefire, overlooking the specific concerns of Roma refugees.

At the local level, there have been instances of local stakeholders expressing racist sentiments about Roma refugees. The mayor of Záhony, a border locality, referred to Roma families from Transcarpathia as "economic migrants" in a video interview. In another case, the mayor of Kerepes in Pest County shared a video on his official Facebook page advocating for police brutality against Roma refugee men in the town, accusing them of harassing local girls. These local incidents contrast with the government's pro-peace narrative, highlighting potential underlying tensions and discriminatory attitudes at the community level.

**Antigypsyism and Discrimination:** Roma refugees in Hungary, particularly from Transcarpathia, face challenges in expressing instances of discrimination due to their historically marginalised status. Interactions with non-Roma have been limited, making it difficult for them to recognise and articulate cases of discrimination, segregation, and antigypsyism in their daily lives.

Despite these challenges, reports of antigypsyism against Roma refugees in Hungary are documented. Discrimination is noted at the border, where Roma mothers with children experienced neglect compared to other refugees receiving immediate assistance. In Záhony, local authorities ordered the closure of tents serving refugees upon learning that Roma families were arriving by train.

In Eastern Hungary, Roma refugees in shelters reported negative attitudes, racist insults during encounters in local stores, and instances of hostility from residents. Acts such as elderly individuals throwing water on children playing outside the shelter and the dismissal of severe health problems by a doctor further highlight discriminatory experiences. In locations where Roma and non-Roma refugees coexist, reports suggest discriminatory practices, such as being placed at the back of donation queues by shelter staff.

These instances shed light on the persistent antigypsyism faced by Roma refugees in Hungary, both at the hands of authorities and local communities, highlighting the need for increased awareness and efforts to address discrimination.

#### **Box: Challenges in Housing for Romani Refugees in Hungary: A Short Analysis**

The housing challenges faced by Romani refugees in Hungary stem from various factors. Firstly, there is an issue of informal segregation in placement, where dual citizens are not registering in the system, potentially resulting in informal segregation as multiple Transcarpathian Romani families are accommodated based on available space, lacking personalised support.

Secondly, Romani families often encounter prejudices and discriminatory practices, leading to their exclusion from assistance at the border. In response, Roma civil society groups and activists have had to organise their accommodation, with recent updates suggesting improved structure and reduced neglect toward Romani refugees.

Another significant challenge is the limited availability of private housing on a solidarity basis, particularly for the long term. Most offers are intermediate-term, providing support for a maximum of one year, posing difficulties for Romani families needing more extended assistance.

Structural inequalities and anti-Roma discrimination also play a role in restricting Romani families' access to private housing. Instances highlight their exclusion from the housing market due to ethnic prejudice from landlords, exacerbated by Hungary's recent high house price growth and economic challenges.

Additionally, the deteriorating economic environment and energy crisis in Hungary create transition barriers for Romani refugee families. Those without financial stability find it challenging to move to the rental market, raising concerns about their housing stability in the future. Economic uncertainties also impact employed Romani families, making it difficult to secure housing without rental subsidies, further highlighting concerns about their housing stability.

### *Conclusions*

The findings highlight ongoing challenges faced by Roma refugees in Hungary, encompassing difficulties in accessing essential services, care, and education, coupled with the persistent threat of discrimination and racist attitudes. These issues are deeply rooted in historical processes of racial marginalisation, necessitating a comprehensive and nuanced approach. Key recommendations emerge from the analysis:

The prolonged stay of Roma refugees in shelters, extending one and a half years after the war began, demands immediate attention from EU and national authorities to ensure their meaningful inclusion in social activities, education, and the labour market. Rather than excluding specific refugee groups, the Hungarian government should invest in creating viable pathways out of institutional housing for all refugees.

Furthermore, there is a crucial need for alignment with EU guidelines, as amendments to Decree 104/2022 conflict with the principles of temporary protection, impeding equal access to housing, employment, and social and medical assistance for all refugees from Ukraine.

### *Recommendations*

To address the persistent vulnerability of Roma refugees in the labour market, urgent initiatives should be implemented to combat anti-Roma discrimination, protect the rights of Roma refugee workers, and establish social security schemes. Additionally, there is a pressing need for special education programs catering to the unique needs of refugee parents with low education levels and early school leavers.

Gender-specific labour programs are imperative to empower Roma refugee women, considering their limited access to jobs that can be balanced with caregiving responsibilities. This should be complemented by adult learning initiatives accessible to them.

The meaningful involvement of Roma refugees in developing and organising support initiatives is a priority, acknowledging their insights and experiences. Simultaneously, efforts should focus on enhancing the capacity of local NGOs involved in the everyday lives of Roma refugees to ensure their overall well-being.

Anti-racist and culturally sensitive practices need to be developed and disseminated through campaigns, workshops, and events that address the specific situation of Roma refugees. Publicly available databases are essential for designing targeted and appropriate services, and funding should be allocated to research projects on the experiences of Roma refugee students.

Comprehensive and systemic interventions and policies are required for the educational integration of Roma refugee children, including access to administrative processes and resources for quality schooling.

Structured cooperation and connection among various actors are critical for developing referral mechanisms and upscaling good practices. Finally, active state involvement at both structural and local levels is crucial, engaging in a dialogue on the vulnerabilities of Roma refugees informed by the experiences and practices of civil society groups.

## Czech Republic

### *Legal Framework*

The system of temporary emergency accommodation involves state, regional, and non-profit organisations providing lodging. Refugees granted temporary protection can choose from these options, with accommodations determined based on capacity, family considerations, and special needs. Solidarity accommodation, where refugees stay with Czech residents, is also widely utilised.

The legislative framework, known as Lex Ukraine, comprises acts regulating the legal status, social security, and access to education for Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic. Temporary protection is granted to those displaced from Ukraine, with the possibility of extension, allowing access to employment, education, and social benefits. Accommodation is provided through humanitarian centres, and financial assistance is available based on individual circumstances.

Key legislative changes within Lex Ukraine, effective July 1, 2023, impose restrictions on using certain buildings for accommodation.<sup>13</sup> Free accommodation is limited to 150 days, and refugees exceeding this period may need to arrange paid accommodations. Vulnerable persons and those

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<sup>13</sup> For detailed information on Lex Ukraine and practical guidance, resources are available on [migraceonline.cz](https://migraceonline.cz) and the Ministry of the Interior's official website.

in emergency accommodation may have exceptions. Humanitarian benefits are adjusted based on age, length of stay, and income considerations, with specific criteria outlined for eligibility.

### *Findings*

**Housing:** The housing situation for long-term residing Roma refugees in the Czech Republic is characterised by various types of accommodations, with rented dormitories being the most prevalent. These dormitories, often located on the outskirts of cities, present challenges such as limited access to essential services. Solidarity households, a mix of accommodations, and emergency housing are also common, with exemptions for vulnerable persons from accommodation limits. Despite these options, the movement of Roma refugees within the Czech Republic is marked by a significant trend of long-term residents leaving, motivated by factors such as disillusionment, limited employment opportunities, homesickness, and a perceived lack of acceptance by the host society. Case studies in Luby and Krátonohy shed light on Roma refugees' diverse experiences and challenges. While individual rental accommodation is rare, its absence poses challenges, especially in Prague. Overall, the housing situation calls for attention to mobility issues and the need for long-term solutions to ensure the well-being of Roma refugees.

**Employment:** The employment status of Roma refugees in the Czech Republic is complex, with challenges and perspectives outlined through interviews with non-profit organisations and Roma refugees. Barriers to employment include low qualifications, language barriers, and employers' reluctance to hire Roma individuals. Roma women face additional obstacles, such as limited support tools, childcare options, and opportunities for improving qualifications. Despite the recognised importance of employment for autonomy and integration, persistent unemployment among Roma refugees is identified as a pressing issue. The report emphasises the need for long-term efforts to address multifaceted challenges, focusing on improving qualifications, literacy, and motivation for employment. The employment section underscores the urgency of comprehensive strategies to facilitate the integration of Roma refugees into Czech society.

**Education:** The educational situation of Roma refugees in the Czech Republic is influenced by various factors, as outlined through insights from non-profit organisations and interviews with Roma refugees. Challenges include language barriers, capacity constraints, and low parental motivation, mainly linked to the socio-economic status of Roma refugee parents. Non-profit organisations are crucial in addressing these challenges through various support services and initiatives, including language courses, adaptation groups, and educational support. The report highlights the importance of addressing school attendance, literacy challenges, and parental motivation issues. Recommendations focus on unified approaches and capacity enhancement to ensure the educational well-being of Roma refugee children.

**Media Reporting:** The media reporting on Roma refugees in the Czech Republic remains sporadic, often overshadowed by the broader coverage of the Ukrainian crisis and refugees. The majority of society's view is influenced by political statements, leading to polarisation and visible resentment in municipalities where Roma refugees are accommodated. The Czech Roma community exhibits a bipolar approach, affected by media-known conflicts, with efforts by some



non-profit organisations to demystify conflicts and de-escalate tensions. Despite the decreasing number of Ukrainian refugees, the report emphasises the need for intercultural dialogue in Czech society to prevent social tension. De-escalation efforts by political officials and the media are considered essential, along with the recognition of the diversity among Ukrainian refugees, including Roma refugees.

**Antigypsyism and Discrimination:** The section on Antigypsyism and Discrimination reveals the state's broad, homogeneous treatment of Ukrainian refugees, with challenges in ethnic identification and a lack of specific support for Roma refugees. Non-profit organisations engage with Roma refugees through varied activities and services, with different levels of awareness and past engagement. Challenges in ethnic identification persist, and there is a notable absence of financial resources exclusively allocated for Roma refugees. The report calls for recognising diversity among Ukrainian refugees and recommends a unified methodological approach to address the needs of Roma refugees effectively. Opposition to segregation, mobility support, and enhanced support for employment motivation are key recommendations.

#### **Box -- Roma Refugee Dynamics in the Czech Republic: Assessing Positive and Negative Practices**

The Czech Republic, in conjunction with Poland and Slovakia, confronts an unprecedented refugee crisis, serving as a litmus test for state and non-state institutions. While several positive aspects have emerged, including the adaptability and expertise of non-profit entities, mainly in collaborating with Roma refugees, notable challenges underscore the complex nature of the situation.

Positive elements encompass non-profit organisations' commendable speed and adaptability, showcasing the Czech Republic's third sector's superior flexibility and individual expertise compared to state institutions. Noteworthy is the quick adaptation of many social assistance service providers to engage with Roma refugees, leading to valuable partnerships and knowledge transfer between Roma/pro-Roma organisations and most non-profit organisations. The establishment of these partnerships and the shared experiences are poised to play a pivotal role even after the conclusion of the Ukrainian crisis.

The arrival of Roma refugees has underscored the crucial role played by non-profit organisations working with the Roma community for an extended period. The contribution of these organisations has proven instrumental, filling gaps where the state apparatus might falter and garnering greater respect and recognition for Roma and pro-Roma non-profit organisations. Additionally, the Ukrainian crisis has facilitated a better understanding of non-profit organisations' financing systems and enhanced comprehension of their diversity by state authorities. Initial misconceptions about the work of Czech non-profit organisations, including those working with the Roma, have gradually been corrected as the crisis unfolded.

Furthermore, the Czech Republic witnessed remarkable solidarity among its inhabitants, including the Czech Roma population. Citizens demonstrated significant generosity by donating



material and financial aid to refugees, particularly benefiting Roma refugees. This collective response exemplifies a positive societal reaction to the crisis.

However, the narrative is not devoid of losses and negative practices. A prevalent issue is the disturbingly frequent occurrences of racism and hostility, especially towards Roma refugees, often originating from state institutions. These instances reveal deeply rooted societal challenges that have become more visible during the Ukrainian crisis. Ukrainian Roma, due to their distinctiveness and low socio-economic status, emerged as particularly vulnerable targets for racism.

Another noteworthy negative aspect is the state's inability to accommodate refugees adequately. Large-capacity facilities, such as SUZ accommodation, have been criticised for their prison-like conditions. The shortage of accommodation capacity appears to be influenced by the reluctance of local governments, particularly exacerbated by public sentiment that turned against Ukrainian refugees during the municipal elections 2022.

A critical omission is the lack of intensive initiatives to foster positive relations between the majority of society and refugees. The absence of projects addressing this gap and the insufficient allocation of financial resources highlight a missed opportunity to counter disinformation and far-right populists actively.

Moreover, a significant drawback is the minimal readiness of state and local government workers to effectively engage with the specific and vulnerable group of Roma refugees. Insufficient skills and knowledge hamper productive interactions, leading to instances of racism and hostility. The reluctance of some state and local government employees to self-educate poses a barrier to future preparations for working with such specific target groups.

### *Conclusions:*

The report concludes by summarising significant observations, emphasising the challenges faced by Roma refugees in the Czech Republic. The majority of Roma refugees use the country as a transit route, and the decreasing number of Ukrainian refugees has led to reduced financial support. The absence of specific financial resources for Roma refugees, challenges in ethnic identification, and limited engagement from state institutions underscore the need for targeted interventions. The risks faced by long-term residing Roma refugees, including employment, education, and mobility issues, cannot be ignored. The report calls for urgent attention to ensure the well-being and integration of Roma refugees in the Czech Republic.

### *Recommendations:*

The recommendations section provides a comprehensive set of actions based on the report's findings. Key recommendations include recognising the diversity among Ukrainian refugees, adopting a unified methodological approach, opposing segregation, and supporting mobility.

Intensified efforts to motivate Roma refugees for employment, prioritise school attendance, and promote intercultural dialogue are emphasised. Good practices, such as comprehensive support programs provided by NGOs, are highlighted as effective models. The report underscores the importance of addressing challenges related to employment, education, and mobility for successfully integrating Roma refugees in the Czech Republic.

## Romania

### *Legal framework*

In response to the armed conflict in Ukraine, Romania has implemented a series of crucial legal measures. Law 122, enacted on May 4, 2006, establishes the legal framework for foreigners seeking international protection, including procedures for granting, terminating, and revoking protection. Ordinance 15, issued on February 27, 2022, complements this law by addressing support and humanitarian assistance for foreign citizens affected by the conflict. Government Decisions 367/2022, 337/2022, and 336/2022 establish conditions for temporary protection, gratuities for transport, and reimbursement mechanisms for hosting expenses, respectively. Emergency Ordinance 20, issued on March 7, 2022, ensures access to medical, educational, housing, and protection services for those fleeing the war. Other legal measures include Government Decision 315/2022 for accommodation and financial support, an Emergency Ordinance amending the Air Code, Ministry of Education Order 3325/2022 facilitating educational recognition, Government Emergency Ordinance 100/2022 implementing a National Plan of Measures, and Decision 368/2023 specifying lump sum provisions. Lastly, Emergency Ordinance 80/05.10.2023 amends support provisions, ensuring lump sum provisions for families and individuals until March 31, 2024.

Legal changes, particularly related to support for those with temporary protection from the Romanian state, have influenced the number of Ukrainian residents in Romania, decreasing from 116,000 in February to 85,276 by October 20, 2023. Of 145,953 Ukrainians with temporary protection, 55,932 received cash assistance in 2023 and 43,129 in 2022. Up to 5% of these refugees, approximately 3,000–4,000 people, are of Roma origin, according to the Roma civil society. Initially, state support covered living costs, but challenges arose after the implementation of Decision no. 368/2023 on May 1, 2023, leading to increased difficulties for Ukrainian refugees, including Roma, in Romania. Some have opted to return to Ukraine or relocate to other EU states. Legal decisions made by European institutions and the Romanian government since February 2022 have significantly shaped the current situation.

### *Findings*

Romania has implemented a multifaceted support system for Ukrainian refugees in response to the conflict, involving both state institutions and civil society organisations. State-initiated programs include housing and food support, with changes to the 50/20 program causing financial challenges for families. Despite the extension of protection status until 2025, the reduction in funds and delays in state payments have led some Roma families to seek refuge in Western Europe.

or return to Ukraine. State institutions also fund social canteens, shelters, and medical services, while employment offices assist refugees in finding jobs.

Civil society organisations, especially those supporting the Roma community, have been at the forefront of initiatives for Ukrainian refugees. Despite financial constraints, these organisations continue efforts in housing and food access, operating shelters, information points, and donation programs. Persistent services include medical, educational, and counselling support, addressing immediate and long-term needs. Online platforms contribute to communication and information dissemination. Individual contributions have been substantial, with citizens mobilising through social media for donations and offering accommodations. Volunteering remains a crucial aspect, with individuals dedicating time and skills under the coordination of NGOs or public institutions.

**Housing:** In the early stages of the conflict, Ukrainian refugees sought shelter through self-organised efforts by individual Romanian citizens, primarily facilitated online. However, Roma refugees encountered housing challenges, facing prejudiced attitudes that reflected an antigypsyist sentiment among some non-Roma individuals.

Despite these biases, positive instances occurred where Roma refugees were warmly welcomed into non-Roma households, and tourism facility owners hosted them in various locations. In Bucharest, Roma families found accommodation in rented apartments with employment assistance from NGOs. Nevertheless, the prevalent antigypsyist sentiment often led to housing in public facilities managed by municipalities or NGOs, offering temporary solutions without long-term plans.

The 50/20 program, initially perceived as beneficial for Roma families, underwent government changes, including reduced support amounts and a shortened period of four months. Late state payments resulted in some individuals facing homelessness, with challenges in covering housing costs after the initial state-supported period. Overall, the altered program created significant pressure on migrant families, emphasising the need for sustainable solutions in the face of evolving circumstances.

**Education:** The educational challenges faced by Roma refugee children in Romania highlight a complex situation. While theoretically entitled to education, practical application has been challenging, particularly in smaller towns. Integration into the school system has been relatively smooth in some cases, with Roma children participating in online classes alongside their Ukrainian peers or observing as attendees. However, a significant number of Roma children have been unable to access education due to various factors, including unstable housing, the unpreparedness of the Romanian school system, language barriers, and parental apprehensions.

Many Roma refugee children have been entirely deprived of educational activities since the beginning of the conflict. Although remote learning could have been an alternative, the lack of access to essential tools like computers has hindered their participation in online classes. Conversations with Roma families emphasise the need for support to facilitate their children's attendance in schools and kindergartens. Assistance is required for online schooling, especially

since parents often face literacy challenges, and language support is crucial due to difficulties in understanding Ukrainian. The evident need for a Roma assistant teacher further underscores the situation's complexity.

**Employment:** Ukrainian citizens can work in Romania without a work permit, benefiting from extended residence rights for work purposes. Since the conflict began, over 6,900 Ukrainians have been employed in Romania, with numerous employers willing to hire. The Municipal Agency for Labor Force in Bucharest facilitates job information at the Romexpo refugee centre through the "Telegram" platform.

Job opportunities for Ukrainian refugees predominantly involve manual labour, such as sorting, gardening, construction, kitchen work, or cleaning roles for women. However, discrimination against Roma refugees persists, resembling challenges faced by the local Roma population. Instances of discrimination often occur during in-person meetings, impacting employment decisions. The lower level of education among Ukrainian Roma refugees acts as a barrier, limiting their eligibility for higher-paying positions.

**Health care:** The healthcare situation for Ukrainian refugees in Romania under temporary protection reveals significant challenges, particularly for Roma refugees. The theoretical entitlement to healthcare services akin to insured Romanian citizens is hindered by language barriers and prevailing antigypsyist prejudices, making access difficult. The strained healthcare system, exacerbated by the increased refugee numbers, necessitates the crucial role of Roma aids and volunteers in facilitating medical services, including doctor visits and medication procurement.

Roma refugees, especially the elderly, women, and children, face pronounced healthcare needs, with instances of serious conditions like tuberculosis and HIV presenting challenges in securing essential medications. The psychological impact of war and escape adds to the demand for mental health support, further complicated by refugees' distrust of institutions and language-cultural disparities.

Data from the Ministry of Health illustrates the substantial impact of the refugee influx on medical units, with specific figures for citizens from Ukraine but lacking detailed information about Roma refugees. Reports highlight difficulties in accessing information about healthcare services, leading to instances where pregnant women, including Roma, return to Ukraine for childbirth due to incomplete or hard-to-find details on clinics and doctors in Romania.

**Media reporting:** Media attention on the Ukrainian Roma refugee crisis has increased due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, forcing Roma families to flee and seek refuge. This heightened coverage by major international news outlets has prompted global awareness and action. While the general coverage of the Ukrainian war has diminished, articles about Ukrainian refugees, including Roma, continue across various media channels.

However, there remains a notable lack of specific coverage on Ukrainian Roma refugees, with only a few news pieces addressing this community. Some media outlets focus on human interest

stories within the Roma refugee group, sharing individual experiences to humanise the crisis and evoke empathy.

Despite the positive impact of media coverage, such as increased awareness and support, there are concerns about perpetuating stereotypes and oversimplifying complex issues. Ethical reporting and responsible journalism are emphasised to ensure a balanced and accurate portrayal of the situation, supporting the well-being and integration of the Roma community.

**Antigypsyism and Discrimination:** Instances of explicit discrimination against Ukrainian Roma refugees, rooted in antigypsyism and biases, have been encountered during research and interventions. These instances include verbal, physical, and social violence, both in Ukraine and during the evacuation process. Traumatic experiences, coupled with the effects of war and displacement, contribute to a deep sense of insecurity and distrust among Roma refugees.

Reports indicate that Roma Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Ukraine faced aggression, including denial of train access and forced removal. Law enforcement, including police and army, engaged in surveillance and confrontations with Roma IDPs. In refugee reception centres, racial stigmatisation led to suspicions of false information and unfair accusations regarding humanitarian aid distribution. Additionally, Roma volunteers faced racist attacks from non-Roma volunteers.

Specific incidents at Bucharest Nord Railway Station highlighted racially motivated exclusion actions, with Roma being denied access to canteens available to Ukrainian refugees based on ethnic profiling. This comprehensive view emphasises the multifaceted challenges Ukrainian Roma refugees face, extending beyond the immediate impact of war and displacement.

#### **Box – Nurturing Inclusivity in Romania: Meeting the Unique Needs of Roma Refugees**

Based on our observations in refugee reception centres and housing accommodations, it is clear that Roma refugees highly value connections with fellow Roma individuals who communicate in Romani. They often obtain reliable and valuable information through such interactions, rooted in an intrinsic trust among Roma refugees towards their fellow Roma, influenced by their collective experiences of significant antigypsyism in Ukraine. This, coupled with war-induced trauma, makes them particularly cautious in their new surroundings.

When Roma individuals offer assistance, they are typically met with gratitude and relief from these refugees. Given instances of prejudice and unwelcoming behaviour from non-Roma personnel at reception centres and other non-Roma Ukrainian refugees, the need for a trustworthy Roma figure becomes crucial. Creating safe social spaces for Roma refugees, whether at initial reception points or in urban settings where they gather, is essential. This involves strategically employing Roma staff and volunteers who can effectively assist their peers.

It is important not to segregate Roma and non-Roma refugees. When we refer to 'safe spaces,' we mean environments that are accommodating towards Roma refugees and reject discriminatory

behaviours. These spaces should have personnel or mediators from the Roma community to bridge communication gaps and effectively support Roma refugee families.

A comprehensive understanding of the Ukrainian Roma community's unique cultural, linguistic, and social nuances is vital. These intricacies shape their present circumstances and influence their interactions with non-Roma Ukrainians.

### *Conclusions*

Romania's legal response to the Ukrainian conflict includes laws and ordinances addressing protection for foreign citizens, such as Law 122, Ordinance 15, and Emergency Ordinance 20. Despite these efforts, challenges like changes in support programs and delays in state payments, exemplified by Decision 368/2023, pose increased difficulties for Ukrainians, including Roma, refugees in Romania.

The multifaceted support system, involving state institutions and civil society, focuses on housing, education, employment, and healthcare. Housing challenges persist for Roma refugees due to antigypsyist sentiments, with the 50/20 program changes and a need for sustainable solutions. Educational challenges involve barriers for Roma children, necessitating support for online schooling, language assistance, and Roma assistant teachers.

While employment opportunities exist for Ukrainian citizens, including Roma refugees, discrimination persists, limiting job options. Healthcare challenges include language barriers and antigypsyist prejudices, requiring targeted interventions. Media reporting highlights the crisis but lacks specific coverage of Ukrainian Roma refugees, raising concerns about oversimplification.

Instances of explicit discrimination rooted in antigypsyism have been encountered, contributing to insecurity among Roma refugees. Precise mechanisms for financial support are crucial to address the overwhelming challenges volunteers and activists face. Sustained efforts and targeted interventions are imperative for the well-being and integration of Ukrainian Roma refugees in Romania.

### *Recommendations*

In response to the challenges faced by Ukrainian Roma refugees in Romania, several key recommendations emerge from the analysis:

The legal and policy domain should witness strengthened efforts, focusing on implementing comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, expediting asylum and refugee status processes, and providing free legal counselling services to address legal challenges faced by the Roma refugees effectively.

There is a pressing need to launch public awareness campaigns and educational programs in education. These initiatives should promote understanding and sensitivity regarding Roma

children's unique challenges, offering language support and training school officials and teachers to create an inclusive educational environment.

In the employment sector, it is essential to establish tailored job placement and vocational training programs for Roma refugees. Combating workplace discrimination requires awareness campaigns and anti-discrimination measures. Additionally, providing language support and training can enhance employability among this group.

Addressing healthcare challenges involves offering translation services, employing Roma interpreters, and conducting awareness campaigns to combat antigypsyist prejudices within the healthcare system. Mental health support services should be enhanced to address the psychological impact of war and displacement on Roma refugees.

In the context of housing, sustainable solutions need to be developed, considering prevalent antigypsyist sentiments. Advocating for inclusive housing policies that consider the specific needs of vulnerable groups and monitoring changes in support programs impacting housing stability are crucial.

Regarding media reporting, there is a need for responsible journalism that avoids perpetuating stereotypes and oversimplifying complex issues. Collaborating with media outlets to share diverse stories that humanise the experiences of Roma refugees can contribute to a more accurate portrayal.

To combat antigypsyism and discrimination, establishing precise mechanisms for financial support for NGOs working with Roma refugees is imperative. Individual support services, including psychological and legal assistance, should be provided for activists and volunteers. Facilitating dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders, including NGOs, government authorities, and the National Council to Fight Discrimination, is essential.

On a broader scale, the establishment of a Cross-National Task Force involving multiple countries can address the unique needs of Roma refugees originating from Ukraine. This task force should prioritise tackling discrimination against the Roma community, especially Ukrainian Roma refugees.

Integration strategies must be comprehensive, involving educational institutions, NGOs, and community centres. Financial support and assistance in various integration aspects are essential for the long-term well-being of Roma refugees.

Lastly, investing in advanced research and data collection is crucial to understanding the evolving needs of Roma refugees. Developing monitoring mechanisms and collecting documented stories can inform policy adjustments and interventions, ensuring a more empathetic and successful approach.

## Moldova<sup>14</sup>

Since February 24, 2022, approximately 40,000 Roma citizens from Ukraine have sought refuge in Moldova, facing unique challenges stemming from low education levels, negative stereotypes, and discriminatory practices. This report provides an in-depth analysis focusing on critical aspects, including the legal framework, housing conditions, employment opportunities, healthcare provision, media reporting and advocacy impact, and discrimination and antigypsism.

**Legal Framework:** Despite establishing a legal framework, including the Temporary Protection Directive, to address the immediate needs of displaced individuals, challenges persist. Roma refugees face difficulties being accepted by Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs), and instances of intimidation and discrimination by authorities and locals have been reported. The discontinuation of the Crisis Management Centre's activity raises concerns about ongoing legal support for Roma refugees.

**Housing Conditions:** While Moldova has set up Refugee Accommodation Centers, including segregated ones for Roma refugees, challenges persist in accessing necessary services. Disparities in living conditions, food, aid access, and infrastructure between Roma and other refugee categories raise concerns about equitable treatment. Overcrowded and unfavourable conditions within RACs, along with reluctance from non-Roma refugees to share facilities, indicate ongoing housing challenges.

**Employment:** Negative stereotypes and prejudices hinder Roma refugees, mainly illiterate or low-educated individuals, from securing employment in the Moldovan labour market. Instances of refusal by administrators or local authorities further exacerbate their challenges. Despite government circulars emphasising equal treatment, Roma refugees continue to face difficulties accessing job opportunities.

**Healthcare:** Access to healthcare for Roma refugees, particularly in Temporary Accommodation Centres, remains inadequate. Revocation of provisions for free primary and emergency health care poses challenges, creating a pressing need for medical supplies, medicines, and interventions. Vulnerable groups, including Roma refugees, face heightened risks due to deficiencies in healthcare provision.

**Media Reporting and Advocacy Impact:** Media reporting has shed light on the vulnerabilities of the Roma community during crises, leading to increased awareness of the discrimination they face. However, challenges persist in translating awareness into tangible treatment and improving living conditions. Human Rights Watch reports underscore the presence of pre-existing biases and tensions among non-Roma refugees, hindering collective efforts.

**Discrimination and Antigypsism:** The Roma community in Moldova faces discrimination rooted in historical prejudices, language barriers, and cultural differences. Instances of intimidation and discrimination by Moldovan authorities and locals highlight the need for targeted assistance and

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<sup>14</sup> data cover only the period until February 2023



protection. Establishing the Roma Task Force aims to address protection risks Roma refugees face, emphasising the importance of cultural awareness in humanitarian efforts to prevent marginalisation and stigmatisation.

#### **Box Navigating Challenges: Roma Refugee Access to Services in Moldova**

In Moldova, the Roma community faces significant challenges due to low education levels, with approximately 80% being illiterate. This lack of education hinders their access to crucial information and tools, making it difficult to meet basic needs and obtain the necessary documentation for accessing available services. In the current context, where legal stay conditions (Temporary Protection) are changing, a pressing need is identified to connect Roma refugees with online platforms for essential services. The illiteracy or low education levels among Roma refugees pose obstacles in accessing official websites for temporary protection or asylum, which require filling in answers and uploading documents. Many are undocumented and uninformed about the necessary procedures, while others have lost their papers during the war. Limited options for information access further exacerbate the challenges. Addressing this new context demands increased efforts to provide accurate information, support Roma refugees in navigating online platforms for requesting temporary protection, and facilitate their access to humanitarian aid offered by various organisations.

#### ***Conclusion:***

The challenges faced by approximately 40,000 Roma citizens from Ukraine seeking refuge in Moldova are multifaceted, encompassing legal, housing, employment, healthcare, media reporting, and discrimination issues. While legal frameworks exist, persistent challenges in acceptance at Refugee Accommodation Centers, housing disparities, employment hurdles, inadequate healthcare access, and ongoing discrimination underscore the need for targeted interventions and cultural awareness to ensure equitable treatment and protection for Roma refugees in Moldova.

#### ***Recommendations:***

Increasing the deployment of Roma mediators is recommended to enhance the refugee support system. These individuals are crucial in facilitating improved access to essential services, ensuring effective communication, and fostering a more inclusive environment for Roma refugees.

In addition, establishing a comprehensive strategic document for refugee response is essential. This document should delineate responsibilities, allocate necessary resources, and outline a robust monitoring framework. Such strategic clarity is crucial for streamlining efforts, preventing gaps in assistance, and maximising the impact of resources deployed in refugee response initiatives.

Gender equality and age diversity should be central considerations in all refugee response efforts. By actively addressing these factors, initiatives can create a more equitable and inclusive

environment for refugees. This includes combating discrimination and actively working to eliminate instances of segregation that may hinder the integration of Roma refugees.

Furthermore, to promote social integration, trust-building activities should be prioritised. These activities can help bridge cultural gaps, foster understanding, and create a more cohesive community. Additionally, vocational training programs tailored to the specific needs of Roma refugees should be implemented. These programs contribute to skill development and enhance economic opportunities, empowering refugees to rebuild their lives with greater independence and resilience.

## Slovakia<sup>15</sup>

Since the Ukraine war outbreak, the Slovak Republic has been actively assisting people arriving across the Slovak-Ukrainian border. Non-profit organisations and volunteers organised at several border crossings to help Ukrainian refugees. The state set up a tent city and added state forces to register incoming arrivals and provide information on support and accommodation options.

**Legal Framework:** The Ministry of Interior aimed to stabilise the situation directly in the registration and passport control process. The assistance and coordination of transport and accommodation was provided through District Offices and later by the Fire and Rescue Service.

**Housing:** The Slovak Republic provided temporary shelter to Ukrainian nationals, including accommodation, food, medical care, hygiene supplies, and access to the labour market. Large Capacity Centres, such as the one in Michalovce, were established to relieve border crossing points. Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia are granted temporary shelter and receive comprehensive support, including access to healthcare, food, education, accommodation, and the labour market. The online application process emphasises applying in the intended EU country. Private individuals offering free accommodation receive a financial allowance, increased as of October 1, 2022. Municipalities facilitate payment from funds provided by the Ministry of the Interior. Local coordination manages transportation to temporary accommodations, with some municipalities offering free transport and mobile operators providing free SIM cards for communication at the border.

**Education:** Temporary Shelter facilitated access to education for Ukrainian refugees. The government and international organisations provided basic financial assistance to those granted Temporary Shelter. To accommodate the rising number of Ukrainian students, the Slovak Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Unicef, initiated the "Support for the Education of Ukrainian Refugees" project. Launched in the summer of 2022, the project aims to actively integrate Ukrainian children into the Slovak education system through various measures, including printed materials, direct school support, teacher training, early childhood education initiatives, and research to enhance integration quality.

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<sup>15</sup> data cover only the period until February 2023

**Employment:** Temporary Shelter allowed Ukrainian refugees access to the labour market, enabling them to contribute economically during their stay. Employers can easily hire individuals leaving Ukraine through a streamlined process facilitated by temporary refugee status. Job offers can be posted on the [sluzbyzamestnosti.gov.sk](https://sluzbyzamestnosti.gov.sk) portal with translation assistance. The Asylum Act grants temporary shelter, allowing employers to hire refugees without additional permits. Ukrainian citizens with temporary refuge have equal access to the labour market as Slovak citizens, excluding state-employed positions. The [sluzbyzamestnosti.gov.sk](https://sluzbyzamestnosti.gov.sk) portal lists 82,103 vacancies accessible to Slovak and Ukrainian citizens. Over 19,300 Ukrainian nationals, constituting nearly 50% of long-term third-country workers in Slovakia, were employed as of January 2022.

**Healthcare:** Temporary Shelter also provided access to healthcare services for Ukrainian refugees, ensuring medical care during their displacement. Foreigners granted temporary refuge in Slovakia, without public insurance or insurance in another EU member state, are entitled to reimbursement for urgent medical care. The Ministry of Health can determine the scope of reimbursed medical procedures beyond emergencies, considering necessary healthcare based on the individual's health condition and expected stay. This includes ambulance services, emergency care, general practitioner consultations, preventive care, vaccinations, and treatments for chronic conditions such as dialysis, oxygen therapy, chemotherapy, and specific treatments. The Ministry may specify procedures beyond urgent care, and reimbursement for medications, medical devices, and dietetic foods is governed by the List of Categorised Medicinal Products, Medical Devices, and Dietetic Foods. In cases where a generic medicine is unavailable, reimbursement is provided for the lowest-priced alternative. Supplementary payments, if applicable, are the responsibility of the individual for whom the product or service is prescribed.

**Media Reporting:** The report does not provide specific details regarding media reporting. Therefore, no information is available on measures related to media reporting in the legal framework.

**Discrimination and Antigypsyism:** There are efforts to assist Roma individuals from Ukraine at the border, providing interpretation services in the Romani language. The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (OGPRC) collaborated with various entities to support Roma families arriving from Ukraine. OGPRC representatives have not documented any discrimination cases by volunteers or civil servants. However, unequal treatment was observed at the borders, notably by Ukrainian border guards who subjected Roma individuals to special lines, resulting in prolonged waiting times. Instances of bias were noted, such as a fire brigade chief in Humenne referring to Roma as economic migrants in the media, later correcting his statement. Ukrainian citizens also displayed reluctance to share tents or travel with Roma families. Despite these incidents, on-the-spot interventions ensured that no discrimination occurred. Ukrainians received more attention and sympathy from Slovaks, while Roma families faced challenges in securing accommodation, although they had no intention of staying in Slovakia. Notably, media attention for the Tirpak family did not translate into tangible help,

highlighting a contrast with the support received by Ukrainians. Additionally, some transporters reportedly refused to provide transportation for Roma individuals.

#### **Box Inequality in Housing Access: Challenges Faced by Roma Refugees in Slovakia**

In the context of racism against Roma from Ukraine in Slovakia, there have been no documented instances of racist actions by state institutions towards Roma. However, signs of discrimination emerged in housing access, with some providers who accommodated separatists from Ukraine refusing to house Roma families. This was exacerbated by the capacity limitations of specific providers designed for smaller family units, whereas Roma families are typically larger. An incident in Humenne, where the fire department head suggested economic motivations for Roma refugees, resulted in an apology. Some Ukrainians also displayed reluctance to share facilities or transportation with Roma, but authorities promptly addressed these instances to prevent discrimination.

#### ***Conclusions***

Roma individuals from Ukraine faced similar conditions as other refugees in Slovakia, with the country primarily serving as a transitional point. Only one Roma family chose to remain in Slovakia for an extended period, receiving accommodation support. The existing regulations still enable refugees from Ukraine, including Roma, to apply for temporary protection and shelter within Slovakia.

#### ***Recommendations:***

Slovakia should strengthen legal protections against discrimination, streamline asylum processes for Roma refugees, and implement targeted initiatives in healthcare, education, and employment to ensure their effective integration. Collaborative efforts involving state institutions, NGOs, community leaders, and data-driven monitoring and media engagement are crucial to addressing discrimination, challenging stereotypes, and creating a more inclusive environment for Roma refugees.