



Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is causing a mounting humanitarian crisis.

In times of crisis, those most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society can suffer disproportionately. **Ukraine's Roma communities are facing a situation where they do not have equal access to protection, humanitarian aid and evacuation.**

In this newsletter, we provide an overview of the history of Roma in Ukraine, their current needs and ways that you can support their protection. **Please see below for fundraising campaigns.**

Activists have compiled a [Padlet](#) providing information and updates specific to Roma in Ukraine. It includes details on Roma organisations, media coverage, fundraising calls and action taken across a range of sectors.

We encourage you to share information on the situation of Roma in Ukraine and stay updated via our social media pages.



Photograph: Yanosh Nemesh/Shutterstock.com

Joint statement

‘History has shown us that in times of war or conflict, the plight of Roma as well as other minorities is continuously ignored. Ethnic minorities are often rendered invisible and further victimised instead of being provided equal protection.’

Roma Support Group has signed an [international statement](#) led by [European Roma Grassroots Organisations \(ERGO\) Network](#) calling on relevant authorities to support Ukraine's Roma communities.

The statement focuses on five main areas and provides recommendations to authorities in Ukraine, governments, world leaders, European institutions and organisations, the media and the United Nations:

- Ensure Roma and other marginalised or vulnerable individuals are granted equal protection and safety when seeking refuge inside and outside of the country.
- Provide equal access to humanitarian aid for Roma, and other marginalised or vulnerable individuals.
- To monitor human rights violations and violence experienced by Roma and other minority groups; and to investigate the reported allegations of discrimination against minority groups by the Ukrainian and/or EU authorities when seeking protection and asylum at the border.

- To not monetise the war against Ukraine to promote inflammatory, racist portrayals of marginalised groups, including Roma.
 - To work closely with Roma civil society organisations and take measures to ensure that Roma refugees and other minorities face no discrimination; and to provide monitoring and practical knowledge and assistance for the respect of human rights at the national level to prevent any human rights violations.
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Background

Roma have a long and diverse history in Ukraine, with the first records of their presence in this region dating back to the 15th century. It is also a history characterised by multiple episodes of displacement and forced assimilation.

During the Second World War, the Nazis occupied Ukraine and the systematic murder of Roma began in the spring of 1942. In the Crimean city of Simferopol, 800 Krim Roma were killed. It is thought that very few Roma survived the Nazi genocide in mainland Ukraine, with only nomadism and the cover of forest helping the few survivors to escape. In 1944 following the Nazi occupation, Stalin ordered all Crimean Tatars and Crimean Romani to be deported to Central Asia as 'special settlers.'

In Ukraine today, the Roma population totals between 200,000 and 400,000, similar to that of the Roma population in the UK. The most numerous Roma communities are situated in the Zakarpattia, Odessa and Kharkiv regions. **The two latter regions are currently under direct military threat and the former is facing an influx of domestic refugees.**



Monument to the victims of the Roma Holocaust from 1941 to 1943 at Babi Yar memorial complex in Kyiv.

Photograph: byvalet/Shutterstock.com

Present-day discrimination and poverty

A [European Roma Rights Centre](#) (ERRC) [report](#) from 2020 provides an overview of the context facing Ukrainian Roma communities in recent years:

‘Many Romani communities in Ukraine live in conditions of extreme poverty, often in segregated settlements or irregular encampments, with little or no access to essential services such as clean water and sanitation, adequate healthcare provision, and quality integrated education.’

Segregation, neglect and abuse in childbirth

In 2018, ERRC interviewed 359 Ukrainian Roma women about their experiences of childbirth. 90% of interviewees were segregated from non-Roma when giving birth, and in Uzhgorod, **Romani women had to pay extra money to access a segregated maternity ward, otherwise they had to give birth in the corridors.**

‘The conditions in the segregated wards were much worse, with limited access to toilets, no hot water, stained bedsheets. In Uzhgorod, Romani women complained that the bedsheets were old and stained with blood.’

Segregation and inequality in education

In Ukraine today, 24% of Roma are estimated to have no education at all, 27% have not completed secondary education, only 1% have accessed higher education, 23% are illiterate and 34% do not speak Ukrainian.

ERRC research has found that **Romani children often study in fully segregated and sub-standard schools**, are not permitted to register in integrated schools, and are overrepresented in so-called 'special education' schools which have adapted curricula for children diagnosed with special educational needs.

Lack of documentation and statelessness

In 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that the stateless population in Ukraine ranged from 35,000 to 46,000. **Either figure makes this one of the largest stateless populations in Europe.** The Ukrainian Ombudsman and Roma rights NGOs have estimated that around 10-20% of Roma in Ukraine are undocumented.

In the current context, thousands of Roma who lack ID documents risk becoming stateless.

Violent anti-Roma attacks

Roma in Ukraine have faced an onslaught of **racist mob violence** in recent years.

In August 2016, local leaders denounced nearby Roma as criminals and demanded evictions, while a mob circled homes, pelting buildings with rocks and trashing a community where many Roma had lived for a decade. By early September, all two dozen Roma targeted, including 17 children, had fled.

In the year that followed, there were at least **8 mass attacks on Roma in the metropolitan regions of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Lviv as well as in the rural areas of Transcarpathia and Chernihiv.**

The Ukrainian state has not provided sufficient protection to Roma from these attacks. The ERRC **has monitored** police violence against Roma over two decades, and has documented incidents which include rapes, beatings and murders, extortion and intimidation at the hands of police officers, who have often colluded with mobs of ethnic Ukrainians and far-right extremists in racist acts of terror and violence.

There are fears that racial violence towards Roma could escalate in the present circumstances with far-right groups taking advantage of the breakdown of Ukrainian society.

The current situation

The current situation in Ukraine and its bordering countries are reflecting the discrimination and prejudice that Roma experience in their everyday lives.

ERRC have visited three reception centres in Moldova housing Romani refugees. They appear to be **ethnically segregated**, with 90% of those housed in each centre of Romani descent, and the remainder of Central Asian and African descent.

These reception centres are overcrowded, often lack washing facilities and people are lacking food, medicine and warm clothing.

Thousands of Roma risk becoming stateless or trapped. People without identification documents are being denied an exit from Ukraine at border crossings in Zakarpattiya. For many Roma, Moldova's open border policy is the only viable option but it appears to be discriminatory. See the personal accounts of Roma who have travelled to Moldova **here**.

Elsewhere, Czech bus drivers have **refused to rescue** Roma refugee mothers and children from the Ukrainian-Slovak border and Czech accommodation facilities have **turned them away**. The New York Times have also reported that Roma are facing **discrimination at humanitarian aid centres** in Hungary.

Romani NGOs are **working at the Ukrainian border** to ensure that Roma have equal access to humanitarian aid and safe passage. Please see the fundraising calls below to support this vital work.

Fundraising campaigns

Roma organisations in Ukraine



Appeal from Volodymyr Yakovenko, Director of ARCA

[Roma Women Fund Chiricli](#) – based in Kyiv with staff in Kharkiv, Odessa and the western part of Ukraine. Currently working to support with evacuation and emergency supplies.

[Youth Organisation for the Support of Romani Culture \(ARCA\)](#) – a Roma youth organisation currently providing help with evacuation and food supplies to families in need.

[Transcarpathian Regional Charitable Foundation "Blago"](#) – a Roma charity in western Ukraine, near the Slovakian border. It works mainly in the area of education and coordinates the [Romani Early Years Network](#) in Ukraine. They are currently facilitating access to humanitarian aid coming through the Slovakian border. They are also working to support domestic refugees travelling to this area.

- To support Roma Women Fund Chiricli please donate to [ERGO Network](#).
- To support ARCA please donate to [ERAC](#).
- To support Blago please donate to [Nadace OSF](#).

ERGO Network – Ukraine: help Roma access humanitarian aid

ERGO Network are collecting funds to **ensure that the Roma community has the same access to humanitarian support as the rest of the population.**

Funds are used to:

- Provide access to transportation, food, medication, accommodation, sanitation kits and other supplies for people in need.

- Help Roma women, children, and the elderly seeking relocation reach the borders of Ukraine with accepting countries.
- Ensure transport and accommodation for displaced Roma individuals, who are not accepted in volunteer initiatives due to discrimination.

Access the campaign and donate [here](#).

ERiac – Support Roma people of Ukraine

The [European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture](#) aim to provide humanitarian help for Roma and other vulnerable victims of the invasion. The funding from this campaign will be used to:

- Provide humanitarian help by distributing supplies, such as food and medicine.
- Support relocation of the most vulnerable community members, in particular women, children and the elderly by providing transportation to safer grounds and shelter.
- Provide facilitation to those crossing the border to neighboring countries by assisting them with documentation issues, transportation and securing accommodation.
- To create and implement rehabilitation strategies in the form of psychological and logistical support.

Access the campaign and donate [here](#).

Nadace OSF – Support the most war-threatened Roma children and families in Ukraine!

[Nadace Open Society Fund](#) are collecting donations primarily for the distribution of material and other humanitarian aid to Ukrainian Roma refugees. Later, they will look to mitigate the consequences of the war.

Access the campaign and donate [here](#).

The three organisations leading the fundraising (ERGO, ERiac and Nadace OSF) are coordinating the use of funds so that they are distributed to all relevant organisations in Ukraine as needed and appropriate.

Roma organisations in Ukraine are reporting increasing numbers of people in need of evacuation and emergency supplies. **The need for financial support is increasing day by day and the donations received so far have proved crucial.**

Roma groups and organisations in countries neighboring Ukraine are reporting that their capacity to provide support is affected greatly by a lack of funding. **Further donations would enable Roma organisations in Ukraine and neighboring countries to provide adequate support.**

An additional fundraising campaign specific to neighboring countries has been launched by Glasgow-based Roma charity, [Romano Lav](#). They are supporting Ukrainian Roma refugees that have fled to Slovakia and Poland. **Access their campaign [here](#).**

Please share these fundraising calls in your networks and use the [Padlet](#) and our social media pages below to stay updated on the situation of Roma in Ukraine. We are working closely with ERGO Network to help broader humanitarian efforts reach Roma.

For more information about Roma Support Group, go to our website and look at the ["projects" pages](#).

We would be grateful if our subscribers could help us to reach more people by using the "Forward" button below to share the newsletter in your networks.



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Views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily suggest that they are in accordance with the trustees of Roma Support Group.

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