



Policy Brief:

Roma Minority Equality in the Humanitarian and Development Interventions and Recovery in Ukraine

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Foundation**

Introduction

This policy brief outlines policy as well as humanitarian aid and development cooperation practices recommendations to promote effective, impactful, localised and Roma planned interventions and policies. The recommendations and lessons learned can be used wider as humanitarian and development work should mainstream minority issues, collaborations and connections across the development-humanitarian and peace work, locally led interventions and localisation in all processes and interventions.

Roma minority and IDPs, especially women and girls, and those who are in unequal and vulnerable positions, are disproportionately

affected by the war in Ukraine. At the same time, many Roma activists act and work daily to support those in need in Ukraine. All humanitarian, reconstruction, development and peace interventions in Ukraine should consider the rights of Roma and minorities in Ukraine in their actions. The collaboration with Roma civil society and activists, who have a long history in the country, is essential to reach the vulnerable groups and make sustainable changes. The Roma civil society should be engaged in the reconstruction plans of the country and their local and international knowledge should be used in the strengthening country's rule of law and access to fundamental and human rights.



The Deaconess Foundation has a history of more than ten years of working in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans countries with vulnerable communities, the Roma minority, returnees, asylum seekers, IDPs, women and girls, and survivors of trauma, violence, and mental distress. Our countries of intervention include Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. Deaconess Foundation has been present in Ukraine since 2019 through development cooperation and humanitarian work interventions. The specific expertise in targeted sectors, long presence in the region, regional approach, and cross-country co-operation and exchanges (for example, Belarus–Moldova–Ukraine–Romania and Kosovo–Ukraine) give the Deaconess Foundation an added value.

Human Rights Vulnerabilities of Roma in Ukraine

It is estimated that about 200,000 to 400,000 Roma people live across Ukraine, especially in the Zakarpattia, Odesa, and Kharkiv regions¹. Approximately 100,000 Ukrainian Roma have fled Ukraine to many European countries and about 300,000 Roma have become internally displaced people since the military offensive against Ukraine that was begun in February 2022 by the Russian Federation.

The main vulnerabilities of the Roma community are the following:

- **Lack of personal identity documents**, especially birth certificates, for a significant number of Roma people. Approximately 30% to 40% of the Roma people surveyed in 3 major cities reported not having at least one of the necessary documents for accessing services². This hinders their access to public healthcare, welfare, education, and humanitarian aid. Lack of documents is also an obstacle for Roma refugees trying to gain access to neighbouring European countries.
- **Severe poverty**, intensified by the war, which makes many Roma dependent on humanitarian aid;
- **Discrimination and prejudice**, which also make them vulnerable to social exclusion, hate speech, and hate crime;
- **Limited access to healthcare**, due to poverty, discrimination, long distance from medical institutions, and lack of identity documents. More than 50% of Roma women reported being discriminated against in hospitals³.
- **Limited access to education for Roma children**, especially those from groups of internally

displaced persons (IDP), due to poverty, discrimination and school segregation, early marriages, and the additional obstacles brought by the war. 'Only 73% of Roma boys and 75% of girls attend elementary school (ages 6–10) and 65% of boys and only 59% of girls continue education in high school (ages 11–15)⁴;

- **Limited education, skills, and poor access to employment** among the adult Roma population—especially women, due to poverty, long-term structural discrimination, early marriages, and limited employment opportunities in certain areas of the country, as well as other factors. It is estimated that only 38% of Roma people are formally employed⁵;
- **Precarious housing conditions** among many Roma people, or without access to heating. Many Roma people are unable to buy a home due to lack of identity documents or financial resources as well as, in some cases, rejection by the majority population. Therefore, their options are limited to renting a home, accessing social housing (when available), occupying premises unlawfully, or living on the streets or in railway stations. Their access to adequate housing conditions has been further restricted by the war, which brought additional challenges.

Roma women in Ukraine often face additional burdens and are victims of intersectional discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and social status. This increased their vulnerability and the risk of social exclusion.

The war has deepened existing vulnerabilities and increased the social exclusion of Roma people.

1 UN Women, *The Rights of Roma Women in Ukraine*, 2018, p.9, https://ukraine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/Country/Ukraine/ROMA_eng_Final-compressed.pdf, Accessed 15.07.2024

2 European Roma Rights Centre, *Written Comments of the European Roma Rights Centre and Chiricli, Concerning Ukraine or Consideration by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at the 52nd Session (28th April to 23rd May 2014)*., p. 4, https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/ukraine-cescr-march-2014.pdf, Accessed 15.07.2024

3 *The Rights of Roma Women in Ukraine*, 2018, p. 23.

4 *Id.*, p. 26.

5 *Id.*, p. 25.

Ukraine's commitment to Roma and national minorities rights and civil society engagement

Over the past years, Ukraine has taken important steps for the protection of national minorities and the inclusion of Roma people despite the difficult context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war. The Action Plan for the updated National Human Rights Strategy in Ukraine was approved on June 23, 2021 by the government, which includes a series of measures for consolidating the human rights values within society. Meanwhile⁶, the state target program Unity in Diversity has been approved on September 26, 2023 by the Cabinet of Ministers, which aims to establish the conditions for protecting of the rights of national minorities⁷. On 23 December 2023, the National Roma Action Plan in Ukraine was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. In the same year, for the first time in the history of the implementation of the Roma Strategy, Ukraine allocated a state budget for its implementation. The regional and local Roma Action Plans should be developed in 2024. Within this framework, the work must continue and additional support must be granted for the inclusion of Roma people and other vulnerable IDPs from Ukraine.

The state efforts for improving the status of national minorities are being supported by the Council of Europe (CoE), through its Action Plan for Ukraine 2023-2026 and the project "Support for implementing European standards relating to anti-discrimination and rights of national minorities in Ukraine", which aims to

enhance the policies for protecting minority rights in Ukraine, including those of the Roma community and to strengthen capacity of the relevant actors⁸. Other international actors which contributed to these efforts include the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the European Union. Civil society organizations (CSOs) from Ukraine, such as Roma Women Fund Chiricli, Vugledat NGO "Roma", Centre Lacho Drom, Odesa Human Rights Centre and Roma NGO Blago, also played an important role in this process.

Beyond advocating for minority and Roma rights, CSOs also participated in responding to the humanitarian crises generated by the war and the reconstruction process. According to a survey conducted in 2024⁹, Ukrainian CSOs participated in the following activities since February 2022: supporting IDPs, children affected by the war, vulnerable groups (elderly, people with disabilities), repairing schools, public buildings, private households, providing medical aid, supplying medical equipment and drugs, working with local authorities to restore public services, documenting war crimes and protecting victims, addressing the negative environmental consequences of war, protecting women from domestic violence, providing mental health support and engaging in post-war recovery planning with local and national authorities. 133,641 CSOs were registered in Ukraine as of 2023¹⁰.

6 UNDP Ukraine, *Ukraine's government approves action plan for new National Human Rights Strategy*, 25 June 2021, <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/news/ukraines-government-approves-action-plan-new-national-human-rights-strategy>, accessed on 05 August 2024.

7 Ukraine Today, *Cabinet approves Unity in Diversity state program*, <https://ua-today.eu/en/cabinet-approves-unity-in-diversity-state-program/>, accessed on 05 August 2024.

8 Council of Europe, *Supporting the reform of the national minority legal framework and the resilience of national minorities and Roma in Ukraine*, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/supporting-the-reform-of-the-national-minority-legal-framework-and-the-resilience-of-national-minorities-and-roma-in-ukraine>, accessed on 05 August 2024.

9 Chatham House, Orysia Lutsevych, *Ukraine's wartime recovery and the role of civil society: Chatham House survey of Ukrainian CSOs – 2024 update*, June 2024, p. 17, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/2024-06-05-ukraine-wartime-recovery-role-civil-society-lutsevych.pdf>, accessed on 03 August 2024.

10 CSO meter, *Overall situation and state of civil society*, <https://csometer.info/countries/ukraine>, accessed on 05 August 2024.

Recommendations

- 1. Data collection:** Improve data collection mechanisms, with special focus on gathering data regarding the Roma population and other vulnerable IDPs, including disaggregated data, according to gender, ethnicity, level of education, employment status, income, housing, and health.
- 2. Humanitarian relief:** Provide immediate relief to Roma communities during crises, such as food, shelter, and medical care.
- 3. Access to IDs:** Reform the procedures for obtaining personal identification documents, in order to make them more accessible to Roma people and provide additional support and assistance to members of Roma communities for obtaining these documents.
- 4. Psychological support:** Provide psychological support and mental health services to Roma people and other vulnerable IDPs, especially for responding to war trauma, promoting reconciliation, and community well-being.
- 5. Nexus approach:** Interventions aimed at improving the situation of the Roma community should combine humanitarian support, building peaceful interethnic relations, and promoting development.
- 6. Integrated policies:** Create development policies addressing interconnected areas where Roma people face discrimination, such as healthcare, education, and social services, in order to create a cohesive support network and achieve sustainable impact.
- 7. Access to education:** Monitor the enforcement of the Law on Education, which mandates that Roma children are not denied access to mainstream schools due to discrimination, lack of identity documents, poverty, or other obstacles.
- 8. Tailored education:** Create educational programmes specifically tailored for Roma adults, which emphasise practical skills and are consistent with their cultural values and in line with the job market, in order to strengthen the link between education and employment.
- 9. Housing support:** Set up a programme of social housing for Roma people and other vulnerable groups and provide financial support for rebuilding homes that were damaged by the war.
- 10. Long-term commitment:** Develop long-term strategies for addressing the social exclusion of Roma people, such as scholarships for Roma children and microfinance for small businesses, fostering independence and community growth.
- 11. Localisation:** Consult Roma communities in the design of aid programmes and policy-making. Their input is essential to ensure that the proposed actions respond to the needs of this group and to encourage ownership. Community leaders and local NGOs play a pivotal role in mediating between service providers and community members.
- 12. Multi-stakeholder engagement:** Engage NGOs, government agencies, international organisations, local mediators, and other relevant actors working with Roma communities in research and policy-marking, in order to document needs, share complementary expertise, build trust, and ensure sustainable impact.

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Mrs. Julia Kondur, President of the Roma women's Foundation "Chiricli" in Ukraine visited the Deaconess Foundation in September 2024.



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