

# ODIHR Report on the Human Rights Situation of Internally Displaced Roma People in Ukraine



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## Introduction

The Russian Federation’s military attack in Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, has triggered widespread civilian suffering, as documented by ODIHR’s reports on violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.<sup>1</sup> This has led to a large number of displaced populations, including Roma, both within Ukraine and abroad. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports<sup>2</sup> that, as of September 2023, there are over 6.2 million refugees from Ukraine worldwide, including 5.8 million refugees in Europe. As part of the mass flow of displaced people, Roma have experienced discriminatory and intolerant treatment at different stages of the displacement cycle. Roma women have been particularly affected by manifestations of discrimination based on their intersectional identities.

In line with the mandate provided by the [Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area](#)<sup>3</sup>, ODIHR organized a human rights monitoring visit to Uzhhorod, Ukraine, from 2 to 7 November 2022. The aim was to investigate alleged human rights violations and, in particular, discrimination experienced by Roma since 24 February 2022. A monitoring team gathered mainly first-hand information from Roma individuals who had been subject to forced displacement within the country.

This report summarizes the testimonies of internally displaced Roma people (Roma IDPs), the observations of the monitoring team, analysis by civil society and the results of desk research on the human rights situation of Roma IDPs since the beginning of the Russian Federation’s military attack in Ukraine. The majority of the evidence was collected through interviewing Roma women and men — most of them had been forced to flee from the occupied regions of Ukraine.

The monitoring team documented the lived experiences of different groups of Roma IDPs, such as undocumented people, the elderly, youth, people with disabilities and parents with children. This was complemented by the observations of Roma civil society representatives who ODIHR interviewed in January 2023. The information was supported by further desk research looking at a variety of sources i.e., reports and other documentation by national human rights institutions, international human rights structures, civil society and mass media. Finally, ODIHR contacted relevant authorities for information on a number of specific issues.

ODIHR adopted a trauma-informed approach, guided by the principles of ‘do no harm’, informed consent and awareness of the risks of re-traumatization. Bearing this in mind, and

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<sup>1</sup> [Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 20 July 2022; [Second Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 14 December 2022; [Third Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 17 July 2023; [Fourth Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 12 December 2023.

<sup>2</sup> [Operational Portal Data](#), Ukraine Refugee Situation, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 26 September 2023.

<sup>3</sup> [OSCE Ministerial Council, Decision No. 3/03](#), “Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area”, Maastricht, 1 and 2 December 2003.

potential threats to their security, the names, initials and other information that could identify interviewees have not been revealed. ODIHR wishes to thank all the interviewees for sharing their testimonies and civil society for their critical input.

## **Executive summary**

The findings of the report suggest that anti-Roma attitudes remain the key cause of the obstacles faced by Roma people who have been displaced by the Russian Federation's military attack in Ukraine. The findings also suggest that some stakeholders were more likely to perceive and treat Roma IDPs as if they deserved less support. ODIHR monitoring identified that Roma have directly experienced and/or witnessed situations of discrimination, biased treatment and intolerance, as well as reported incidents of violence. These situations occurred throughout the different stages of their displacement journey — from the outbreak of the armed conflict and evacuation, when securing housing and temporary shelter, as well as when trying to access humanitarian aid, information, documentation, facilities for IDPs, education and employment.

Lack of documentation among Roma communities in Ukraine has been a persistent and pressing issue in recent decades, despite the state's commitments to address it. In turn, undocumented or stateless Roma people have been particularly vulnerable during the displacement process, facing major challenges in accessing shelter and accommodation, services and entitlements for IDPs, humanitarian aid and employment opportunities in western regions of Ukraine. This also limited their ability to leave the country and look for safe shelter elsewhere.

Displaced Roma women found themselves in an even more difficult position due to their intersecting vulnerabilities. They often faced a heightened risk of gender-based violence, exploitation and human trafficking. Roma children have had limited access to online schooling and other educational programmes since the outbreak of the armed conflict.

Displaced Roma often experience significant obstacles to accessing the protection they are entitled to and there are several reports of limited access to humanitarian assistance.

Given the difficult situation many Roma find themselves in since the outbreak of the Russian Federation's military attack in Ukraine, this report recommends that national authorities should ensure tailored measures to alleviate the specific difficulties faced by Roma — in accessing shelter, humanitarian assistance, personal documentation, facilities for IDPs, education, employment and public information.

## **Internally displaced Roma people**

Amidst the widespread suffering of the civilian population and serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, the armed conflict continues to pose serious and complex challenges for the Ukrainian population, including for displaced people. At the same time, Roma people often face additional obstacles. The International

Organization for Migration estimates that there are 5.4 million IDPs in Ukraine, as of July 2023.<sup>4</sup> The number of Roma IDPs remains uncertain, but some sources suggest that 100,000 Ukrainian Roma have been forced to flee their homes.<sup>5</sup>

In December 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees conducted a survey on the situation of IDPs in Ukraine. They noted the key issues facing IDPs including: poor sources of income; dependency on social benefits, pensions and humanitarian assistance; lack of decent employment opportunities; poor or no childcare arrangements; and the lack of affordable housing. For example, 70 per cent of interviewed IDPs noted that their income had been insufficient to meet their basic needs over the last three months. Only 29 per cent of respondents of working age were employed at the time of the survey, and just 18 per cent specified a salary as their main source of income.<sup>6</sup> On housing, 46 per cent of respondents were renting, 47 per cent were hosted by family or other IDPs and five per cent were living in collective centres. Nearly half (47 per cent) of those surveyed described their housing conditions as worse than their permanent residence.<sup>7</sup>

In May 2023, the “Chiricli” Roma Women’s Fund, an international charitable organization, published a study on the needs of Roma IDPs in Dnipropetrovsk, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhzhia and Odesa regions in the context of the armed conflict. The findings show that accommodation was the biggest difficulty for most respondents (66 per cent), followed by employment (60 per cent) and lack of income (51 per cent). In terms of accommodation, 32 per cent of those surveyed were able to afford to rent an apartment, 27 per cent were hosted by friends or relatives, 20 per cent were using temporary accommodation provided by the community or volunteers and 6 per cent were living in collective centres. As for employment, 25 per cent said they had a job. Of those looking for work, 45 per cent noted that discrimination, lack of education and skills were the main barriers.<sup>8</sup>

Information and data about the socio-economic situation of displaced Roma in Ukraine is limited. However, the testimonies collected by ODIHR from Roma IDPs and civil society suggest that figures given above may be much worse for Roma people.<sup>9</sup> This may be due to the extreme poverty, inadequate living conditions and omnipresent discrimination and prejudice they often faced before 24 February 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> [Regional Ukraine Response Situation Report](#), International Organization for Migration, April 2023, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> [Roma From Ukraine: A Year of War and Flight](#), ADC Memorial, 7 April 2023; according to the official 2001 census, there are 47,587 Roma living in Ukraine, out of a total population of c. 48.5 million. Other sources suggest that the numbers are much higher, ranging from 120,000 to 400,000 Roma in Ukraine, see [Situation Assessment Report on Roma in Ukraine and the Impact of the Current Crisis](#), OSCE/ODIHR, August 2014, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> [Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, February 2023, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> [Соціологічного дослідження оцінки потреб ромів-ВПО](#) (Sociological Survey on the Needs Assessment of Roma IDPs), “Chiricli” Roma Women’s Fund, May 2023, pp. 6, 12 and 13 (in Ukrainian).

<sup>9</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022; online interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma civil society, January 2023.

## *Civilian casualties and evacuation*

As of September 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded 27,449 civilian casualties in Ukraine since the outbreak of the armed conflict on 22 February 2022 — 9,701 killed and 17,748 injured. The main cause of civilian casualties is the use of explosive weapons with wide area effects.<sup>10</sup> Reports also indicate massive destruction of civilian objects and infrastructure across the country.<sup>11</sup>

The media has reported instances of Roma civilian killings. In November 2022, a group of 28 Roma people from the occupied territories were shot dead. The circumstances of the act and the progress of the investigation remain unknown.<sup>12</sup> In December 2022, a family of eight Roma people, including three children, was shot dead in Makiivka, Donetsk region. The local authorities announced that three local residents had confessed to the murder. However, the adviser to the mayor of Mariupol, Petro Andryushchenko, declared that the Russian-affiliated groups were behind the murders.<sup>13</sup> Given the paucity of information about these cases, it is challenging to categorize these situations.<sup>14</sup> In January 2023, a missile attack in Zaporizhzhia killed a 25-year-old Roma woman on the spot, injured a woman who was taken to the hospital, and caused the death of a young Roma found under fallen debris.<sup>15</sup>

Displaced Roma interviewed by ODIHR had also experienced casualties among close family members.<sup>16</sup> Many first-hand accounts spoke of damaged or destroyed property due to the hostilities in the occupied regions. Before the evacuation, Roma said they faced security threats, shortages of food and medical supplies, and lack of income.<sup>17</sup>

Since 24 February 2022, along with other groups, Roma had been included in various evacuation and resettlement plans drawn up by the Ukrainian authorities or had fled by themselves. It is not clear, however, how effective these plans were in practice, considering the particular challenges that Roma people face; chiefly lack of documents and obstructed access to economic and social services.<sup>18</sup> In its 2022 country report on Ukraine, the United

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<sup>10</sup> [Ukraine: civilian casualty](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Ukraine website, 25 September 2023.

<sup>11</sup> [Ukraine: Situation Report](#), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, February 2023; [Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 20 July 2022; [Second Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine](#), OSCE/ODIHR, 14 December 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Zdeněk Ryšavý, Gwendolyn Albert, [Ukraine: Russian Army shoots dead 28 Romani people, claims they poisoned dozens of Russian soldiers with vodka](#), Romea website, 27 November 2022.

<sup>13</sup> [Деталі вбивства ромської родини в окупованій Макіївці](#) (Details of the murder of a Roma family in occupied Makiivka), Roma UA website, 29 December 2022, (in Ukrainian).

<sup>14</sup> The National Police of Ukraine ensures investigation of criminal proceedings for offences motivated by bias in line with the provisions of the Criminal Code of Ukraine and the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine. There is no information provided on these cases.

<sup>15</sup> [Трагедія в Запоріжжі – від російської ракети загинула ромська жінка](#) (Tragedy in Zaporizhzhia - a Roma woman was killed by a Russian rocket), Roma UA website, 7 January 2023, (in Ukrainian).

<sup>16</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>17</sup> [Війна в Україні та міграція ромських громад Херсонщини](#) (The war in Ukraine and the migration of Roma communities in the Kherson region), Roma UA website, April 2023, (in Ukrainian).

<sup>18</sup> [Situation of Human Rights in the Context of the Armed conflict by the Russian Federation](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Ukraine, June 2022.

States Department of State emphasized that some Roma could not afford to flee the conflict areas.<sup>19</sup> According to the International Renaissance Foundation, some of those who managed to leave their homes were subjected to discriminatory behaviours during evacuation and in-country resettlement.<sup>20</sup>

The majority of Roma IDPs interviewed by ODIHR noted that they were evacuated from hostility areas on the same terms as other population groups. National legislation prohibits differential treatment on a variety of grounds, including ethnicity, gender and social origin. The National Police of Ukraine put in place targeted actions to prevent conflicts fuelled by bias, to prevent discrimination towards Roma, to ensure safety and security, and to establish a mutual understanding between law enforcement and Roma. The information provided by authorities informs that relevant state entities worked to prevent bias motivated offences against Roma throughout 2022 and 2023.<sup>21</sup> Some IDPs interviewed by ODIHR reported cases where Roma were separated from the main flow of people and placed in separate train coaches. Isolated incidents of violence by members of law enforcement and volunteers were shared with ODIHR by displaced Roma. Incidents like this occurred before and during evacuation and upon arrival in their new location.<sup>22</sup>

ODIHR interviews showed that Roma people with disabilities and the elderly faced additional challenges during evacuation.<sup>23</sup> Roma women faced increased hardship throughout resettlement as they travelled with extended families and cared concurrently for children, the elderly and family members with disabilities.<sup>24</sup> Those without identification documents experienced additional barriers at different stages of displacement. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights flagged the problems faced by undocumented people in travelling by bus or train, forms of transport frequently used for evacuation or relocation.<sup>25</sup>

### *Housing and access to shelter*

The International Crisis Group, in a 2022 report, highlighted that Ukrainian elderly, people with limited mobility, and Roma were among the groups of population facing specific barriers in finding accommodation in safer regions of the country. According to their findings, Roma

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<sup>19</sup> [2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ukraine](#), US Department of State.

<sup>20</sup> [Education of Roma children in Ukraine during the war](#), International Renaissance Foundation, 2023, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Information provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, 15 September 2023. The Constitution of Ukraine and the Law of Ukraine “On the National Police” prohibits differential treatment on the grounds of ‘race’, skin colour, political, religious and other beliefs, gender, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence, language or other grounds. To that end, the National Police of Ukraine takes measures to prevent ethnic conflicts and protect the rights of national minorities and women, namely raising awareness among police officers, training, dialogue with Roma communities and civil society.

<sup>22</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022; [Історії війни: Малина Повольська зі Слов'янська](#) (War stories: Malyna Povolska from Sloviansk), Roma UA website, June 2023, (in Ukrainian).

<sup>24</sup> [Situation of Human Rights in the Context of the Armed conflict by the Russian Federation](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Ukraine, 29 June 2022.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

people were not welcome in communal shelters due to stereotyping.<sup>26</sup> Displaced Roma interviewed by ODIHR also reported such difficulties.<sup>27</sup> The coordinator of a state-owned shelter in Lviv said that Roma IDPs were redirected to Zakarpattia region where they could find better conditions.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, non-state entities often matched state efforts in terms of providing temporary housing for displaced Roma. For instance, a Roman Catholic Church offered shelter to 200 IDPs, including 50 Roma.<sup>29</sup> Another example is the case of the “БЛАГО” Social Centre in Uzhhorod. The centre was established by a Roma activist to accommodate displaced Roma as well as others who found themselves rejected from state and other places of support. In November 2022, the shelter was hosting around 70 Roma IDPs and fewer than 10 non-Roma IDPs.<sup>30</sup>

The founder of “БЛАГО” noted that displaced Roma rarely find accommodation either in state-provided spaces or in private settings. The economic hardship Roma faced before the armed conflict<sup>31</sup> made it harder to access private housing. Additionally, many of those who could afford it, were turned down due to widespread anti-Roma attitudes.<sup>32</sup> First-hand accounts given to ODIHR by Roma IDPs show that they face significant challenges in securing accommodation throughout their journeys from areas where fighting is ongoing to Uzhhorod. Some interviewees testified that they were forced to find refuge at the train station in Lviv without being offered adequate conditions, while non-Roma IDPs were given choices of accommodation.<sup>33</sup>

The State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region reported that 307 budget-funded institutions had been arranged for IDPs to accommodate more than 15,500 individuals, including Roma.<sup>34</sup>

Displaced Roma people without documents and those who are stateless often face greater difficulties in accessing housing since they cannot prove their identities.<sup>35</sup> Large Roma families also have a challenging time in securing temporary accommodation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [Responding to Ukraine’s Displacement Crisis: From Speed to Sustainability](#), International Crisis Group, 26 September 2022, p. 12; interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>28</sup> [Responding to Ukraine’s Displacement Crisis](#), International Crisis Group.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Interview conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with the founder of the “БЛАГО” Social Centre, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>31</sup> [Situation Assessment Report on Roma in Ukraine and the Impact of the Current Crisis](#), OSCE/ODIHR, August 2014; [Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Ukraine](#), UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2 April 2020, para 14; [ECRI Report on Ukraine \(fifth monitoring cycle\)](#), European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 19 September 2017, para 77.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*; online interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma civil society, January 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Information provided by the State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region, 15 September 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Interview conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with the founder of the “БЛАГО” Social Centre, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.



The State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience communicated that the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Facilitating the Realisation of the Rights and Opportunities of Persons Belonging to the Roma National Minority in Ukrainian Society for the Period Until 2030 for 2024-2025 (Action Plan 2024-2025) provides a number of tailored measures to meet the housing needs of Roma. These measures entail the development of procedures that will facilitate the registration of home ownership, the restoration of destroyed and/or damaged houses, the transfer of modular houses to Roma in need of social housing, and the provision of information on access to social housing. In addition, Roma, along with other population groups, have been included in the mainstream housing programmes targeting people forced to flee their place of residence.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Access to humanitarian aid***

The armed conflict has triggered immense humanitarian needs, with more than 18 million Ukrainian people in need of humanitarian support.<sup>38</sup> The United Nations identified multiple forms of humanitarian assistance required due to the armed conflict, ranging from food packages and hygiene supplies to shelter, healthcare services, education support, legal aid, counselling, cash assistance and more.

Given the difficult socio-economic situation prior to the armed conflict, Roma people are more dependent on humanitarian support than other groups. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women reported that displaced Roma experience specific difficulties with accessing humanitarian assistance and Roma women face particular challenges.<sup>39</sup> According to civil society, some humanitarian entities were reluctant, and in some instances refused, to provide cash assistance and aid to Roma.<sup>40</sup> A few of the Roma interviewees described situations where several volunteers in Lviv refused to give them additional meals and other forms assistance.<sup>41, 42</sup>

In 2017, the “Chiricli” Roma Women’s Fund reported that 56 per cent of displaced Roma women were not registered as such, and therefore had limited access to humanitarian assistance and entitlements for IDPs. Among the key reasons is a fear of detention and mistreatment for their lack of identification documents. Roma civil society organizations had been instrumental in providing substantial humanitarian assistance to displaced Roma since 2014 and<sup>43</sup> these efforts were redoubled in light of the ongoing armed conflict.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Information provided by the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, 15 September 2023.

<sup>38</sup> [Ukraine: Situation Report](#), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, February 2023.

<sup>39</sup> [Rapid Gender Analysis](#), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 4 May 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma civil society, January 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>42</sup> [For displaced Roma, the conflict has exacerbated existing patterns of discrimination – and left them without an income](#), Minority Rights Group International.

<sup>43</sup> [Written Comments of the European Roma Rights Centre and the International Charitable Organization Roma Women Fund “Chiricli”](#), 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma civil society, January 2023.

The State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region said that more than 233,000 IDPs temporarily sheltered in the region, including Roma, had received 2,220 hryvnias (approx. 54 euro) per person over a period of three months. This money was provided through a humanitarian programme carried out by the Government jointly with the United Nations.<sup>45</sup>

### *Access to personal documentation and facilities for IDPs*

Civil society estimates that around 30,000 Roma in Ukraine are without personal documents.<sup>46</sup> According to figures collected in 2014 by the “Chiricli” Roma Women’s Fund, 2,500 Roma IDPs could not register as such due to lack of passports.<sup>47</sup>

A 2014 ODIHR report noted that, despite state efforts to address lack of documentation, Roma continued to face administrative barriers. In addition, Roma people often have insufficient funds to cover related costs and no proof of registration at a permanent address.<sup>48</sup> Those living in informal settlements often face limited or no prospects to obtain personal documentation due to their marginalization and exclusion, while Roma women experience more limitations because of their gender roles.<sup>49</sup>

The lack of documentation significantly limits the potential of Roma to exercise their socio-economic rights. Civil society notes that this group cannot benefit from assistance made available to IDPs. Without documents Roma often experience limited access to social services, employment opportunities, accommodation, education, and medical services.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Roma become more vulnerable to forced eviction, abuse and exploitation.<sup>51</sup> The State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region noted that assistance is only provided to IDPs once they are registered as such and receive a confirmation certificate.<sup>52</sup>

The majority of displaced Roma interviewed by ODIHR had no personal documents at the time of their interview. Without proof of identity, the full enjoyment of state-provided benefits and entitlements for IDPs remains a significant challenge. This group therefore often faces limited humanitarian assistance and freedom of movement both in the country and abroad. Serious obstacles were noted in access to the labour market, health care and housing.<sup>53</sup> A survey published by the “Chiricli” Roma Women’s Fund in December 2022 revealed that 42

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<sup>45</sup> Information provided by the State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region, 15 September 2023.

<sup>46</sup> [About 30,000 Roma in Ukraine have no documents. The story of a Roma activist](#), United Nations Ukraine, January 2021.

<sup>47</sup> [Monitoring the human rights situation of Roma in Ukraine](#), International Charitable Organization Roma Women Fund “Chiricli”, September 2014.

<sup>48</sup> [Situation Assessment Report on Roma in Ukraine and the Impact of the Current Crisis](#), OSCE/ODIHR, August 2014

<sup>49</sup> [Written Comments of the European Roma Rights Centre and the International Charitable Organization Roma Women Fund “Chiricli”](#), 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma civil society, January 2023.

<sup>51</sup> [Written Comments of the European Roma Rights Centre and Chiricli concerning Ukraine to the Human Rights Council](#), within its Universal Periodic Review, for consideration at the 14th session, ERRC, November 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Information provided by the State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region, 15 September 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

per cent of respondents (Roma IDPs) have no access to healthcare services due to lack of identity documents or funds to pay for treatment.<sup>54</sup> Displaced Roma with disabilities and pregnant women could not undergo regular medical check-ups, adversely affecting their health condition to a greater extent than other groups of the population.<sup>55</sup>

Roma IDPs interviewed by ODIHR stressed particular concerns about the documentation process. First, poor education makes the administrative procedures more difficult for many Roma. They need tailored assistance and guidance through the process. Second, Roma are often subject to discriminatory treatment which leads to a lack of trust in the authorities. Due to this, the majority of interviewees found it challenging to keep up with administrative proceedings. Third, in view of the armed conflict, the documentation processes have been extended for months and, during this time, displaced people have been unable to benefit from assistance.<sup>56</sup>

The State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region informed ODIHR that more than 155,000 IDPs, including Roma, have received various forms of state-funded social assistance, amounting to 7.4 billion hryvnias (approx. 178 million euro) as of August 2023.<sup>57</sup>

The Ukrainian authorities have passed several legislative amendments to remove administrative barriers and ease access to documentation, including for those who lost their documents because of the armed conflict. To that end, the Law on Free Legal Aid was amended in May 2022. It expanded the list of beneficiaries entitled to free secondary legal aid and included people without identity documents.<sup>58</sup> Between March and October 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers passed several resolutions<sup>59</sup> setting out the procedure for obtaining e-documentation during martial law, regulating passport applications for Ukrainian citizens abroad, and ensuring identification through video conference calls.<sup>60</sup>

National and local authorities also put in place programmes specifically aimed at Roma people without personal documentation. In April 2023, the Secretariat of the Human Rights Commissioner of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, in partnership with the State Migration

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<sup>54</sup> [Досвід внутрішньо переміщених ромів під час війни](#) (Experiences of internally displaced Roma during the war), International Charitable Organization Roma Women Fund “Chiricli”, 17 February 2023, (in Ukrainian).

<sup>55</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma female IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma female IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Information provided by the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, 15 September 2023.

<sup>58</sup> Information provided by the State Migration Service of Ukraine in the Zakarpattia region, 15 September 2023.

<sup>59</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 10 March 2022 No. 248 “Some issues of application of the eDocument during the period of martial law”; Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 7 May 2022 No. 541 “Procedure for the implementation of an experimental project for simultaneous registration, exchange of a passport of a citizen of Ukraine and a passport of a citizen of Ukraine for travelling abroad”; Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 10 June 2022 No. 678 “On the implementation of an experimental project on the issuance of a passport of a citizen of Ukraine and a passport of a citizen of Ukraine for travel abroad to citizens of Ukraine who are outside Ukraine”; Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine from October 28, 2022 No. 1220 “On Amendments to Certain Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on Registration of Identity Documents and Confirming Citizenship of Ukraine”.

<sup>60</sup> Information provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, 15 September 2023.

Service and the Ministry of Justice and support by the Council of Europe, launched a pilot project — Documentation of persons from the Roma national minority (community) and the development of legal mechanisms to simplify this procedure — in Mukachevo, Zakarpattia region. The project aims to ensure that Roma get assistance with obtaining identity documents and confirming their citizenship through simplified documentation procedures. An interdepartmental working group was established to ensure the effective implementation and coordination of the project.<sup>61</sup>

The State Migration Service in Zakarpattia region issued national identification cards to 1,783 Roma between January and July 2023; seven per cent of the total number of documented individuals.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Access to education***

For many years there has been a significant gap in school attendance rates between Roma girls and boys and national averages. For instance, data gathered by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in 2018 noted that 73 per cent of Roma boys and 75 per cent of girls attend elementary school while 65 per cent of boys and only 59 per cent of girls continue education in high school. According to the results of this research, the level of illiteracy among the Roma remains high. Few Roma children attend pre-school, and the proportion of Roma in secondary education is significantly lower than among the general population.<sup>63</sup>

Ukrainian children are all facing complex challenges with their education during the armed conflict. However, Roma children often face particular obstacles in attending school, especially those Roma who are displaced. These obstacles include a difficult socio-economic situation and the lack of documentation; and for girls, gender roles and stereotypes add to the barriers.<sup>64</sup>

Research conducted by the International Renaissance Foundation in 2023 reported that 79 per cent of surveyed Roma IDPs enrolled their children in school.<sup>65</sup> This data seems to contradict what Roma IDPs reported to ODIHR — many of those interviewed said that their children had not properly attended classes, including online, since their displacement.<sup>66</sup> The key problems were a lack of devices to connect remotely, housing instability and security threats. Most interviewees had not registered their children with their local school due to a shortage of places and deeply rooted discrimination.<sup>67</sup> There are organized classes for displaced Roma children at the “БЛАГО” Social Centre, yet but education is not happening regularly and its quality remains problematic.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Information provided by the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, 15 September 2023.

<sup>62</sup> Information provided by Zakarpattia region Military Administration, 15 September 2023.

<sup>63</sup> [The Rights of Roma Women in Ukraine](#), UN Women, 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>65</sup> [Education of Roma children in Ukraine during the war](#), International Renaissance Foundation, 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>67</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with female Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>68</sup> Observations by the ODIHR monitoring team.

The Zakarpattia region Military Administration reported that the local authorities ensured access to pre- and secondary school education for Roma children, taking into account their temporary location as well as providing psychological support to help their inclusion in the educational process.<sup>69</sup>

### **Access to employment**

Before 24 February 2022, the employment rate among Roma in Ukraine ranged from 22<sup>70</sup> to 38 per cent<sup>71</sup>. The figures for Roma women are thought to be much lower.<sup>72</sup> Roma often experience prejudice in the labour market, while those without documentation and women face greater difficulties in securing jobs. The armed conflict has worsened the prospects for Roma people to earn a living and has exacerbated the existing challenges they face in labour market.<sup>73</sup>

Roma IDPs interviewed by ODIHR, both women and men, have experienced a reduction in income-generating activities following the outbreak of hostilities in February 2022 and their consequent displacement. Some female interviewees reported unsuccessful attempts to access job opportunities in Uzhhorod, including in the informal economy where no specific skills were required.<sup>74</sup> Employment rates are typically lower during an armed conflict, but the Roma population continues to face additional challenges, from bias and unequal treatment.

The Action Plan 2024-2025 includes programmes providing a first job for young Roma, in particular for women, and incentives for businesses that create such job opportunities.<sup>75</sup>

### **Access to information**

Roma interviewed by ODIHR highlighted a basic need for information about the ongoing hostilities, evacuation opportunities, available services and aid providers. Many interviewees reported difficulties in accessing trusted and understandable sources of information. Elderly people and those with incomplete education found it harder to access information on the security situation and to understand the content. This significantly hampered their efforts to evacuate promptly, to identify sources of humanitarian assistance, and to keep up with security updates.<sup>76</sup> ODIHR observed that they often needed assistance when going through

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<sup>69</sup> Information provided by the Zakarpattia region Military Administration, 15 September 2023.

<sup>70</sup> [Reyn Ukraine](#), Romani Early Years Network webpage.

<sup>71</sup> [The Rights of Roma Women in Ukraine](#), UN Women, 2018.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma civil society, January 2023; Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022; [For displaced Roma, the conflict has exacerbated existing patterns of discrimination – and left them without an income](#), Minority Rights Group.

<sup>74</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with female Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>75</sup> Information provided by the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience, 15 September 2023.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022; Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma civil society, January 2023; [Making the Invisible Visible: An evidence-based analysis of gender in the regional response to the war in Ukraine](#), UN Women, 2022, p. 24.

various procedures, from getting identity documents or accessing entitlements for IDPs to fleeing abroad.<sup>77</sup>

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women emphasized that inadequate access to accurate information and limited access to technology is a direct barrier to participation, especially for certain groups, including Roma women.<sup>78</sup> ODIHR observed that many of the Roma they interviewed are still unaware of their human rights due to poor access to information.<sup>79</sup> This may increase the risk, in particular for Roma women and youth, of falling victim to human trafficking, forced labour and other forms of exploitation and modern slavery.

## The intersectional dimension of Roma IDPs

It remains essential to look at the situation of displaced Roma through an intersectional lens. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women noted that inconsistent approaches affect the needs and experiences of women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, Roma and other ethnic groups, and LGBTI people.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, intersecting vulnerabilities should be recognized to ensure better responses during the conflict and in the post-conflict recovery period.<sup>81</sup>

The ODIHR monitoring team observed that various groups of Roma women, such as those without documents, parents, the disabled, elderly and youth, are amongst the most excluded and marginalized in the context of the armed conflict and therefore report multiple and intersecting experiences of discrimination and gender-based violence.<sup>82</sup> Those with no identification documents cannot access state entitlements for IDPs. Some women reported hostile treatment by state bodies, particularly if they were unable to read or write.<sup>83</sup> Figures provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women estimate that 60 per cent of Roma women and children in Ukraine have no documentation.<sup>84</sup> ODIHR noted that more displaced Roma women are without identification documents than displaced Roma men.<sup>85</sup>

Displaced Roma women and refugees without complete education have a limited understanding of their rights and therefore become exposed to and experience more complex security threats.<sup>86</sup> In 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that authorities strengthen Roma women's

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<sup>77</sup> Observations by the ODIHR monitoring team.

<sup>78</sup> UN Women, [Making the Invisible Visible](#), p. 26.

<sup>79</sup> Observations by the ODIHR monitoring team.

<sup>80</sup> UN Women, [Making the Invisible Visible](#), p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>82</sup> Observations by the ODIHR monitoring team; [OSCE Ministerial Council, Decision No. 4/18](#) on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, Milan, 7 December 2018.

<sup>83</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma female IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>84</sup> UN Women, [Making the Invisible Visible](#), p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>86</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

awareness of their rights and make available remedies and redress for violations of those rights.<sup>87</sup>

ODIHR's interviews found that the already difficult socio-economic situation of Roma women has been exacerbated by the armed conflict. This has increased Roma women's dependency on humanitarian assistance.<sup>88</sup> ODIHR's monitoring work in different OSCE participating States along with other human rights entities established that, while all Ukrainian women refugees face the risk of human trafficking, Roma women are particularly vulnerable due to the intersectional discriminations they experience in their host countries.<sup>89</sup> This has been acknowledged by the European Parliament, which, in May 2022, called upon European Union Member States to pay special attention to women facing intersecting discrimination, including Roma women.<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusions

The outbreak of the armed conflict in Ukraine imposed significant challenges on the national and regional authorities and the general population. To address the emerging issues, the Ukrainian authorities amended existing legislation and passed new provisions in many areas. Comprehensive programmes were put in place to mitigate the impact of the conflict on the population. In addition, tailored action has been implemented specifically to meet the needs of Roma communities.

At the same time, Roma people forced to flee the conflict areas have reported significant obstacles in securing access to the protection they are entitled to. They have experienced and witnessed situations of discrimination and intolerance at all the stages of the displacement journey — from the outbreak of hostilities and evacuation to when securing housing and temporary shelter, and when accessing humanitarian aid, information, documentation, facilities for IDPs, education and employment.

Certain groups, such as undocumented people, stateless people, women, the elderly and people with disabilities, have been particularly badly affected because of their intersecting vulnerabilities. This is due to the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination they experience because of their ethnic origin, gender, degree of marginalization in Ukrainian society, etc. Displaced Roma women are at greater risk of violence, exploitation and human trafficking.

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<sup>87</sup> [Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Ukraine](#), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2017, para 21(d).

<sup>88</sup> Interviews conducted by OSCE/ODIHR with Roma IDPs, Uzhhorod, 3-7 November 2022.

<sup>89</sup> Internal report (unpublished) from ODIHR monitoring work in OSCE participating States neighbouring Ukraine; [Waiting for the Sky to Close: The Unprecedented Crisis Facing Women and Girls Fleeing Ukraine](#), VOICE and HIAS, September 2022, p. 33.

<sup>90</sup> [European Parliament resolution \(2022/2633\(RSP\)\) of 5 May 2022](#) on the impact of the war against Ukraine on women, section 22.

In light of the protracted nature of the hostilities, displaced Roma are unable to return safely to their homes, so it is crucial that emergency measures are implemented to provide them with basic assistance at the very least so they can live in dignified conditions.

Given the current situation of the Roma people, it is of paramount importance to ensure tailored measures are in place to alleviate the specific difficulties faced by Roma in general and displaced Roma in particular. These measures should also reflect the gender, ethnicity, age and other identities of those displaced, as well as flows as well as taking into account the multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by displaced Roma.

It is also crucial that the Action Plan 2024-2025, post-conflict recovery frameworks and other policies acknowledge the challenges faced by displaced Roma in accessing documentation and information, housing, employment and education and contain actions to address these difficulties. Furthermore, they must ensure accountability for human rights violations faced by displaced Roma and facilitate access to the justice system and redress. In doing so, it is essential to provide the necessary support for Roma and pro-Roma civil society organizations already rendering assistance and support to Roma IDPs in the field.