



RECOMMENDATIONS on ROMA INCLUSION in the UKRAINE REFUGEE RESPONSE | HUNGARY

Introduction.

The conflict in Ukraine has forced millions of individuals to flee their homes, with Hungary becoming a main destination for Hungarian-speakers from the Transcarpathian region, including Roma. While the exact number of Romani refugees from Ukraine in Hungary is unknown, thousands are believed to have fled to Hungary since 24 February 2022.

Many dedicated Romani community organizations have been engaged in responding to the needs of vulnerable refugees and advocating for their rights since the onset of the crisis. However, despite the solidarity and legal protections afforded to refugees in Hungary, the Romani refugee community continues to experience exclusion and marginalization and as a result face additional challenges accessing social protection, healthcare, education, and employment. Furthermore, tailored information and support services are lacking for vulnerable and marginalized groups like Roma.

This note aims to collect recommendations and lessons learnt on the inclusion of Romani refugees within the Refugee Response Plan to address the challenges faced by Romani refugees from Ukraine in Hungary and provide practical solutions to humanitarian actors to improve their access to services. The recommendations were collected through consultation, including interviews with Romani refugees, service providers, Working Group chairs, and relevant stakeholders and through the monitoring activities of partners of the Refugee Coordination Forum in 2022 and 2023.

This note on Roma inclusion in the Ukraine refugee response highlights the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the unique needs and challenges faced by the Romani refugee community. It also emphasizes the importance of building partnerships between service providers, Romani community leaders, Romani-led organizations, and government agencies to ensure the effective implementation and sustainability of the recommended solutions.

Snapshot of Vulnerabilities of Romani Refugees in Hungary.

Protection. The lack of updated and comprehensive data on Romani refugees in Hungary and on their difficulties in accessing humanitarian services hinders effective service planning. Romani refugees without complete documentation or adequate information on the procedures face challenges in accessing the TP status and related benefits. Also, according to RRP partners, some Hungarian-Ukrainian dual nationals, who were residing in Ukraine, face administrative obstacles accessing their rights as Hungarian citizens, and as a result experience difficulties accessing such benefits as subsistence allowance or free health care [[HHC](#), [Voice Amplified](#)].

Gender-based violence. Many Romani women in Ukraine already faced significant gender-based discrimination, limited education and employment opportunities, financial dependency on male family members, and increased vulnerability to protection risks. The escalation of the conflict and displacement further exacerbated their vulnerability and exposure to trafficking/sexual exploitation, dependence on abusive relationships, and other forms of gender-based violence [[Voice Amplified](#)].

Socioeconomic Inclusion: Employment. Romani refugees in Hungary often face economic uncertainty and challenges in accessing the labor market. Romani refugee women in particular often face more difficulties in finding work due to care responsibilities and limited formal education, and typically have access to only low-paying, insecure jobs. They therefore often lack labor protections, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation, job insecurity, and physical harm, with limited social protection, resulting in challenges moving out of institutional housing [Romaversitas].

Socioeconomic inclusion: Education. Enrolling and retaining Romani refugee children in formal education is challenging in Hungary's public education system [Menedék], with difficult coordination between local and national institutions and a lack of harmonization between education and asylum laws [UA Info], leading to unaddressed needs, high rates of dropout, and illiteracy in the Roma population [Romaversitas].

Accommodation. The lack of affordable rental housing and discrimination in the private housing market creates significant barriers for refugees in general to access independent housing, making them particularly vulnerable, and only a few are accommodated through individual offers of solidarity or humanitarian programs [UNHCR]. Romani refugees in Hungary are often housed in institutional settings such as homeless shelters, temporary family shelters, and workers' dormitories that are not designed and unsuitable for long-term housing due to overcrowding, lack of privacy, and necessary facilities [Romaversitas].

Health and Psychosocial Support. Many Romani families faced difficulties accessing healthcare and basic services pre-displacement, due to historical exclusion and segregation, leading to higher rates of health complications and untreated psychosocial conditions [ROR, Chirikli], which have been exacerbated by the conflict and subsequent displacement [Voice Amplified]. Moreover, access to healthcare in Hungary can be challenging, due to complicated administrative processes, and Hungarian citizens who fled Ukraine may be mistakenly denied free healthcare, due to the lack of administrative papers. [Voice Amplified].

Other sources: Chirikli (2022) | EDUA Projekt (2023) | Menedék (2022) | Mirga- Wójtowicz, Talewicz, Kołaczek (2022) | Müller, S. (2022) | OXFAM (2022) | Romaversitas Foundation (2022) | Romea.cz (2022) | VOICE (2022) | UNHCR Data Portal (2023).

Recommendations on Roma Inclusion in the Refugee Response.

R1. COUNTERACT DISCRIMINATION: Proactively address discrimination towards Romani refugees through education, positive examples, and awareness-raising campaigns to prevent negative attitudes and promote a welcoming environment. Integrate anti-discrimination principles into institutional and humanitarian work when dealing with Romani refugees. Ensure effective monitoring and accessible reporting mechanisms to identify and combat cases of discrimination and promote access to justice for victims of discrimination.

R2. PROTECTION: Ensure that all Romani refugees from Ukraine have equal access to protection and support, including legal documentation, housing, healthcare, subsistence support, employment, and education. To ensure this, providing support and adequate information on services available and related administrative procedures is essential.

- Ensure unhindered access to rights associated with temporary protection for Romani refugees, and support access to documents and rights of Hungarian dual citizens who fled Ukraine.
- Improve access to existing specialized services for Romani refugees with disabilities and children deprived of parental care, and support families in precarious situations.

- Provide legal aid and support to Romani refugees in public administration procedures, considering literacy and information gaps.
- Consider establishing a focal point for temporary protection registration that would specifically support Romani families and prevent discriminatory practices.
- Hire Romani professionals as mediators/community workers to support Romani refugees in accessing protection services and as a consequence bridge the gap of trust between Roma, other refugee groups, and the host community.
- Conduct tailored and accessible awareness-raising campaigns, in Romani and Hungarian languages, to inform Romani refugees about procedures to register for temporary protection, associated rights, and responsibilities. Increase information provision for stateless persons, persons at risk of statelessness, persons with undetermined nationality, including Romani, and those who lack documentation by raising awareness on statelessness across communication activities.
- Provide information and support for Romani people fleeing Ukraine with Ukrainian-Hungarian citizenship to enable them to fully access their rights as Hungarian citizens but also to benefit from targeted services and humanitarian assistance for refugees.
- Provide training/information to public services administration staff and service providers to inform them about the rights of refugees according to different legal statuses and to improve the understanding of the specific needs and challenges faced by Romani refugees.

R3. CHILD PROTECTION: Strengthen child protection systems by engaging community leaders, parents, caregivers, and service providers, and building their capacity to identify and respond to child protection risks and concerns. Address the root causes of child protection risks among Romani refugee children, including poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion, and develop targeted interventions to mitigate these risks.

- Facilitate access to identity documents to prevent the risk of statelessness in particular among children who fled Ukraine without personal documents or children born in Hungary.
- Ensure that Child Protection systems are equipped to address the specific challenges of Romani children and to respond to child protection risks.
- Develop and implement tailored child protection programs, with a focus on supporting parents and caregivers and providing technical support to case managers.
- Monitor and ensure that Romani refugee children have access to quality services for children (safe and secure accommodation, education, healthcare, family and child welfare services, including social services for families, mental health support).
- Encourage participation in early childhood education, care programs and nursery/preschool programs.
- Promote the participation of Romani refugee children in decision-making processes and promote their rights to express their views and have these views considered.

R4. GENDER EMPOWERMENT: Address barriers that perpetuate gender inequality, promote inclusive and equitable social norms and values and encourage the participation of Romani refugee women and girls in decision-making processes at all levels, including within their communities and in broader society.

- Develop programs to integrate protection with a focus on prevention/mitigation/response to human trafficking, and sexual and labor exploitation, including forced begging, forced/exploitative/sham marriages (tailored to women, youth, and children).
- Support Romani women's access to justice and support services to prevent and overcome domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence.
- Ensure that national violence prevention and response systems are accessible to Romani refugee women, for example through targeted outreach activities, and tailored information materials.
- Develop gender-specific programs/services, e.g. childcare support, promoting access to jobs that can be combined with care responsibilities, equal access to education and training opportunities for women.
- Set up education and awareness-raising campaigns on women's right and protection mechanisms in place for survivors.
- Ensure that Romani refugee women and girls have access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, maternal care, and information on sexual health and rights.
- Ensure the meaningful participation of Romani women and girls in activities related to relief, recovery, and prevention, as well as in leadership and decision-making processes and develop targeted programs to empower Romani refugee women and girls, including initiatives that promote education, leadership development, and economic independence.

R.5 / 6. SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCLUSION: Promote access to education and employment to enable a successful socio-economic inclusion of Romani refugees in Hungary fostering refugees' resilience.

Education

- Ensure that all refugee children, including Romani refugee children, have access to integrated education, and avoid setting up separate educational systems that could further stigmatize and marginalize children.
- Promote comprehensive state policies and investment in the educational inclusion of Romani refugee children, including access to administrative processes of school enrollment, resources and services essential for meaningful attendance, and the provision of quality education.
- Provide catch-up and after-school programs specifically targeted at reducing the educational and social gap for Romani refugees and facilitating a smooth transition to mainstream classes. Also, encourage the participation of Romani refugees in extracurricular activities and cultural events organized by schools, to promote integration and social cohesion.
- Provide necessary resources to improve attendance and participation in school for Romani refugees, such as school transportation, educational materials, clothing, and basic needs, as needed.
- Address early dropouts through monitoring, assessment, prevention and support activities.
- Engage community mediators and representatives of the Romani community to identify focal points among Romani refugees to facilitate access to education.
- Prevent risks of segregation, bullying, and harassment in education through measures such as cultural mediation and sensitizing school staff.
- Raise awareness among Romani parents and caregivers about the benefits and opportunities of education to encourage school enrollment of Romani children, and work with community members to address any concerns they may have.
- Implement basic literacy initiatives and parenting programs at the community level, focusing on Romani mothers, to improve their own literacy skills and support their children's education.

Employment

- Provide vocational training and skills development opportunities to Romani refugees, with a particular focus on youth and adults who may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to find employment. Ensure that these programs are accessible and inclusive, and that the skills learned can also be applied upon return to Ukraine.
- Develop gender-sensitive labor programs and initiatives that respond to the specific needs of Romani refugee women heads of household, who face challenges in finding work to balance with their care duties. This could include job opportunities with flexible hours or work-from-home options.
- Establish policies and programs that combat anti-Roma discrimination in the workplace. This could involve partnering with employers and labor unions to promote inclusivity and diversity in hiring and workplace practices, as well as providing legal aid and support to workers who face discrimination or exploitation.
- Ensure that Romani refugee workers are protected by social security schemes.
- Engage with employers and business leaders to promote diversity and inclusivity in hiring practices. This could involve developing partnerships with local businesses, hosting job fairs or networking events, and promoting the benefits of a diverse workforce.
- Offer counseling and support services to Romani refugees seeking to enter the labor market. This could include assistance with job search, resume building, and interview preparation.
- Prevent risks of labour exploitation or trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation by raising awareness about potential signs and risks of labor exploitation among the refugee communities as well as about rights and services available for victims.

R7. HOUSING: Design housing interventions that facilitate long-term inclusion of Romani refugees by providing pathways out of institutional housing into (supported) independent housing. Address the immediate housing needs of Romani refugees by providing safe and stable housing, and address housing challenges such as inadequate housing conditions, homelessness, and difficulty finding affordable housing.

- Prevent risks of segregation in collective shelters and evictions without looking into alternative housing arrangements.
- Ensure the implementation of minimum quality standards in the case of shelters and other forms of housing arrangements.
- Raise awareness among stakeholders, including municipalities and local governments, on specific challenges faced by Romani refugees in accessing housing.
- Ensure that Romani families have access to private accommodation schemes, facilitated by humanitarian organizations and/or social housing schemes managed by local municipalities, while promote anti-discrimination messages in the local rental market to ease access of Romani refugees to other private housing opportunities.
- Expand the availability of subsidized housing for refugees in general, with a focus on the most vulnerable categories.

R8. HEALTH AND MHPSS: Quality health and mental health support should be provided to Romani refugees in need and who have experienced trauma and stress before and during their flight. This can help them cope with the challenges of displacement and support their overall well-being.

- Address discrimination in accessing quality healthcare and sensitize healthcare workers to the specific needs of the Romani population.
- Increase outreach campaign to Romani refugees on health rights related to the TP status and address the barriers linked to low literacy levels.
- Provide access to compulsory vaccinations for Romani children.
- Address mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs among Romani refugees by developing targeted programs that promote well-being, address trauma, and address mental health challenges.

R9. COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT: Empower Romani refugees and engage Roma-led organizations as key stakeholders in the humanitarian response. The involvement of Roma civil society organizations (CSOs) is crucial in developing specific measures to address anti-Roma sentiments and discrimination, and in monitoring the results of implemented measures. Frontline organizations, including women and Roma-led community-based organizations, should be financially supported and provided with capacity development to enable the provision of complex services supporting Romani refugees.

- Encourage the active participation of Romani refugees in the decision-making processes by involving them in community organizations and other initiatives that promote their inclusion and representation.
- Create opportunities for Roma engagement and ensure representation of Roma in all their diversity, including marginalized and integrated women, children, and young people in projects that impact their community.
- Include Romani refugees in the integration process as actors of change, by providing leadership training, opportunities for civic engagement, and community involvement.
- Foster collaboration between Roma-focused and mainstream organizations to promote civil society cooperation for the benefit of children, youth, and women's rights. This could include joint projects and partnerships between organizations, as well as sharing of resources and expertise.
- Facilitate the exchange of knowledge and skills between Romani refugees and local Romani communities or Romani community already in Hungary, by organizing community events and networking opportunities, with local Romani experts involved as community mediators or social workers.
- Celebrate and promote Roma culture and traditions by organizing cultural events and exchanges between Romani refugees and host communities. This can help to promote integration and reduce discrimination.
- Employ local Roma experts as community mediators/social workers, to foster cultural integration of refugees.
- Engage in transnational cooperation with humanitarian actors in the Transcarpathia region of Ukraine to effectively address the challenges and opportunities arising from the transnational mobility of Roma.

R10. CONTEXT AWARENESS: Publicly available databases on Romani refugee figures and their specific needs and systematic monitoring of refugees' situations are essential for planning services to meet different needs. This can help ensure that appropriate support is provided to Romani refugees, and the data can be used to inform and monitor policies and strategies to improve their integration and well-being.

- Collect and compile information on protection and access to services through community outreach in Budapest and other counties (Focus Group Discussion with age/gender/diversity lens, key informant interview, stakeholders consultations, etc.) with a focus on specific experiences of Romani refugees, as well as incidents and barriers in accessing services.
- Ensure that Complaint and Feedback mechanisms are accessible and functioning for all refugee groups, including Romani refugees.
- Design need assessments, data collection round tables, and other forms of dialogue tailored to identify the needs of Romani refugees impacted by the conflict.

Conclusions.

Romani refugees from Ukraine are often among the most vulnerable and marginalized populations within refugee communities. Failure to include them in the response can exacerbate existing inequalities and perpetuate discrimination and hamper social inclusion. Mainstreaming Roma inclusion into refugee response ensures that Romani refugees and asylum seekers have equal access to services and resources, including education, healthcare, housing, and employment.

Roma inclusion can help to break down stereotypes and promote greater understanding and acceptance within refugee communities. This can improve social cohesion and reduce tensions between different groups. Mainstreaming inclusion of Romani refugees within existing and planned humanitarian interventions is a shared responsibility of all Refugee Coordination Forum's partners as failure to mainstream can lead to Romani refugees being overlooked or excluded from important decision-making processes, which can further marginalize them and perpetuate their vulnerability.

Addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by Romani refugees and asylum seekers can lead to more effective and efficient refugee response overall, as it ensures that resources are being directed to where they are most needed.

Roma-led organizations are often best equipped to understand the unique challenges faced by Roma communities, as they have firsthand experience and cultural knowledge that outside organizations may lack. Adequate funding allows Roma-led organizations to effectively carry out programs and initiatives that are tailored to the needs of Romani communities. This can include initiatives related to education, healthcare, housing, employment, and more. Roma-led organizations can serve as a bridge between Romani communities and the broader society, helping to break down stereotypes and promote greater understanding and acceptance.

Mainstreaming Roma inclusion into refugee response is not only a matter of social justice but also a matter of compliance with international human rights law, which requires that all individuals be treated equally and without discrimination. It is a necessary step towards building a cohesive and inclusive environment, ensuring the protection of Romani refugee families, children, and women. By addressing the root causes of exclusion and marginalization, promoting equal access to services and opportunities, and creating safe and welcoming spaces for integration, RRP partners are working responsibly towards a more just and equitable inclusion of refugees in Hungary.

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