

REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON PROTECTION AND INCLUSION OF ETHNIC ROMA REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES

Republic of Moldova

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AGENȚIA
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Regional Refugee Response
for the Ukraine Situation



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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This report has been developed based on the valuable insights gathered during the Regional dialogue on the protection and inclusion of ethnic Roma refugees and host communities in Ukraine and countries of asylum held in Chişinău, Republic of Moldova from 11th to the 12th of April 2024.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 11-12 April 2024, during “Amare Amala: Roma Culture Week” in the Republic of Moldova, the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) of the Republic of Moldova, the Agency for Inter-Ethnic Relations, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Roma Task Force, with the support of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the European Union, hosted a regional dialogue on the protection and inclusion of ethnic Roma refugees and host communities in Ukraine and countries of asylum. The dialogue provided an opportunity for government officials, Roma-led organizations and activists, civil society and UN agencies to come together to consider the situation of displaced Roma in the region, the challenges that they face and the opportunities that exist to ensure that their rights are observed, that they have access to critical services, and that they are fully included in discussions and decisions that affect their community.

The dialogue was broken into two segments. The first comprised plenary discussions around the situation of ethnic Roma in general in Moldova, Ukraine and four other countries of asylum, Germany, Romania, the Czech Republic and Hungary. These sessions allowed for participants to better understand both the national and regional context for responding to the needs of Roma refugees, including their situation in Ukraine prior to displacement, as well as their relationship with existing Roma communities in host countries. The second segment, on Day 2, comprised thematic discussions on key issues of concern to the Roma refugee community, including social cohesion and community development, education, child protection and gender equality, and inclusion more broadly, with a focus on documentation, accommodation, and livelihoods. Best practices were identified throughout.

A key point raised by participants throughout the dialogue was the importance of history and context. The Roma communities have long been marginalized and socially excluded in the region. Tens of thousands of ethnic Roma were killed during the genocide of European Roma in the late 1930s and

1940s, with the community suffering discrimination and violence before and after. Each country in Europe has its own history in the treatment of ethnic Roma and its own present-day engagement with Roma communities with regard to rights, inclusion and integration. As well, the Roma communities are diverse, each carrying with them different traditions and cultures. This also affects the discourse that takes place in each country.

The reception and treatment of ethnic Roma displaced from Ukraine following the full-scale invasion of the country in February 2022 carries with it, in part, this history and context in each country of asylum. Complex dynamics are in play in each country, involving multiple actors, including Roma refugees, ethnic Roma from the host country, the government, society at large, the broader refugee community, and the different organizations and agencies providing support. In many respects, the existence of Roma communities in countries of asylum and government and Civil Society Organization (CSO) programmes to support ethnic Roma facilitated the reception and support provided to Roma refugees from Ukraine.

In some locations, however, the arrival of Roma refugees complicated inclusion efforts already underway, inserting a new Roma community into the discussion, one from another country with its own set of needs and capacities.

In responding to the arrival and needs of Roma refugees in countries of asylum, participants throughout the two-day dialogue stressed the importance of including the Roma community in the discussions and planning that take place around the refugee response. Most, if not all, countries of asylum in Europe have Roma-led organizations that work with the Roma community, including Roma refugees, and know their needs and capacities. Community centres and “Roma hubs” designed to provide information and services to Roma refugees and local Roma communities have proven successful in many countries, including Ukraine.

Roma community mediators play a critical role in the refugee response, bridging a cultural and communication divide between government policy makers and service providers and Roma communities themselves. On a daily basis, these mediators advance social cohesion at the local level, facilitating discussion between communities and helping to establish trust and respect between them. Participants at the regional dialogue, however, repeatedly returned to the need to adequately fund Roma mediators to ensure that this important work can be done.

In terms of access to services, as well as to employment, numerous obstacles exist in all represented countries. Many Roma refugees experience discrimination, from government authorities (national and local), service providers, and private actors (landlords, employers).

Lack of information, lack of documentation, lack of skills (for jobs) and lack of trust on the part of the Roma community also pose challenges. These obstacles can be overcome, however, through coordinated and culturally-sensitive actions,

with a number of good practices highlighted during the event.

There was also discussion, however, of some aspects of Roma culture and traditions that carry protection risks for members of the community. Child marriage and gender inequality, carrying risks of gender-based violence, were particularly noted. Participants acknowledged that government authorities have a responsibility to respond to acts that put women and children at risk. To prevent such acts from occurring, and to avoid compounding risks when they do, there must be a dialogue with the Roma community.

Finally, the importance of education was repeated throughout the two-day event, seen by many as key to improved social cohesion, empowerment of Roma refugees, access to livelihoods, and realization of rights. Working closely with parents is essential to increasing school enrolment of Roma children and keeping them in schools, explaining the value of formal education and addressing their concerns about the safety of their children. Informal literacy and accelerated learning programmes can help prepare Roma children for school. Once in school, successes of Roma students should be recognized, both to motivate the children to continue to do well, as well as to dispel negative stereotypes of Roma students that may exist. Positive role models play an important role in promoting inclusion and integration by all.

This report concludes with a series of recommendations drawn from the discussion that took place. It is hoped that the regional dialogue and implementation of the recommendations will contribute to strengthened relations between Roma refugees and host communities, increased participation by Roma refugees in the decision-making that surrounds them, and respect for, and access to, basic rights and services.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Moldova (hereafter Moldova) has been recognized, both regionally and internationally, for its generous and effective response to the arrival of over a million refugees from Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion of the country in February 2022. From the moment refugees arrived in the country, the Moldovan people, local and national authorities, civil society and international actors moved swiftly to ensure that those fleeing Ukraine were able to access protection and services in Moldova.

Among those seeking safety in Moldova were many ethnic Roma, a historically marginalized community in Ukraine and the region. It is estimated that around 100,000 ethnic Roma were displaced from Ukraine as a result of the Russian invasion in February 2022^[1]. According to a mapping conducted in 2023 by members of the Roma Task Force in Moldova, ^[2] more than 1,500 refugees of Roma ethnicity were residing in Moldova as of August 2023. While Roma refugees, like all refugees from Ukraine, were able to enter and find refuge in Moldova with relatively few difficulties, assessments have shown that they face multiple challenges in accessing rights and services in the country, for example in the areas of employment, education and accommodations, as they do in the region as a whole ^[3]. At the same time, some practices and traditions within the Roma refugee community also present potential risks in the areas of child protection and gender equality.

To better understand and address these challenges, UNHCR, the Government of Moldova and members of the Roma Task Force, with the support of OHCHR and the European Union, organized in Chisinau, Moldova, a regional dialogue on the protection and inclusion of Roma refugees and host communities.

The objective of the dialogue was to enhance the inclusion of Roma refugees in countries of asylum by identifying and addressing barriers to rights and services, promoting cultural sensitivity, and raising awareness through the exchange of information and best practices from actors in the region.

Joining the regional dialogue were representatives of the Government of Moldova, local authorities, civil society, UN agencies, donors and international NGOs, as well as representatives of organizations dedicated to Roma rights from Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Germany. Welcoming remarks were made by the Minister of Education and Research of Moldova and representatives of UNHCR, the Roma Voices Coalition and Roma Task Force, the United States Embassy in Moldova and the European Union Delegation to Moldova. During one and a half days, nine panel discussions were held, bringing together more than 100 participants.

This report captures key points of the discussions that took place and the different thoughts and proposals that were put forward. A summary of the recommendations that were proposed can be found at the end of the report.

The organizers of the Regional Dialogue would like to thank all of the participants for their participation in the event and their thoughtful contributions. It is hoped that the event and this report will contribute to collective efforts by governmental and non-governmental partners to ensure that all refugees, including those of Roma ethnicity, are able to fully enjoy and exercise their rights in countries of asylum.

1. [Padmini Iyer \(Oxfam\), Aresel, the Tenth of April, Foundation Towards Dialogue, Further Into the Margins: A regional report on Roma communities displaced by the Ukraine crisis, Oxfam Research Reports \(September 2023\)](#)

2. The Roma Task Force was established in 2022 and is an integral part of the Refugee Coordination Forum in Moldova. It is co-chaired by Roma Voice Coalition, a coalition of Roma-led organizations in Moldova, and the international NGO INTERSOS and brings together State, humanitarian and donor stakeholders to identify and implement solutions for better inclusion for Roma refugees.

3. See, e.g., [Dejan Markovic, Monitoring of the Situation of Ukrainian Roma Refugees in Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia – Final Report, ERGO Network \(Feb. 2024\)](#)



PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

Panel 1: Setting the stage: The Ukraine refugee response in Europe and ensuring the protection of ethnic minorities

The Regional Dialogue opened with a panel discussion on the Ukraine refugee response in Europe and regional efforts to ensure the protection of ethnic minorities. Participants included representatives of OHCHR (moderator), UNHCR, the Council of Europe, the European Roma Rights Center and the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

As noted by UNHCR's Deputy Director of its Division of International Protection, any response to a refugee influx must consider the needs of all displaced populations, in particular ethnic minorities. Key principles in a refugee response include: (1) the promotion of non-discrimination and equality for all, and, 2) meaningful participation and community integration.

A displacement response must adopt a rights-based and community-based approach, with the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the decision-making process. It is the members of displaced communities themselves who are the experts on their displacement. It is imperative that they contribute to any refugee response, as it is their lives that are most affected by any decisions that are taken.

Different panellists described the experiences of Roma refugees from Ukraine across Europe and noted trends to monitor. In February 2023, the European Roma Rights Center issued a monitoring report on the treatment of Roma refugees in several EU countries since the start of the war [4]. The report found patterns of discrimination against Roma refugees across Europe in different sectors, including healthcare, employment and education, and provided examples of mistreatment such as the eviction of Roma families from refugee collective centres during winter months without an offer of alternative accommodation.

“
Roma refugees are people first, that is how they should be perceived - contributing members of society, agents of their own rights. And together we should work more actively to support their rights.
 ”

Bernadette Raymonde Castel, UNHCR's Deputy Director of its Division of International Protection

4. [European Roma Rights Center \(ERRC\), Roma Rights Under Siege: Monitoring Reports from One Year of War in Ukraine \(Feb. 2023\)](#)



Bernadette Raymond Castel, UNHCR Deputy Director, Division of International Protection (centre) and Ion Bucur, Moldova Country Representative of the European Roma Rights Centre are leading the first discussion panel on the Ukraine refugee response in Europe and ensuring the protection of ethnic minorities moderated by Bea Ferenci, UN Human Rights Advisor, OHCHR [Moldova] (left). ©UNHCR/ Salahaldeen Abdulrahman

Patterns of discrimination against Roma refugees were noted by other panelists as well, not only from government institutions but also from civil society and other Ukrainian refugees. It was noted that already existing anti-Roma sentiment in some countries of asylum was exacerbated by the arrival of Roma refugees from Ukraine. In some locations, Roma refugees were not perceived as refugees at all, effectively denying their displacement status. The representative of the Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues with the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) emphasized the importance of considering the different dimensions of Roma refugee needs, taking into account their traditions and history. The need to engage Roma civil society and refugees in tackling these issues and to ensure their participation in the decisions affecting their daily lives was emphasized.

Various initiatives to report on and address these issues at the regional level were noted as underway. The Council of Europe (CoE) provided information on its [Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction” 2023-2026](#),^[5] which includes two projects to support national minorities, including Roma, one on the rights of IDPs and returnees and another on anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion. The Action Plan seeks to include the Roma population and Roma refugees in the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine and facilitates meetings with Roma community representatives to discuss their needs and access to rights. The CoE High Commissioner for Human Rights is preparing a special report on the rights of Roma and Roma refugees in European countries with specific recommendations, as is the European Ombudsman on the situation of national minorities and Roma in occupied territories of Ukraine.



GOOD PRACTICES

Several good practices from the region were identified during the discussion, including:

- Inclusion in the reports of the Office of the Ombudsman of instances of discrimination and segregation against Roma refugees. (Moldova)
- Establishment of the Roma Task Force, within the Refugee Coordination Forum, which brings together government agencies, Roma-led NGOs, community mediators and other stakeholders to coordinate actions and bring sustainable solutions for Roma refugees. (Moldova)
- The establishment of a centre specifically for Roma refugees by a Roma-led NGO to provide a range of services, including shelter, consultations and legal aid. (Poland)
- Across Europe, Intercultural Cities provide for inter-cultural exchange and inclusion. The CoE's Intercultural Cities Programme supports cities and regions in reviewing and adapting their policies through an intercultural lens, and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to manage diversity as an advantage for the whole society ^[6].

5. Council of Europe, [Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction” 2023-2026](#) (Nov. 2022)

6. See, Council of Europe, Intercultural Cities Programme at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities>

Panel 2: What should we know about ethnic Roma from Ukraine? Life in Ukraine before and after the full-scale invasion



I wish local people knew us better: our traditions, the respect we have towards older people, and the love we share towards our children. I am sure they would treat us better.

Refugee woman of Roma ethnicity

During this session, panelists discussed the situation of ethnic Roma in Ukraine before and during the full-scale invasion, including in the context of forced displacement. Participants included representatives of NGOs and agencies working in Ukraine, including the Association for Ukrainian Culture and Art in Moldova "PTASHKA" (moderator), the Roma Human Rights Center, the NGO Blaho, Uzhhorod Roma Hub, UNHCR and a Ukrainian refugee.

To begin the discussion, Svetlana, a Ukrainian refugee, shared her personal experience fleeing the war in Ukraine. She recounted having to suddenly flee her home amidst explosions with 11 people packed into a small car to go to Moldova, leaving Ukraine only with the clothes that they wore. Upon arrival in Moldova, the family faced difficulty finding housing due to their Roma identity. Fortunately, they received assistance from Roma community mediators in Moldova, who helped them to navigate their new surroundings. Svetlana highlighted the challenges her family faced in securing education for her grandchildren, as she explained, girls in their community generally do not attend school. She suggested that online education or dedicated learning spaces for Roma children be provided to help address these challenges.

The situation of Roma refugees in Odesa was described by a representative of the Roma Human Rights Center. Odesa was described as a transit city for many Roma, with over 3,500 Roma living there, including at least 500 internally displaced Roma persons.

Pre-war issues of employment and basic needs intensified after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, adding legal complexities like the need to obtain Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) status, as well as challenges in transitioning to on-line education. It was noted that local Roma families often hosted Roma IDPs due to discrimination from the broader population, exacerbating socio-economic challenges within the community. Community mediators were described as critical in providing information and legal assistance to the Roma community in the city.

The important role of community centres in providing support to ethnic Roma in Ukraine was highlighted. A leader from the Uzhhorod Roma Hub shared the establishment of their community center in Uzhhorod, with its focus on providing services to and bringing together the Roma community. The Hub provides a multifunctional space focused on assisting Roma women, children, and youth, with plans to open a legal clinic as well. The center also acts as a liaison between the Roma community and national and international organizations, collecting community needs and communicating them to different actors.

Many panelists noted that Roma-led organizations are best-positioned to support ethnic Roma given their close relationship with the community itself. A representative of the NGO Blaho described the organization's long-standing work in Ukraine since 2003 in support of ethnic Roma and its close collaboration with authorities. By integrating support through

Roma organizations, they are able to build trust and effectively address the community's needs. The NGO worked closely, for example, with Roma children and parents on early childhood education, working to change parental mindsets on school attendance. During the war, the organization opened a shelter helping over 3,000 people, providing meals, activities, and legal assistance.

The efforts of the Government of Ukraine to ensure better inclusion and integration of the Roma population resulted in the adoption of a national Roma inclusion strategy. However, adequate funding is needed to implement the planned activities.

International organizations play an important role in protecting Roma rights in Ukraine, including in such areas as documentation. As noted by the Assistant Representative for Protection with UNHCR in Ukraine, many Roma IDPs lack necessary documentation, hindering their access to services. Efforts are underway, particularly in the Transcarpathia region, to assist Roma in obtaining documents despite barriers like language and costs. The need for a holistic approach to address these issues was stressed, as was direct collaboration with Roma groups and Roma-led initiatives. UNHCR stressed the importance of fostering trust and acceptance to combat discrimination and help the Roma community achieve its potential.



Panel 3: Understanding the host community: Inclusion of ethnic Roma in the Republic of Moldova

The panel discussion on the inclusion of ethnic Roma from and in the Republic of Moldova highlighted several key areas of progress, ongoing challenges, and actionable solutions aimed at improving the integration and well-being of the Roma community. The discussion featured insights from representatives of the Equality Council (moderator), the Government of Moldova's Agency for Inter-Ethnic Relations, the Roma Voices Coalition, the Mayor of Otaci, and the Ministry of Health.

The legal framework for advancing the rights of ethnic Roma in Moldova can be found in the government's Programme to support the Roma population in the Republic of Moldova for the period 2022-2025^[7] and the Strategy for strengthening interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2017-2027^[8]. Significant progress was noted in the implementation of the 2024-2025 Activity Plan in various sectors, although challenges remain (see below). Efforts have been made to foster closer collaboration between ethnic Roma, Roma-led organizations and the authorities, with the objective of achieving more effective partnerships. Efforts are underway to position the Roma community as an ally to local institutions, understanding the different contexts and needs that exist in different parts of the country. Alignment of government law and policy with EU standards as part of the accession process offers further opportunities to strengthen Roma rights.

The critical role of community mediators in ensuring access to rights and services for ethnic Roma was emphasized. In 2024, the government plans to fund 50 Roma mediators who operate throughout the country.

7. See [Government Decision No. 576/2022](#).

8. See [Government Decision No. 1464/2016](#).



These mediators, with their deep understanding of Roma culture and experiences, play a vital role in bridging communication gaps, resolving disputes, and advocating for the needs and rights of the Roma community. Their presence not only facilitates dialogue and understanding between different stakeholders but also empowers Roma individuals to navigate complex social systems and access essential services. Through their work, Roma mediators contribute to building trust, promoting social cohesion, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Significant efforts have been made to improve the situation of ethnic Roma in the education sector. The 2024-2025 Activity Plan saw the successful review and approval of the history curriculum of ethnic minorities, including the Roma minority, marking a crucial milestone in improving the knowledge of Roma history by the overall population. Additionally, the introduction of merit scholarships for Roma children represents a pivotal step towards promoting educational equity and fostering talent within the Roma community. By recognizing and rewarding academic achievement based on merit, these scholarships not only empower Roma students but also contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality. Moreover, they serve as a tangible example of societal support and recognition of the potential within the Roma community, ultimately leading to greater inclusion and participation in higher education and beyond.

Working with parents, however, was highlighted as foundational in improving education outcomes for Roma children. By engaging with parents in meaningful dialogue, providing relevant information, and addressing their concerns, trust and collaboration are established, ultimately creating a shared understanding of the value of education. Through concerted and well-efforts, a supportive ecosystem can be created that empowers parents to actively participate in their children's education and fosters a culture of lifelong learning within the community.

Panelists spoke to the importance of social cohesion when promoting the rights of ethnic Roma in particular socio-economic inclusion. The involvement of all stakeholders is paramount, with the government being the key actor in driving comprehensive initiatives forward. By assuming a central role, the government can provide leadership, resources, and policy frameworks necessary for effective collaboration and sustainable progress. Engaging other actors, including local authorities, community leaders, NGOs, and international partners, amplifies the impact of interventions and ensures a holistic approach to addressing complex challenges.

Collaboration with local authorities in the past few years has shown positive results, especially during the refugee crisis when the Roma community actively assisted Roma refugees, but more funding is needed. The Mayor of Otaci noted the importance of local community centres for vulnerable Roma families, like the one that was established in Otaci, in providing essential support services and assistance to those in need. The sharing of information and resources through the centre acts as a catalyst for knowledge dissemination and empowerment, ensuring that community members are equipped with the information they need to make informed decisions and access available resources.

There are several ongoing efforts to improve access to healthcare and social services for the Roma community in Moldova. Family planning and reproductive health centres, along with multidisciplinary teams including family doctors, play a vital role in providing comprehensive care. However, challenges such as lack of information, ineffective communication with medical staff, and inconsistent monitoring persist. Pregnant women, for example, who are not continuously monitored face increased risks to their health and the health of their unborn children. Regular prenatal care is essential for identifying and addressing potential complications early on, thereby improving maternal and infant outcomes.

Addressing issues such as these requires continuous improvement in service delivery and enhanced communication through trusted channels.

Fighting discrimination against ethnic Roma remains a challenge. Panelists noted the importance of breaking the silence about discrimination and empowering individuals to challenge discriminatory practices in their communities, including through the filing of complaints with government authorities. By equipping minorities with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively participate in decision-making processes and to advocate for their rights, their voices can be amplified and greater inclusion and representation within society be promoted. Similarly, conducting seminars and training sessions for public authorities and service providers can raise awareness and provide practical strategies for addressing discrimination.

Additionally, improving awareness of Roma culture fosters mutual understanding and respect, as well as promotes cultural sensitivity within service delivery systems.

Finally, the importance of employment as a cornerstone of socio-economic inclusion was noted. The employment of Roma individuals by local authorities was mentioned as being particularly impactful, serving as a powerful form of representation and demonstrating a commitment to diversity and social inclusion. It sends a strong message that Roma voices are valued and respected within the community and can contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes and governance structures. Additionally, it contributes to economic empowerment and social mobility within the Roma community, helping to address longstanding disparities and promote greater equality.

To achieve this goal, local authorities should implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies, provide training and support to ensure the success of Roma employees, and create inclusive workplace environments that foster respect, dignity, and belonging for all employees.



GOOD PRACTICES

Several good practices from the Moldova context were identified during the discussion, including:

- Merit scholarships for Roma students to enhance educational opportunities.
- Deployment of Roma mediators to bridge communication gaps and resolve conflicts.
- Establishment of centers for supporting vulnerable families and tailored information-sharing initiatives to empower the community.
- Collaborative efforts involving all stakeholders to promote social cohesion and address systemic barriers.

Panel 4: The refugee response in Moldova and Roma refugees

Following the discussion on the situation of local ethnic Roma in Moldova, the conversation moved to the situation of Roma refugees in countries of asylum. The first panel discussion focused on Roma refugees in Moldova and featured speakers from UNHCR (moderator) the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the Association of Roma Community Mediators in Moldova, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Deputy Mayor of Ungheni, and the international NGO INTERSOS.

The State Secretary for MIA opened the session with an overview of the Government of Moldova's response to the arrival of over a million refugees from Ukraine in Moldova since February 2022, with some 120,000 deciding to remain in the country. The number of Roma refugees is not known, as data based on ethnicity is not captured by the government. The Temporary Protection (TP) directive that was introduced in Moldova in March 2023, which has been extended to March 2025, has proven to be a critical mechanism for ensuring lawful stay for refugees displaced from Ukraine, as well as to access services such as accommodation, health care, employment, and education. As of the date of the Regional Dialogue, TP cards had been issued to over 43,000 persons. Roma refugees can choose where they live (public accommodation is not assigned based on ethnicity), and schools are open to all children, although there are specific challenges with regard to literacy for Roma children. The government has been working with humanitarian actors to mobilize funds for all refugees in Moldova, including Roma refugees, through the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for Moldova. As in other panels, the important role played by Roma mediators in ensuring access to the rights and services of Roma refugees was emphasized.

This is especially true in the Transnistrian region, where the government is not present. As noted by the Director of the Association of Roma Community Mediators in Moldova, in every region where there is a Roma mediator, access to education, health care and documentation is much easier for the Roma community, including Roma refugees. Roma mediators would like to see, however, greater engagement with the government in decision-making processes on Roma issues. Although the volume of work can be overwhelming, Roma mediators can face the challenges with the support of national and international partners. They remain, though, underpaid and understaffed. There is a need for 82 Roma mediators, yet there are only 48, although with government plans to reach 50.

A view on the response for Roma refugees from a Local Public Authority (LPA) was offered by the Deputy Mayor of Ungheni. Ten (10) Roma families were living in Ungheni at the time. The main challenge for the Roma community was to be accepted by the host community, as their culture is very different. That said, since the beginning of the refugee emergency, Ungheni has become more open towards Roma people. However, other challenges also exist. Although children are provided free access to kindergarten and schools, only two Roma children were enrolled at the time of the conference. It can also be challenging to find accommodation for Roma people, as their families are often very big. Local Public Authorities (LPAs) often do not have enough resources to help refugees.



A displaced person means an added value to the host country, not a problem.

**Jana Costachi, Former State Secretary,
Ministry of Internal Affairs; President,
Commission for the Coordination of Activities
in the Field of Migration and Asylum**



With UNHCR support, a community centre was opened in Ungheni, which has helped with the integration of refugees, including Roma refugees, and social cohesion.

Monitoring of the human rights of Roma refugees is undertaken by different institutions and organizations, including the Office of the Ombudsman. A recent report [9] of the Ombudsman's Office highlighted discrimination as one of the biggest challenges facing Roma refugees in Moldova, with specific concerns about segregation (including self-segregation) in specific Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs) and of Roma refugees being rejected or ejected from RACs due to their ethnicity. Historical mistreatment by the state and other institutions has led to a lack of trust between the Roma community and government entities. Roma refugees are experiencing the same lack of trust. Much work needs to be done, including sensitization of society and trainings for civil servants.

Different panelists raised the importance of public consultations with the Roma community to identify specific concerns of the communities and to engage together to find tailored solutions. This would contribute to their integration and social cohesion within the Moldovan context. Encouraging the participation of Roma women in particular was seen as essential to prevent their marginalization. The Roma Task Force was identified as a positive forum for this engagement.

The need for a long-term integration policy for the Roma refugee community was highlighted as important, with a focus on mutual commitment and allowing displaced individuals to choose their own path. Integration will not happen in a day, or even a year. Given the systemic discrimination that has long existed, time is needed to understand it and counter it. That said, Moldova opportunities not seen in other countries in Europe. Since the beginning of the refugee emergency, it was recognized

in Moldova that Roma people can be doctors, psychologists, teachers, mediators, and so on. Moldovan NGOs are advocating strongly for the Roma community and the state is open to dialogue and aware of the specific needs of this community. While there is much yet to be done, at least in Moldova the subject of the Roma community is part of the public dialogue in the search for solutions. Direct involvement of Roma refugees and Roma-led NGOs is critical in this regard, to ensure that the Roma community helps to choose what is best for them.



GOOD PRACTICES

Several good practices in the Moldova context were identified during the discussion, including:

- Establishment of the Roma mediators system, supported by a legal framework, which facilitates communication with and support for Roma refugees.
- Active engagement of national human rights institutions in the monitoring of human rights of Roma refugees and intervening to address instances of discrimination.
- Advocacy by Moldovan NGOs, the state, and Roma mediators in support of the rights and inclusion of Roma refugees, both to address systemic issues and to raise public awareness.



[9. Office of Ombudsman for the Republic of Moldova, Raport Alternativ în baza Convenției ONU privind eliminarea tuturor formelor de discriminare rasială 2024](#)





Panel 5: The refugee response: Receiving Roma refugees in Europe

Moving beyond Moldova, civil society organizations from neighbouring countries of asylum, many of them Roma-led, shared their views and experiences on the reception and treatment of Roma refugees. Panelists included representatives of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) in Moldova (moderator) and civil society and Roma-led organizations in Germany, Romania, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Czech Republic (Romodrom): Romodrom started as a Roma-led initiative in 2001 to fight social exclusion of Roma communities and has since expanded to serve all vulnerable populations. Since 2022, it has been actively involved in the refugee response in the Czech Republic. Efforts to assess refugee numbers have been difficult due to limited documentation, with estimates of around 300 Roma refugees currently residing in the country receiving assistance.

Initial efforts focused on providing basic needs and essential services, including humanitarian aid, with partnerships established with UNHCR and UNICEF. The implementation of mobile teams proved successful in addressing dynamic refugee movements. An important approach by the organization has been to employ local authoritative figures and intercultural workers to foster community engagement in socially excluded areas, with the goal of establishing trust with marginalized communities such as the Roma.

However, discrimination against Roma refugees and social tensions persist, with reports of substandard living conditions and limited access to essential services. While some refugee communities come together through shared experiences, others face intense social tensions. These tensions extend beyond interactions between Roma refugees and other groups, affecting the broader Czech population and ethnic minorities, such as the Russian community.

An area of particular concern for Romodrom in the Czech Republic has been accommodation. According to Romodrom, temporary shelter, though established, fail to adequately address long-term needs. Proposed legislative amendments limiting access to refugee accommodations have raised further concerns, especially for Roma refugees, who are in particular need of housing.



Hungary (Carpathian Foundation): The Carpathian Foundation has 30 years of experience operating in the border regions of five countries. It has recently engaged in supporting refugees from Ukraine, working through partnerships and projects to assist individuals and families, especially those of Roma ethnicity, with culturally sensitive methods.

Tailored approaches are necessary to address unique challenges in different countries, such as the closure of hostels accommodating Roma families, which can lead to displacement and the interruption of studies of children attending school. The foundation employs social worker teams to ensure comprehensive support for refugees, with Roma mediators trained to navigate complex cases and advocate for sensitivity within governmental institutions.

Romania (Aresel): According to the Romanian NGO, Aresel, discrimination at transit points led to advocacy for better treatment of Roma refugees in Romania. In addition, due to limited accommodation facilities for Roma families, efforts to secure housing and integrate Roma families into the community has been a key activity. Aresel intervened to secure housing for Roma families in Bucharest, fostering integration within the community. Educational initiatives, including language classes and psychological support, have successfully integrated Roma and non-Roma children, creating a supportive environment akin to a second family.

Cooperation with local authorities has been instrumental in providing assistance to Roma refugees, reflecting a collaborative approach to integration efforts.

Germany (Hildegard Lagrenne Foundation): The issue of Germany receiving refugees is complex, rooted in historical contexts. Germany's past experiences with refugees, including during the Nazi era, have influenced its asylum laws.

However, according to Aresel, political parties have exploited immigration for their agendas, making it a sensitive topic. Despite offering asylum, Germany's refugee quotas are relatively small compared to its population.

Chancellor Merkel's decision in 2015 to welcome refugees sparked solidarity and civil society initiatives. The influx of Ukrainian refugees in February 2022 highlighted discrepancies in Germany's treatment of different refugee groups, particularly Roma refugees. While many Ukrainians received immediate refugee status and support, Roma refugees faced discrimination and challenges.

Germany's immigration policy historically lacked targeted measures for Roma inclusion, but recent initiatives aim to address this gap. Municipalities' approaches to refugee integration vary, with some embracing collaboration with Roma organizations for better outcomes. However, others resist inclusion efforts, perpetuating discrimination and hindering effective refugee support.



GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMENDATIONS

The good practices identified during discussions in participating countries highlighted the direct involvement of Roma-led organizations in refugee response efforts. This approach has proven to be both necessary and effective for ensuring better inclusion of Roma refugees. These civil society organizations, operating in various countries, serve as an important and solid bridge between the Roma refugee community, local authorities, and host communities.

BREAK-OUT DISCUSSIONS

Day 2 of the Regional Dialogue featured break-out sessions on issues of particular concern to Roma refugees, including education, child protection and gender equality, social cohesion and community development, and inclusion measures, including documentation, livelihoods and accommodation. The summaries of the break-out panels highlight challenges and opportunities in each area.

Panel 1: Education



Having more Roma children in my school. It's like a dream for me.

Ludmila Gruscaia, Principal Lev Tolstoi High School, Glodeni, Moldova



The panel discussion on education featured insights from representatives of UNICEF (moderator), the Ministry of Education and Research (Moldova), Tarna Rom (Roma-led NGO in Moldova), the Principal of Lev Tolstoi High School, Glodeni (Moldova), Hildegard Lagrenne Foundation for Education (Germany) and Uzhhorod Roma Hub (Roma-led NGO in Ukraine).

Challenges:

Panelists and participants raised a variety of challenges related to education for Roma refugees. Some challenges were at the institutional level and included lack of funding for needed services, language barriers, lack of needed documents, such as educational documents and vaccine certificates, and, importantly, lack of data on out-of-school children.

Social factors are also at play, such as early marriage, children starting first grade late, and lack of literacy of parents (to fill out school registration forms, read notices from the school about parent meetings, etc), as well as fears of discrimination. The need to highlight to children and parents the benefits of education was emphasized during the panel discussion, as well as working in parallel to ensure that fulfilling job opportunities will be available to Roma youth once they graduate. In this regard, the focus of advocates should not only be on school enrolment but also dropout prevention. Linkages between education and child protection were also noted. Children being out of school, for example, increases risks of child marriage.

It was noted that these challenges are not unique to Roma refugees; many of them are the same for ethnic Roma from Moldova. Efforts for both communities should be coordinated and mutually reinforcing.

Suggested solutions:

A range of solutions and recommendations were proposed to address these challenges. All participants emphasized, however, the need to actively engage Roma community members in addressing the issue.

As a starting point, it was proposed to conduct a mapping of the location of all school age Roma children. This would allow for a more targeted approach to school enrolment efforts.

At the school level, it was noted that it is important to ensure that schools are safe and welcoming environments that promote anti-discrimination and anti-racism. Providing educational materials and books that highlight Roma culture would contribute to these efforts. Additionally, it is crucial not to “blame” Roma children if they are not performing well in school, but rather to work with their teachers to ensure that they are receiving all the support they need. Too often, the term “Roma children” is used in the negative to refer to children who are struggling, overlooking the many Roma children who do fine in school and succeed. Funding, of course, from local and national authorities is needed to ensure that the necessary services to children and families are provided.

Parents are the critical link to increased school enrolment. Education advocates must be proactive in reaching out to parents, to explain the benefits of school enrolment, address their concerns (especially about discrimination and bullying), and support them in the enrolment process. It is not enough to give enrolment forms to Roma parents to complete when they themselves are not literate.

The need to build trust between the Roma community and local schools was emphasized. It was recommended to engage Roma community mediators in these efforts, while also recognizing that Roma mediators are already overwhelmed. Ideally, one would hire community mediators to just focus on school enrolment in towns with large numbers of Roma children.

Additionally, it was suggested that highlighting positive examples from the Roma community can help motivate students to succeed. Finally, it was proposed that involving parents in literacy activities can support them in being better able to engage in their children’s education.



GOOD PRACTICES

The following practices were identified:

- Visit by inter-agency Education Working Group to a school located near a Refugee Accommodation Center where many Roma refugee families lived to identify barriers to enrolment and to jointly develop solutions to address them. (Moldova)
- Informal literacy classes for Roma children residing in refugee accommodation centres as a bridge to school enrolment, with individualized outreach to parents and children to explain the benefits of classes. (Moldova)
- Inclusion of classes on Roma history in schools. (Moldova)
- Information sessions for teachers on how to promote inclusion. (Moldova, Germany)
- Campaigns on acceptance of refugees and Roma students. (Germany)
- Conducting after school programs, open to all students, on Roma history and culture. (Germany)
- Provision of legal advice on children’s right to education. (Ukraine)
- Highlighting of success stories – such as Roma girl in Molodva who won four school competitions and represented the local school at a regional competition. (Moldova)
- Engaging Roma mediators to support with school enrolment and to prevent drop-outs. (Moldova, Germany)
- Hiring Roma teachers. (Germany)
- Offering support services (including academic support, as well as social support like community showers and washing machines) at a Roma community “Hub.” (Ukraine)

Panel 2: Child protection and Gender-Based Violence

The panel discussion on child protection and gender equality included representatives of the National Coalition of Life Without Violence (moderator), the Children Rights Protection Policy Department of the Moldovan Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP), the Roma-led women's rights NGO ROMNI, the child protection NGO AVE Copiii, UN Women, Roma Hub (Roma-led NGO in Ukraine) and the Carpathian Foundation (Hungary).

Challenges:

A variety of challenges were raised during the panel discussion on child protection and gender equality, including issues around school enrolment (including lack of vaccines impeding access to kindergarten), school attendance and drop out (including early pregnancy as a contributing factor to school dropout), documentation (including birth registration), violence against women and girls, distrust of the police, and negative stereotypes against Roma women. Practical challenges, such as language barriers (for example, when Child Protection Specialists delegated to the border don't speak the same language as Roma refugees), as well as a shortage of Roma mediators, and an unrealistically high workload for existing mediators, were also raised.

Suggested solutions:

The discussion highlighted the need to provide support to Roma mediators, who play a key role in interacting with and supporting Roma refugees, but who are overworked and tasked with the management and resolution of too many issues, without the means to do so. It was also noted the importance of involving Roma mediators in multidisciplinary teams, as this can help promote trust with all stakeholders.

With regards to GBV, it was noted that Roma survivors often approach mediators, instead of the police, so additional support and training for mediators on how to best handle these kinds of cases is needed. Additional training on child protection was also discussed, as was a proposal to have shelters adapted to the needs of Roma women fleeing gender-based violence, in particular intimate partner violence. It was noted that the role of community mediators in sensitive cases needs to be considered. While they can help communicate with Roma community members, including GBV survivors, their role must be seen as different from that of law enforcement, otherwise they risk losing trust within the community. Moreover, the importance of involving men in addressing gender inequality, the roots of GBV, was highlighted.



When a Roma family sees a Roma member of a multidisciplinary team [for GBV cases], it increases the level of trust and credibility.

Elena Sirbu, President, ROMNI



With regards to child protection, participants noted the key role that parents play in the lives of their children. As the head of the NGO ROMNI noted, "the relationship between mothers and children in the Roma community is very specific." That said, there is also the need for specialists to intervene if parents are not adequately supporting their children. Families in need of support should be informed and encouraged to apply for existing services. Intersectoral coordination mechanisms were seen as important tools, not only in the delivery of services, but also in ensuring coordination among different actors and to avoid families having to respond to different actors who approach them separately. In response to

several questions about individual cases in which families were denied services, it was recommended that mediators ensure that correspondence with local authorities be done in writing, so that in case of denial, an official appeal can be made. Finally, it was highlighted that when talking about children's rights, no distinction should be made between children of different backgrounds, as they all enjoy the same rights.

In the context of gender equality, the importance of labour inclusion was another significant topic of discussion. Participants suggested that a session be organized for mediators to better understand how to intervene when labour issues arise. It was also suggested that more emphasis be placed on supporting the civic and political participation of Roma women, as well as supporting Roma women to run for public office. One panelist suggested that women should be supported "to be carers and have careers too."

Finally, it was noted the good practice by some organizations of hiring Roma experts, and it was suggested that all organizations follow this practice. While Roma women already have a strong voice, international organizations need to provide support and listen and ensure that an even broader range of voices are heard.

GOOD PRACTICES

The following practices were identified:

- Amendment to national law on rights of the child (Law no. 370) to ensure alignment with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, grounded in the principle of non-discrimination of services. (Moldova)
- In terms of government services, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection noted the government's RESTART reform, which includes the hiring and training of additional Child Protection Specialists to support mayors with child protection interventions. (Moldova)
- Hiring of Roma experts by international organizations. (Moldova)
- Creation of Roma education fund, with support to teachers and students (of all ethnicities). (Romania)
- Dance classes of traditional Roma dances that are offered to both Roma and non-Roma Ukrainian girls. (Romania)
- Joint child protection trainings with mediators and social workers, facilitated by a member of the Roma community. (planned) (Moldova)



Felicia Bludoi, a 23-year-old from Comrat, Republic of Moldova, is a standout figure for the Roma community in Moldova. She is a law student at Comrat State University, also studying at the Faculty of National Culture, and works as a community mediator and news presenter at NTS TV. Aspiring to become a professional lawyer, Felicia aims to continue her mediation work, setting a strong example for her community. Her journey highlights the power of education in overcoming stereotypes, and she actively advocates for support for Roma refugees and marginalized communities.

Panel 3: Inclusion (Livelihoods, Accommodation, Documentation)

The panel discussion on inclusion, covering the issues of livelihoods, accommodation and documentation, included representatives of the United States Embassy in Chisinau, Moldova (moderator), the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) (Moldova), Law Centre for Advocates (NGO, Moldova), the National Employment Agency office in Ungheni (Moldova), Association of Community Mediators (Moldova), RomaJust (Roma-led NGO, Romania), and the Carpathian Foundation (Hungary).

Challenges:

In general, discrimination was noted as one of the main barriers to inclusion of Roma refugees in society. As explained by the Association of Community Mediators in Moldova, discrimination affects access to livelihoods, accommodation, and a range of other social services. Once Roma refugees experience discrimination, it becomes harder to motivate them to actually want to integrate. As such, the impact of discrimination goes beyond the individual acts that take place.



“
Each refugee deserves an individual approach, including Roma refugees.

Vasile Cusca, State Secretary, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection

Accommodation: In Moldova, since the beginning of the refugee emergency, some 140 Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) were established in both publicly and privately-owned buildings. Moldova is now in the process of consolidating the RACs, with the intention of promoting the integration of refugees into the host community and to contribute to social cohesion. Particularly vulnerable refugees may be relocated to a RAC that will remain open, while others will be expected to find accommodation either with family or friends or in the private market. While the closure of RACs provides opportunities, it also creates challenges for those who are not eligible to relocate to another RAC, especially given rising rents in some locations like Chisinau. For Roma families, who often have large families, finding suitable and affordable private rentals can be difficult. Rental assistance provided by international partners can assist, but this is generally time limited. Some Roma refugees also report discrimination in the private housing market and an unwillingness by landlords to rent to them due to their ethnicity.

Similar challenges exist in Romania, where one of the biggest accommodation challenges faced by Roma refugees is their large families. According to the NGO RomaJust, it can be difficult to find affordable housing for families with seven to ten people. According to RomaJust, the state refused to provide housing to Roma refugees, claiming that the large size of the families was an impediment to finding suitable locations. This then led to a loss of trust in state institutions by the Roma refugees.



Documentation: Among ethnic Roma from Moldova, lack of documentation is not as much of an issue as it is in other countries. Of the 1,889 individuals recognized as stateless in Moldova as of the end of 2023, only 5 were identified as Roma based on ethnicity^[10]. While the numbers of undocumented Roma from Moldova are likely higher than this, the numbers are not believed to be that great. The situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine, though, is somewhat more challenging. Many do not have documents and do not apply to obtain them. Without documents, they cannot access education, employment, social protection, medical assistance and other services.

Livelihoods: The representative of the National Employment Agency (NEA) office in Ungheni, Moldova noted that local public authorities, like central authorities, do their best to facilitate the integration of Roma refugees. Roma representatives, however, said that they expected more from the NEA in supporting Roma access to employment opportunities.

Suggested solutions:

In addressing the broader challenge of discrimination, panelists noted that the first step of inclusion was through education and the promotion of tolerance and equality. Roma mediators are a critical part of this process, as they can not only help Roma refugees overcome discrimination but also increase Roma people's trust in integration.

Livelihoods: In Ungheni, Moldova, local authorities stated that they informed Ukrainian Roma refugees about the possibilities of employment, education, and medical assistance. Seven (7) refugees in RACs gained certificates in beauty services so that they could provide services even within the RACs.

A local NGO, together with the local NEA, provided other activities as well for Roma refugees to better integrate in the local community. The representative of the Association of Roma community mediators urged state institutions and state agencies to collaborate more closely with Roma mediators in achieving Roma integration.

Accommodation: As was noted by the State Secretary of MLSP in Moldova, it is the duty of local public authorities to intervene and address issues of discrimination in the local housing market. They also have a role in motivating society to be more open towards displaced people, regardless of ethnicity. State institutions and local CSOs have an important role in facilitating the integration of Roma refugees and combatting discrimination.

The Romanian NGO RomaJust suggested the need for the Romanian government to launch a national program for refugees, including Roma refugees, to access housing. In such a program, the state could refer to legal provisions on how housing can be accessed and how it should be followed. This would allow for state monitoring of the situation and overall state control, which can be beneficial for all parties.

Documentation: The Moldovan legal services NGO, Law Centre for Advocates, identified different means of helping Roma refugees in accessing documentation in Moldova. The first was checking whether a Roma person has some roots in Moldova, possibly entitling a right to obtain Moldovan citizenship. The second is support in applying for temporary protection, provided they have sufficient proof of citizenship or protected status in

10. See Letter from Public Services Agency of the Republic of Moldova to Mihail Voda, Head of General Inspectorate of Migration, dated 17 January 2024 (available with UNHCR Moldova).

Ukraine. The third is applying for the status of stateless person, which is more beneficial than beneficiary of temporary protection as it gives the possibility, if granted, to reside on the territory of the Republic of Moldova without any time limit. Ultimately, naturalization is the best legal means to promote local integration, offering refugees the possibility of Moldovan citizenship. The individual at issue, however, must choose what option is best for him or her.



GOOD PRACTICES

The following practices were identified:

- Access to yearly transportation passes for Roma refugees who have integrated. (Hungary)
- Program where Roma refugees can go to school and learn together, both adults and children. Within the program there are also organized cultural events, development courses, language courses. (Hungary)
- NGO staff with protection backgrounds and government social assistants work together to manage the cases of refugees residing in accommodation centres scheduled for closure, seeking to find the most appropriate solutions for them, taking into account any vulnerabilities they might have. (Moldova)

Panel 4: Social cohesion and community development

The panel discussion on social cohesion and community development included representatives of the Norwegian Refugee Council (moderator), Bahtalo Ker (Roma-led NGO in Moldova), the Mayor of Otaci, Moldova, UNDP, IOM, Romodrom (Roma-led NGO in the Czech Republic) and Uzhhorod Roma Hub (Roma-led NGO in Ukraine).



Roma communities have a great amount of support from each other, but it should not stay only in their community, it should also be initiated by state and local authorities.

Dmitrii Zavrotchii, Mayor of Otaci, Moldova

The panel discussion on social cohesion and community development included representatives of the Norwegian Refugee Council (moderator), Bahtalo Ker (Roma-led NGO in Moldova), the Mayor of Otaci, Moldova, UNDP, IOM, Romodrom (Roma-led NGO in the Czech Republic) and Uzhhorod Roma Hub (Roma-led NGO in Ukraine).

Challenges:

During the panel discussion, a variety of challenges were raised around social cohesion and community development, one of the most fundamental of which being a lack of trust between Roma communities and government institutions. A complicating factor is that often times Roma communities end up being physically isolated, residing in more remote parts of the country. This contributes to misunderstandings between the Roma community and the rest of the population, if only due to more limited interactions.

It was also noted that Roma communities, both host and refugee, are not a unanimous group. Each have their own lifestyles, traditions and Romani dialects across different regions. Roma from the east of Ukraine are different from those from the west, and, of course, may be different from the Roma in the host country. Therefore, the coexistence of the host Roma community and the newly arriving Roma refugees may create additional tensions between the groups as well as the rest of the local population. It was noted that in some instances, the arrival of Roma refugees exacerbated pre-existing distrust between the Roma communities and the government, bringing additional challenges with them, such as lack of documentation and language barriers.

Another challenge to social cohesion emphasized by participants was in the education sector. While Roma refugee children can enter the education system of Moldova without barriers, many are discouraged from attending local schools due to discrimination and having difficulties catching up with the rest of their class. Having children study and play together is key to creating synergies between communities. Addressing these barriers to education is therefore critical not only for education outcomes, but also social cohesion.

Suggested solutions:

Education and communication were identified as twin pillars to positive and productive engagement with the Roma refugee community. To build mutual trust between the Roma community and the government, Roma-led civil society organizations and community mediators should take a lead role in facilitating communication, helping to dispel misunderstandings and promote peaceful coexistence. Front-line workers need to be trained on Roma diversity, which Roma-led NGOs can provide.

Social cohesion projects and integration projects must also be tailored to the needs of each community. Host and refugee Roma should be included, with strong collaboration with local authorities. The Mayor of Otaci noted that the arrival of Roma refugees to his locality, some of whom also had Moldovan citizenship, had a positive demographic effect, as it brought more people to the town. The local authorities were willing and eager to work with the Roma community to find solutions to the particular problems that they faced.

The role of the Roma diaspora was also highlighted in promoting community development. In Otaci, the Roma community abroad is supporting their relatives with funds and documentation. In some cases, the Roma diaspora helps find employment abroad and helps to find solutions for children if they are left alone.

As in other panels, participants emphasized that social cohesion is advanced when the Roma community is at the center of decision-making and awareness-raising. They are best placed to identify and create solutions to address their difficulties. This is particularly true of Roma women and girls in efforts to prevent gender-based violence. They just need support.



GOOD PRACTICES

During the dialogue many good practices were identified in improving social cohesion and community development:

- Opening of shelters that support ethnic Roma in promoting their traditions and achieving better living. (Ukraine)
- Roma host communities, Roma-led NGOs and local authorities providing support for newly arriving Roma refugee from Ukraine, helping them integrate into society. (Otaci, Moldova)
- Building capacity of social workers and front-line workers on Roma diversity and inclusion. (Czech Republic)
- Provision of guidance on legislation by Roma-led NGOs. (Czech Republic)
- Use of Romani language in awareness raising campaigns with Roma communities (books, leaflets and audiobooks).



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Challenges in Accessing Services

Roma refugees encounter major barriers in accessing education, healthcare, housing, and the labor market, including due to discriminatory practices and socio-economic barriers. Inability to access these services contributes to exclusion and marginalization of the community as a whole.

Critical Role of Roma Mediators and Organizations:


Roma mediators and Roma-led organizations have been essential in bridging gaps between Roma refugees, government authorities and service providers. Their efforts in legal assistance, community mediation, and empowerment have been crucial in addressing immediate needs and promoting social cohesion. However, establishing stronger cooperation with authorities at different levels is required to ensure effective communication between the Roma community and the authorities on various topics. Additionally, Roma mediators need financial support to build the capacity of the network.

Education and Social Integration

Successful education initiatives, such as merit scholarships and the involvement of Roma mediators, have shown potential for positive impact. However, the integration of Roma children into the education system remains a significant challenge due to discrimination, socio-cultural barriers and basic needs. Concerted and facilitated engagement with Roma parents is needed.

Long-term Integration Policies

To ensure sustainable integration, it is imperative to establish comprehensive, long-term integration policies that prioritize the independence and dignity of Roma refugees. These policies should be inclusive and developed in collaboration with Roma communities, fostering continuous advocacy and capacity building. Active involvement of Roma communities in decision-making processes is crucial to address their unique needs and challenges effectively.

 Veronica Teleuca, Programme Coordinator, National Coalition Life without Violence (left) moderating the discussion panel on Child Protection & Gender Equality. Panel: Ina Scaticailov, Senior Consultant, Child and Families, Children Rights Protection Policy Department, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection [Moldova], Elena Sirbu, President, ROMNI [Moldova], Mariana Ianachevici, Executive Director, Ave Copii [Moldova], Dominika Stojanoska, Representative, UN Women [Moldova], Izaura Dryma, Coordinator, Refugee Department, Aresel [Romania]. ©UNHCR/ Salahaldeen Abdulrahman

Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen Support for Roma Mediators and Organizations:** Invest in Roma-led organizations and expand networks of Roma mediators to enhance their capacity to support Roma refugees effectively. Recognize and utilize their expertise in addressing community-specific issues and finding solutions.
- 2. Tailor Social Cohesion and Integration Projects:** Design integration projects that address the specific needs of Roma communities, both host and refugee, considering local contexts. Ensure meaningful participation from Roma communities, including diaspora, to address these challenges effectively.
- 3. Improve Access to Education:** Implement initiatives to increase school attendance among Roma children, such as dedicated learning spaces that provide accelerated learning. Provide motivational mechanisms, such as scholarships, for successful students and work with Roma parents to promote the importance of education for their children. Reinforce positive examples of learning by Roma children, highlighting success stories.
- 4. Combat Discrimination and Promote Rights:** Conduct advocacy activities, including seminars and training sessions for public authorities and civil society and cultural events to raise awareness of Roma culture and discrimination. Encourage Roma involvement in public consultations and policy-making to ensure their voices are heard.
- 5. Enhance Employment and Economic Opportunities:** Develop targeted recruitment and retention strategies for Roma individuals within local authorities and other employment sectors. Promote inclusive workplace environments to enhance economic opportunities for Roma communities.
- 6. Promote Community Engagement and Trust-Building:** Foster community engagement initiatives that bridge communication gaps and resolve conflicts.
- 7. Utilize Romani Language in Awareness Campaigns:** Use the Romani language in awareness-raising campaigns, with a focus on video and audio materials. Consider use of Russian language for printed materials such as books and leaflets. This approach will ensure that information is accessible and culturally relevant to Roma communities.
- 8. Encourage Participation of Roma Women:** Actively support the participation of Roma women in integration processes to prevent their marginalization and promote gender equality within Roma communities.
- 9. Develop Long-term Integration Policies:** Create and implement long-term integration policies focusing on mutual commitment from both host and Roma communities. Ensure these policies respect displaced individuals' autonomy and support their rights as contributing members of society. Incorporate Roma refugees into existing programmes to support Roma integration as appropriate.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards more effective and inclusive solutions for the challenges faced by Roma refugees, enhancing their integration and well-being in Moldova and the region.

REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON PROTECTION AND INCLUSION OF ETHNIC ROMA REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES

Republic of Moldova

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