

# ROMA IN THE UKRAINE: FROM THE ORIGINS TO PRESENT DAYS, THE WAR AND REFUGEES

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## Introduction

The war currently raging in the Ukraine has highlighted the plight of Roma in that country and as refugees. In some cases, attacks against Roma have been used by the Russian as a demonstration of the prevalence of “fascism” in the Ukraine. This was very much what happened with the picture of Roma bound to posts in Lviv at the beginning of the war where the excellent review from the Roma organisation Roma highlights the source, the usage, and the full story behind these shocking pictures.<sup>1</sup>

As usual, however, the situation is more complex than simple press article are capable of presenting, and the story is more balanced and shaded than people would like to present. So yes, there have been anti-Roma pogroms in the Ukraine, unfortunately with very little legal consequences for the perpetrators, but no, it is not the norm by far, as many Roma are well integrated in the country. Discriminations exist, but by and large, they are by far less prevalent than in other European countries. Switzerland has by far more negative and racist stereotypes against Roma than Ukraine. We know several Roma with university degrees and good jobs in the country, reflecting the high level of integration of many of them.<sup>2</sup>

The advent of the war also highlighted issues of discrimination against Roma in Poland, Moldova, Czech and Slovak Republics, Hungary, Germany and so on, and also surfaced some of the effects of Hungary’s policy of granting passports to citizen outside of Hungary, resulting in the Czech government denying these Roma refugees status in the Czech Republic.

The aim of this report is to present a short overview of the Roma groups and history in the territories of the present day Ukraine and highlight the situation of Roma in modern Ukraine and the fate of Roma in the War as well as the issues they face as refugees from in other places.

A substantial part of this report is the result of our tracking of news about Roma in many countries, something that can be followed on and has been ongoing for the last 12 years.<sup>3</sup> This has given us a trove of references on the Ukraine for this report. We have also kept contacts with Roma and Roma activists in the Ukraine ever since 1992.

A few words on the Ukraine: We refer to the Ukraine as the lands included when it became independent in 1991, thus including Crimea and the Donbas. When speaking about specific regions, we have included some historic background (Transcarpathia, Bessarabia, etc.). We have chosen to use the Ukrainian spelling of places such as Kyiv, Lviv, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> У Львові вдаються до самосуду щодо ромів. Цим уже послуговується російська пропаганда для просування нарративу про “неонацистів”. In: Zmina. 22.03.2022. <https://zmina.info/news/u-lvovi-vdayutsya-do-samosudu-shhodo-romiv-fo/>  
Z Ukrajiny prišlo do ČR kvůli válce asi 500 Romů, většinu tvoří ženy a děti. Členové "romské rady" vyzvali nejen Romy k solidaritě se všemi uprchlíky. In: Romea. 22.03.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/domaci/z-ukrajiny-prislo-do-cr-kvuli-valce-asi-500-romu-vetsinu-tvori-zeny-a-deti.clenove-romske-rady-vyzvali-nejen-romy-k>

<sup>2</sup> We even have 2 Romnja refugees in Switzerland with university degrees.

<sup>3</sup> See Rroma contact Point on facebook or [www.rroma.org](http://www.rroma.org)

A word on other terminology: We call the current events a war, definitively not a “special operation” whatever the Russian propaganda says. When cities are levelled down, when civilian casualties are in the thousands, this is a war.

## The Roma in Ukraine

Ukraine is in a pretty unique situation in terms of Roma population and groups in Europe: It has autochthonous groups of every of the major metagroups, having Vlax, Nordic, Carpathian and Balkan Roma.<sup>4</sup> The following sections are largely based on the work of Tcherenkov and Laederich<sup>5</sup> as well as the seminal work of Dobrovolskiy<sup>6</sup> in the early 1900 and Barannikov<sup>7</sup> in the early 1930 as well as references therein.

## Vlax Groups

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### *Servi*

The oldest group found in the Ukraine and southern Russia are the **Servi** or **Servurja**.<sup>8</sup> The first sources about Roma emigrants from Walachia in these regions date back to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Servi, as other Old Vlax groups, fled early the slavery in Wallachia and Moldova, and their arrival and presence is recorded in several documents of the Lithuanian state, which at that time covered a large part of present day Ukraine. The first mentions of Vlax dialects in the Ukraine stem from the end of the eighteenth century.

Servi were sedentary, even calling later arrivals such as the Xaladytka Roma Šatritka Roma [tent Gypsies]. They were also trading other domestic animals, something unheard among Xaladytka Roma. In some regions, they were and are musicians – probably importing the violin to Russia in the Russian Roma music. They are linguistically quite assimilated, intermingling of Ukrainian and Romanes being extremely pronounced amongst them. They switch back and forth between them easily, sometime incorporating Romanes in their Ukrainian speech and vice versa.

Servi are found all over the Ukraine, but their traditional domain does not extend to the more recent acquisitions such as Transcarpathian Ukraine or Bessarabia.

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<sup>4</sup> For more background on the metagroups, we refer to: Tcherenkov, Lev, and Stéphane Laederich. *The Roma: Otherwise Known as Gypsies, Gitanos, Γύφτοί, Tsiganes, Tigani, Çingene, Zigeuner, Bohémiens, Travellers, Fahrende, Etc.* Schwabe, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Tcherenkov, Lev, and Stéphane Laederich. *The Roma*. Op. Cit.

<sup>6</sup> Dobrovolskiy [Добровольский], V. [Владимир], n.d. *Kisjeljovskie cygane, Vyrusk I, Cyganskije teksty*. [Добровольский, Владимир. Киселёвские цыгане. Выпуск 1. Цыганские тексты]. St. Petersburg. 1908.

<sup>7</sup> Barannikov [Баранников], Alexei Petrovich [Алексей Петрович]. *Cygany SSSR [Цыганы СССР: краткий историко-этнографический очерк]*. Zentrizdat [Центриздат], 1931.

<sup>8</sup> See Tcherenkov, Lev; Laederich, Stephane. Op. Cit. Vol 1. pp. 421 ff.

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### *Vlaxurja*

The Vlaxurja are later arrivals and do not count to the “Old Vlach” groups. Vlaxurja were nomadic smiths and sometimes sieve-makers. Nowadays they are found in the same areas as the Servi and sometimes are even mixed with them. Due to this fact, some authors have thus often assimilated them to Servi.<sup>9</sup>

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### *Bessarabian Roma*

Sometimes also known as *le Rom le gavune* [the village Roma], they are traditionally at home in the Bessarabian part of the Ukraine, which was part of the Moldovan principality until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### *Later Arrivals: Kalderaša and Lovara*

With the abolition of slavery in Moldova and Wallachia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many Vlach migrated away from their traditional lands. Kalderaša and Lovara are recorded from 1905 onward in the Russian Empire and are now found all over the Ukraine.

The Kalderaša were originally coppersmiths while the Lovara were traditionally horse dealers, where they were in competition with the more established Xaladytka Roma.

## **The Balkan Roma<sup>10</sup>**

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### *Ursarja*

This group is originally from Bessarabia, and its name might indicate that they were bear baiters originally, but the Ursarja in the Ukraine are clearly a Balkan Roma group. They are less well known and documented in the Ukraine as their brethren the Kîrîmlides, as they are effectively more prevalent in present day Moldova.

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### *Kîrîmlides*

The Kîrîmlides most probably arrived in the Crimean Peninsula most probably after the Bucharest Treaty of 1812 which displaced population as a result of the changes of borders. They are very close to the Crimean Tatars, having assimilated many of their words in their dialect. Politically they are aligned to the Tatars and as such not really in favor of the annexation of Crimea to Russia even though quite a number of Kîrîmlides live in the Moscow region.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 423.

<sup>10</sup> Tcherenkov, Lev; Laederich, Stephane. Op. Cit. Vol 1. pp. 474 ff.

## The Nordic Roma: Xaladytka Roma<sup>11</sup>

The Xaladytka (Russian) Roma and the Litovska Roma arrived in the region during the height of the Polish Lithuanian Union, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century, being originally migrants from Germany where they fled persecutions. The Servi in the Ukraine and southern Russia till now refer to Xaladytka Roma as *Njemcuri*, lit. Germans!

Traditionally horse-dealers and musicians, they are found all over the Ukraine, but most prominently in the regions where the Servi are. There are many cases of inter-marriages between Xaladytka and Servi, meaning that the distinction between the two groups can sometimes be blurry.

## The Carpathian Roma

The historical Carpathian Roma presence in the Ukraine was pretty tiny, represented by a small group, the Plaščuni, but was increased massively after the annexation of the Transcarpathian Ukraine (the Uzhhorod region) after World War Two.

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### *Plaščuni*<sup>12</sup>

This relatively small group of Carpathian Roma was often assumed to be a Vlax group, something that has now been refuted although they are sometimes mixed with Vlax Roma. They are relatively recent arrivals in the Ukraine, most probably during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### *The Transcarpathian Ukraine Roma*

The vast majority of Roma living in the regions that were annexed after World War Two on the other side of the Carpathian Mountains are North Hungarian Roma, with many of them still speaking Hungarian besides Romanes.

In fact, many of them benefited from the policies of the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán and obtained the Hungarian passport, a future source of issues, as we will see later in this report.

## Geographical Distribution and Settlements

Broadly said, there are three fairly distinct regions within the Ukraine in terms of Roma:

- Transcarpathian Ukraine, with a high density of Roma living in segregated settlements on the outskirts of the towns and villages, very much like what one sees in Slovakia and in Hungary;

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pp. 345 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Tcherenkov, Lev; Laederich, Stephane. Op. Cit. Vol 1. p. 443.

- Southern Ukraine, with also a large number of Roma, also living in segregated settlements, more akin to what exists in Moldova and Romania;
- The rest of the country, where by and large, the integration of Roma is much more prevalent. They have their own houses, but the number of segregated settlements is almost inexistant, and by and large, this Xaladytka and Servi population is much less visible and better integrated in society at large.

Life in Roma settlements where they exist in the Ukraine is hard. Access to water is often blighted by corruption, bad infrastructure, and a general lack of will.<sup>13</sup> The situation there is worse than the one in Slovakia and Hungary by far as can be seen with a reportage in Western Ukraine, with nearly 500 Roma living on a settlement on a garbage dump.<sup>14</sup>

The war of 2014, with the annexation of the Donbas and of Crimea, and the ongoing conflict, resulted in many displaced Roma in the Ukraine. This is especially the case of the Kîrîmlides who, like many Tatars fled Crimea after 2014. Many Roma who were displaced by the combats in Eastern Ukraine are still struggling to find a place elsewhere in the Ukraine, as discrimination and prejudice is ripe. They cannot go back either – nationalism and Roma are never friends.<sup>15</sup>

## Current Roma Population

The numbers cited about Roma living in the Ukraine vary tremendously. They range from 100'000 to half a million.<sup>16</sup> As usual, it is almost impossible to obtain accurate numbers as Roma prefer not to declare their ethnicity, and during the Khrushchev period of the Soviet Union, many Roma were declared as “Russians”, leaving them after the fall of the USSR part of another minority.

The currently accepted number of Roma in the Ukraine lies at around 400'000 people. This was of example stated in a UNN interview, by Zemfira Kondur, vice president of the Russian Chirykli Women's Foundation. She stated that up to 400,000 Roma live in Ukraine, but that only 5-7% of the total live in camps and migrate around the country. The official numbers of Roma are much lower, essentially because most Roma simply don't declare their origins.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Access to clean water for Roma in Ukraine: a grim tale of local barons, leaky pipes and dry wells. In: ERRC Blog. 2016.08.10. <http://www.errc.org/blog/access-to-clean-water-for-roma-in-ukraine-a-grim-tale-of-local-barons-leaky-pipes-and-dry-wells/121>

<sup>14</sup> Франківець показав, як живе близько п'ятиста циган на сміттєзвалищі у Рибному (фото). In: Версії. 19.01.2017. <http://versii.if.ua/novunu/frankivets-pokazav-yak-zhivut-500-tsigan-na-smittyezvalishhi-u-ribnomu-foto/>

<sup>15</sup> Strangers in Their Own Land. In: TOL. 24.07.2017. <http://www.tol.org/client/article/27072-ukraine-donbas-roma-minorities-displaced-people.html>

<sup>16</sup> According to the Ukrainian Ombudsman, there are between 50 and 400'000 Roma in the Ukraine. В Україні проживає до 400 тисяч ромов - Офіс омбудсмена. In: Ukrinform. 08.04.2021. <https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-society/3223559-v-ukraine-prozi-vaet-do-400-tysac-romov-ofis-ombudsmena.html>

<sup>17</sup> Today, up to 400,000 Roma live in Ukraine, but only 5-7% of the total live in camps and migrate to the country. In: UNN. 12.07.2018. <http://www.unn.com.ua/uk/exclusive/1740902-pravozakhisnitsya-lishe-5-7-romiv-v-ukrayini-vedut-taboroviy-sposib-zhittya>



## History up to the Present Days

### Historical Arrival and Early History

The early history of the Roma in the Ukraine is actually fairly atypical in the European context, in that there were almost no persecutions or pogroms in the core of the Ukraine lands (excluding some of the later acquisitions). This is most probably a legacy of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth that was extremely lenient towards Roma and did not promulgate laws against them at all. This tolerance was continued in the Russian Tsarist Empire and can be felt to this day in a much more positive view of Roma and less stereotypes against them.

As we have seen, the first Roma documented in the Ukraine were the Servi, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the Xaladytka Roma (who at that time were certainly not called by that name). These two Roma groups were not very large, meaning that the Roma presence in the country was rather small. The Xaladytka, being horse traders and even later the sole suppliers of horses to the Tsarist army, were more visible, as they travelled with tents during the summer months to buy horses in the entire empire. However, they also had houses in villages and towns where they stayed during the winter months.

The annexation of Bessarabia at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century suddenly incorporated a larger number of Roma in the country as well as introducing the presence of segregated settlements which were purely Roma something that did not exist prior to this period in the country and is still very rare in the core Ukrainian lands. Note that during the early years of the Soviet Union, and the creation of the kolkhozes, the Soviet created Roma villages in several places where they had not existed before.

The Roma also suffered during the man-made famine of 1932-33 which killed a large number of Ukrainians and is given the name of Holodomor.<sup>18</sup> But Roma were actually not the target of this famine as they were very seldom farmers. They were simply collateral victims.

### Holocaust

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 transformed the life of Roma in the Ukraine.<sup>19</sup> They were now targets of the German and were eliminated by the German on the spot, almost never being brought to concentration camps. The German relied on local population to identify Roma, and the relatively good integration of the Roma in Ukraine meant that many were

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<sup>18</sup> Wikipedia. Holodomor. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holodomor>

<sup>19</sup> For an overview, as well as for further references, see: Holler, Martin. *Der nationalsozialistische Völkermord an der Roma in der Besetzten Sowjetunion (1941-1944)*. Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma. 2009. See also: Kay, Alex J., Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel. *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front, 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*. University Rochester Press, 2012.

spared. There are, however, numerous cases where Roma villages, such as the ones created by the Soviets during the collectivisation were fully wiped out.

Many Roma fled the Ukraine and the War, going as far as Samara and Saratov on the Volga, a place where nowadays many Servi live, not having been able to go back to the Ukraine after the War.

The number of Roma victims of the Holocaust in the Ukraine is nearly impossible to assess and quantify, as there were no reliable statistics on the Roma population prior to the War and as the German did not keep records of their murders in the fields.

## Soviet Times

Four key things happened in the aftermath of the War. First, the deportation of the Crimean Tatars ordered by Beria in May 1944<sup>20</sup> to Uzbek lands saw the deportation and death of many Kîrîmlides who were assimilated to the Tatars by the Soviets.

The second change in the Ukraine was the annexation of the Transcarpathian region, which thus brought a large additional number of Roma in the country., Roma who were not integrated, as they were effectively segregated by the centuries of Austro-Hungarian repression.

The third important fact was the interdiction of travels promulgated in 1956 by Khrushchev, force settling the Roma who were still travelling and forcing them to work in kolkhozes. This interdiction touched mostly Kalderaša who still had a travelling way of life, and less the Xaladytka, as they were only occasionally on travels for buying and selling horses and as most of them had houses. It resulted in the creation of further Roma segregated settlements.

Finally, the last important fact for Roma in the region was the drive to actually change the “nationality” that existed in Soviet passports from “Tzigan” to “Russian”, so as to reduce the number of Roma in the Ukraine (and in other Soviet Republics). This measure touched mostly the Xaladytka and Servi, and left the others as Roma minority.

## Modern Ukraine and Roma

### Foreword

The following sections on the Roma in the Ukraine may read as an indictment of the modern Ukrainian State and as a justification of the Russian propaganda dubbing Ukrainians as “Nazis”. First and foremost, we do not agree with the branding of a nation as “Nazis”. This term is reserved to a very specific regime in a specific country at a specific time. Misusing it, as it is being done by Russian propaganda, cannot be condoned.

Second, nationalists are not a unique Ukrainian phenomenon, by far. The Russians have groups many ultra-nationalist groups, who do beat up and sometimes kill what they deem as undesirable.

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<sup>20</sup> See Wikipedia. Deportation of the Crimean Tatars. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deportation\\_of\\_the\\_Crimean\\_Tatars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deportation_of_the_Crimean_Tatars)

Some of these groups have been very close to the government or even to Putin, as in the case of the motorcycle gang. Going further, many Western European countries do have far-right blatantly racist political parties that in some cases are even part of governments. These generally hate Roma, as they are deemed to be alien and undesirable in a very nazi-oriented view of ethnicity. So the next paragraphs on the situation of Roma in the Ukraine should not be read as an indictment of the country but as a fact finding and as an illustration of the gaps that are still present in that country. Nationalism, which is understandable in the current situation can lead to extremism, which is not, and the sometimes laissez-faire of the Ukrainian state in the case of Roma is simply not acceptable but unfortunately not an isolated case. Other countries, when really investigated, are not much better at prosecuting hate crimes or at prosecuting politicians making outrageous racist statements.

## Registration and Citizenship

The first issue faced by quite a few Roma in the Ukraine is the question of citizenship and the lack of official documents. Many Roma were qualified as being ethnic Russians, but many more were simply lacking any official documents, already in the old USSR. This is nothing really new, and many Roma, especially Vlax, simply failed to register births, deaths, or weddings. When they did it, it was often with long delays, and the number of Roma in the former USSR who are either officially born on 1<sup>st</sup> of January if upon declaration the child was said to have been born in winter or 1<sup>st</sup> June if born in the summer is fairly large. In addition, if you were Kalderaš, in the USSR, chances are that your place of birth was defaulted to Kishinev, today's Chisinau, Moldova.<sup>21</sup>

These quirks were not so important while the USSR existed but became much more important as soon as former soviet republics became independent. We, as the Rroma Foundation, had for example to help many Roma in Lithuania who were “officially” ethnic Russian in Lithuania, and who no one wanted upon independence of the country. Clearly, Roma in general were not wished as a minority in most of the new republics following the fall of the USSR.

Similar things happened in the Ukraine. Although it is impossible to give accurate numbers, there are hints that a fair proportion of Roma simply never declared births and weddings to the authorities. As a result, they are de-facto stateless, an issue when they fled the war. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, between 4 and 8% of Roma in the Ukraine do not have identity papers or a proof of Ukrainian citizenship and many more lack other documents such as birth or wedding certificates.<sup>22</sup> We will not dwell too long into the percentages cited here, as, when you do

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<sup>21</sup> The author can testify to having viewed numerous such documents, and Lev Tcherenkov stated as much, having seen many more.

<sup>22</sup> 4–8% ромов в Украине не имеют документов, удостоверяющих личность и подтверждающих украинское гражданство – Минкульт. In: Gordon. 28.07.2021. <https://gordonua.com/news/society/48-romov-v-ukraine-ne-imeyut-dokumentov-udostoverayushchih-lichnost-i-podtverzhdayushchih-ukrainskoe-grazhdanstvo-minkult-1564937.html>

not have an accurate picture of how many Roma live in the country, giving percentages is a purely random exercise.

The case of Transcarpathian Ukraine's Roma highlights one of the key issues with registration and official documents: In order to obtain an ID, a birth certificate, any official document, you need an address. And most Roma settlements in Transcarpathia but also in other Ukrainian regions do not have any official registration. These so-called "illegal" settlements and housing are common in many countries, and authorities have often chosen to enforce regulations to get "rid" of Roma, as for example in Bulgaria.

Roma have tried to circumvent this issue, and there are cases of residents complaining that Roma registered themselves at their official address, simply to be able to get papers.<sup>23</sup> The lack of birth certificates is often cited as an issue for obtaining Ukrainian identity papers.<sup>24</sup> The number of Roma without official documents varies according to the sources, even within the government. In 2020, according to the Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, Lyudmila Denisova, 10% of the Roma community in the Ukraine did not possess any identity documents.<sup>25</sup> According to the Ministry of Culture, in 2021, between 4 and 8% of Roma in the Ukraine did not have identity papers or a proof of Ukrainian citizenship. Apparently even more do not have other papers such as birth or marriage certificates, residency proof etc.<sup>26</sup>

We do have testimonies from people helping Roma refugees from the Ukraine who have encountered Roma without proof of citizenship, this in Poland, in Moldova, Romania, and in Western Europe. It is fairly clear that the Ukrainian authorities have done little to tackle this issue. There, as in many other places, one prefers nationalism over minorities, even when people have been living there for centuries. This problem is definitively present, as testified by recent articles about Roma refugees without proof of Ukrainian citizenship.<sup>27</sup>

## Mainstream views on Roma

To say that Ukrainians have positive views on Roma would definitively not reflect reality. However, one needs to relativise, and differentiate. News in the Ukraine are dominated by crimes committed

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<sup>23</sup> У Мукачеві місцеві жителі з подивом виявили прописаних у себе ромів: служби поплутали. In: ZNAJ. 28.02.2019. <https://znaj.ua/society/215253-u-mukachevi-miscevi-zhiteli-z-podivom-viyavili-propisanih-u-sebe-romiv-sluzhbi-poplutali>

У будинках мукачівців без їх відома прописали ромів. In: PMG. 28.02.2019. <https://pmg.ua/life/78046-u-budynkakh-mukachiv-civ-bez-ikh-vidoma-propysaly-romiv>

<sup>24</sup> В Запорозькой области выдали паспорта большой семье ромов. In: Actual. 02.12.2020. <https://actual.today/v-zaporozhskoi-oblasti-vydali-pasporta-bolshoj-seme-romov-foto/>

<sup>25</sup> Через відсутність документів 10% ромів позбавлені медичної допомоги – Денісова. In: UNN. 23.12.2020. <https://www.unn.com.ua/uk/news/1909185-cherez-vidsutnist-dokumentiv-10-romiv-pozbavleni-medichnoyi-dopomogi-denisova>

<sup>26</sup> 4–8% ромов в Украине не имеют документов, удостоверяющих личность и подтверждающих украинское гражданство – Минкульт. In: Gordon. 28.07.2021. <https://gordonua.com/news/society/48-romov-v-ukraine-ne-imeyut-dokumentov-udostoverayushchih-lichnost-i-podtverzhdayushchih-ukrainskoe-grazhdanstvo-minkult-1564937.html>

<sup>27</sup> Wie geflüchtete Roma aus der Ukraine gegen Vorurteile kämpfen. In: Bayerische Rundfunk. 01.06.2022. <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/wie-gefluechtete-roma-aus-der-ukraine-gegen-vorurteile-kaempfen,T7PCdEQ>

by Roma, by Roma band thieving in railway stations, aggressing brave citizen. In the reference list, we have listed some of the more egregious examples.

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## Surveys

That Roma are not popular in the Ukraine is underpinned by surveys. A 2018 survey in the Ukraine showed a scary trend. According to the survey, 27% of respondents are convinced that the rights of drug addicts must certainly be restricted, and 38% believe their rights should be limited in certain circumstances. About Roma, 12% of respondents are convinced that the rights of the Roma must definitely be curtailed, and 35% believe that their rights may be limited in certain circumstances.<sup>28</sup> A 2019 survey showed similar results with Africans and Roma being the least popular minorities in the Ukraine.<sup>29</sup> As usual (and as in other countries) these surveys are to be taken with a pinch of scepticism. They usually refer to the visible Roma and the results are not worse than what have been seen in Western Europe.

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## Criminality

To represent Roma as criminals is the most prevalent form of reporting on Roma in the Ukraine. They are being berated for moving on “bands” or “gangs”, pickpocketing at best, robbing, beating up passers-by, raping, selling drugs, and even holding Ukrainians as slaves. As references to these matters are too numerous, we simply refer the reader to the reference list on articles about criminality.<sup>30</sup> This list of references shows how often (and this is only a sample), the Ukrainian but also the Russian press reported on Roma criminality in the Ukraine. The terminology used is terrible, with terms such as “flooding”. Interestingly, the press in the Ukraine is rather specific in their Roma targets. Many if not most of the negative coverage is clearly allocated to the Transcarpathian Roma, with a smaller part being directed at the Southern Vlax Roma.

One has to be frank and that Roma criminality does indeed exist and is very visible, as places where it occurs are places where many people pass through, such as railway stations. This is thus what a fair part of the population will see and thus make their minds about. It is also dangerous, as

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<sup>28</sup> Українці за обмеження прав геїв, ромів та наркозалежних – опитування. In: Korrespondent. 10.12.2018. <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/4041862-ukraintsi-za-obmezhenia-prav-heiv-romiv-ta-narkozaleznykh-opytuvannia>

Українці вважають, що права наркозалежних та ромів потрібно в окремих ситуаціях обмежувати — опитування. In: Visokii Zamok. 10.12.2018. <https://wz.lviv.ua/news/381918-ukraintsi-vvazhaiut-shcho-prava-narkozaleznykh-ta-romiv-potribno-v-okremykh-sytuatsiakh-obmezhuvaty-opytuvannia>

Українці вважають, що права ромів, наркозалежних та секс-меншин потрібно обмежити. In: 1 News. 11.12.2018. <https://1news.com.ua/ukraine/ukrayintsi-vvazhayut-shho-prava-romiv-narkozaleznykh-ta-seks-menshin-potribno-obmezhati.html>

<sup>29</sup> Найвищий рівень до африканців і ромів: міжетнічні упередження в Україні. In: Pershij. 08.11.2019. <https://pershij.com.ua/naivyshchyi-riven-do-afrykantsiv-i-romiv-mizhetnichni-uperedzhennia-v-ukraini/>

Найгірше українці ставляться до румунів, африканців та ромів – дослідження. In: Unian. 07.11.2019. <https://www.unian.ua/society/10746414-navgirshe-ukrajinci-stavlyatsya-do-rumuniv-afrikanciv-ta-romiv-doslidzhennya.html>

<sup>30</sup> See the section on the press reporting on [criminality](#)

ultra nationalist movements such as C14 have gained popularity in “cleaning up” railway stations from Roma thieves.<sup>31</sup> People applauded,<sup>32</sup> and something even worse happening afterwards, namely the government claiming it did not happen.<sup>33</sup> Going even one step further, government officials accompanied C14 representative after this “clean up”, thus giving it an official seal of approval.<sup>34</sup>

This reporting can become almost grotesque as in the case of Roma children being made responsible of a train derailment without any proof or background.<sup>35</sup> In another train related case, Roma youngsters were filmed apparently stopping a train by laying a tree on the track and pelting a train with rocks. What is interesting in the reporting is that the person filming was definitively close to those Roma and filming them from behind at close distance which begs for some explanations.<sup>36</sup> That things are not so simple can be illustrated in a chain of event following the beating of a Ukrainian Donbas veteran in the Ukrainian Volyn region, in Torchyn, where a group of drunk Roma beat a veteran of the Donbas apparently because of some remarks he made.<sup>37</sup> This prompted

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<sup>31</sup> Народная инициатива: Киевский железнодорожный вокзал «зачистили» от ромов. In: Info Resist. 23.10.2018. <https://infore-sist.org/narodnaya-initsiativa-kievskiy-zheleznodorozhnyiy-vokzal-zachistili-ot-romov/>

THE WITNESS SHOWED HOW GYPSIES STEAL IN THE KIEV METRO. VIDEO. In: Bobr Times. 23.10.2018. <https://bobrtimes.com/the-witness-showed-how-gypsies-steal-in-the-kyiv-metro-video/131682/>

<sup>32</sup> Народная инициатива: Киевский железнодорожный вокзал «зачистили» от ромов. In: Info Resist. 23.10.2018. <https://infore-sist.org/narodnaya-initsiativa-kievskiy-zheleznodorozhnyiy-vokzal-zachistili-ot-romov/>

<sup>33</sup> Омбудсменка вимагає розслідувати можливий напад С14 на ромів на київському вокзалі. In: Hmarochos. <https://hmarochos.kiev.ua/2018/10/26/ombudsmenka-vimagaye-rozsliduvati-mozhlyviv-nyapad-s14-na-romiv-na-kiyivskomu-vokzali/>  
«Муниципальна варта» заявляє, що ромів на вокзалі в Києві не розганяли. In: Hromadske. 26.10.2018. <https://hromadske.ua/posts/municipalna-varta-kiyeva-zayavila-sho-romiv-na-vokzali-v-kiyevi-ne-rozganjali>

<sup>34</sup> UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT MINISTER ACCOMPANIES C14 NEO-NAZIS INSPECTING KYIV RAILWAY STATION FOR ROMA. In: Hope not Hate. 02.04.2020. [https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/04/02/ukrainian-government-minister-accompanies-c14-neo-nazis-inspecting-kyiv-railway-station-for-roma/?fbclid=IwAR38WIKCpgNR9kh1LyhJ6\\_3jRkYpGTw6xzRwz\\_58kRi2Vs-H5iwOVuJ9rqM](https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/04/02/ukrainian-government-minister-accompanies-c14-neo-nazis-inspecting-kyiv-railway-station-for-roma/?fbclid=IwAR38WIKCpgNR9kh1LyhJ6_3jRkYpGTw6xzRwz_58kRi2Vs-H5iwOVuJ9rqM)

<sup>35</sup> В Ужгороді грузовой поезд сошел на лагерь ромов. In: Cudebno Juridicheskaya Gazeta. 20.10.2018. <https://sud.ua/ru/news/ukraine/127272-v-Uzhhorode-gruzovoy-poezd-soshel-na-lager-romov>

В Ужгороді посреди табора ромов поезд сошел с рельсов. In: 24News. 19.10.2018. <http://24news.com.ua/64077-v-Uzhhorode-posredi-tabora-romov-poezd-soshel-s-relsov/>

<sup>36</sup> Кинули на колію дерево і закидали камінням: діти ромів зухвало напали на потяг (ВІДЕО). In: 0352. 10.08.2021. <https://www.0352.ua/news/3175923/kinuli-na-koliu-derevo-i-zakidali-kaminnam-diti-romiv-zuhvalo-napali-na-potag-video>

<sup>37</sup> У Торчині компанія п'яних ромів жорстоко побила атовця. ФОТО. ВІДЕО. In: UA Git TV. 04.10.2021. <https://uagit.tv/2021/10/4/11126-u-torchyni-kompaniya-pyanyh-romiv-zhorstoko-pobyla-atovtsya-foto-video>

У Волинській області група п'яних ромів побила ветерана АТО через зауваження (відео). In: Unian. 04.10.2021. <https://www.unian.ua/incidents/u-volynskiy-oblasti-grupa-p-yanih-romiv-pobila-veterana-ato-cherez-zauvazhennya-video-novini-ukrajina-11566291.html>

"Это тебе не восток, с\*ка, не восток": толпа ромов избива ветеранов АТО (видео 18+). In: Telegraf. 15.10.2021. <https://telegraf.com.ua/mestnyiy/2021-10-15/5685856-tse-tobi-ne-skhid-ska-ne-skhid-natovp-romiv-pobiv-veteraniv-ato-video-18>

Табір ромів виїхав із селища після побиття АТОВця на Волині. In: TV1. 07.10.2021. <https://t1.ua/news/61227-tabir-romiv-vuyikhav-iz-selyshcha-pislya-pobyttva-atovtsya-na-volyni.html>

many manifestations, also in Kyiv and in Irpin, a suburb that has unfortunately gained fame after the Russian occupation.<sup>38</sup>

Things are not as simple as presented. During these manifestations, there were fights between Roma and veterans of the war against separatists in Irpin. Roma were accused of beating the veterans. It seems that the entire affair was provoked, essentially to remove the Roma from the neighbourhood to make place for a new residential complex. So in brief, it was an attempt to kick Roma out. If true, this indicates collusion between Ukrainian nationalists and the construction lobby and business. The paper in which this is published is a well-established and serious one, laying credence to this theory.<sup>39</sup>

As a conclusion, Roma in the Ukraine are being presented as criminals, debauched, unreliable, not working, and clearly dangerous, but on the other hand, the press and Ukraine at large has a more differentiated attitude as it pinpoints these crime issues straight to Transcarpathian and to a lesser extent to Southern Vlach Roma. What they totally miss, and this is the thing that needs to be vehemently condemned, is that they brand all Roma to be criminals based on a minority of the population, which can only be qualified as racist, and they totally fail to see or understand the true reasons of the low level criminality found among Roma in these groups, namely poverty, exclusion, and lack of any alternatives.

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### *Discrimination and Stereotypes*

The stereotypes on Roma in the Ukraine besides the criminality that we have highlighted in the previous section have definitively increased in the last few decades.<sup>40</sup> Nationalism and Roma are seldom compatible, and the rise of nationalism coincides with a rise of racist stereotypes and attacks against minorities. One of the least negative stereotypes is that Roma do not work, as per the “astonishment” of an entrepreneur who realises that Roma actually work.<sup>41</sup> It sometimes verges on the absurd: a freight train derails in Uzhhorod near a Roma neighbourhood, and oh wonder,

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<sup>38</sup> "Хлопці, яких не садять". В Ірпені вийшли на акцію протесту після нападу ромів на АТОвця (фото, відео). In: Segodnya. 17.10.2021. <https://kiev.segodnya.ua/ua/kiev/kaccidents/parni-kotoryh-ne-sadyat-v-irpene-vyshli-na-akciyu-protesta-posle-napadeniya-romov-na-atovca-foto-video-1579721.html>

"Парни, которых не садят". В Ирпене вышли на акцию протеста после нападения ромов на АТОшника (фото, видео). In: Segodnya. 17.10.2021. <https://kiev.segodnya.ua/kiev/kaccidents/parni-kotoryh-ne-sadyat-v-irpene-vyshli-na-akciyu-protesta-posle-napadeniya-romov-na-atovca-foto-video-1579721.html>

Драка ромов и военнослужащих. In: BTV. 16.10.2021. <https://www.btv.md/draka-romov-i-voennosluzhashih/>

<sup>39</sup> Ромов выгоняют ради многоэтажек: почему националисты устроили шоу в Ирпене. In: VESto. 18.10.2021. <https://vesti.ua/kiev/romov-vygonayut-radi-mnogoetazhek-pochemu-natsionalisty-ustroili-shou-v-irpene>

<sup>40</sup> «Ромського гіпнозу не існує, існують страх і стереотипи»: вчимося говорити про ромів коректно. In: Hromanske Radio. 30.10.2020. <https://hromadske.radio/podcasts/dno/roms-koho-hipnozu-ne-iskuie-iskuuiut-strakh-i-steretyipy-vchymosia-hovoryty-pro-romiv-korektno>

<sup>41</sup> У Львівській області підприємець влаштував на роботу ромів. In: То є Lviv. 18.08.2018. <https://inlviv.in.ua/lviv/u-lvivskij-oblasti-pidpryyemets-vlashtuvav-na-robotu-romiv>

“Roma” are in all the titles...<sup>42</sup> When poverty is not the the theme, one shows the very rich Roma (and thus they must be criminal to get to that money) and their parties.<sup>43</sup> In another case, Roma were suspected of abducting non-Roma children, a fairy tale, most prevalent in Western Europe.<sup>44</sup> When Roma settle in predominantly non-Roma neighbourhoods, people protest, as in Vynohradiv when a Roma representative bought a house. People are tried to prevent him from living there.<sup>45</sup> According to a Romani activist and national consultant to the Council of Europe in the project “Protection of National Minorities, Including Roma, and Minority Languages in Ukraine”, Oleksandra Koryak, “Roma are the most discriminated ethnic community in Ukraine.” Attacks on Roma settlements, labour exploitation, lack of access to medical services, government services, inability to obtain education, discrimination in the media, stereotypes about “Roma” and, as a result, hostile attitude of part of society - these are just a few of the problems faced by Roma in Ukraine. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the conditions in which Roma are forced to live.<sup>46</sup> Blatant discriminations have been documented: In the Odessa region, Roma were discriminated in the health service and hospital;<sup>47</sup> the region was flooded at some point with anti-Roma leaflets;<sup>48</sup> in Ivano Frankivsk, the Railway station was reported as “free of Roma”;<sup>49</sup> near Kyiv’s central station, posters were put up stating “You can be robbed by Gypsies”, these ads were forbidden by the Ombudsman as they are derogatory to the entire Roma community and incite racial hatred;<sup>50</sup> A really nasty poster was posted on the bus station in Lutsk, Ukraine urging people not to speak nor help Roma there.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> В Ужгороді грузовой поезд сошел на лагерь ромов. In: Cudebno Juridicheskaya Gazeta. 20.10.2018. <https://sud.ua/ru/news/ukraine/127272-v-uzhgorode-gruzovoy-poezd-soshel-na-lager-romov>

В Ужгороді посреди табора ромов поезд сошел с рельсов. In: 24News. 19.10.2018. <http://24news.com.ua/64077-v-uzhgorode-posredi-tabora-romov-poezd-soshel-s-relsov/>

<sup>43</sup> Пара ромів з Ужгорода вразила Україну розкішним весіллям на національному телепроекті (ВІДЕО). In: 0312. 13.12.2018. <https://www.0312.ua/news/2246195/para-romiv-z-uzgoroda-vrazil-ukrainu-rozkisnim-vesillam-na-nacionalnomu-teleproekti-video>

<sup>44</sup> Зняли з поїзда ромів з трьома дітьми без документів. Немовля сильно плакало. In: 20 Minut (UA). 08.07.2019. <https://vn.20minut.ua/Podii/znyali-z-poyzda-romiv-z-troma-ditmi-bez-dokumentiv-nemovlya-silno-pla-10899363.html>

<sup>45</sup> У Виноградіві люди збунтувалися проти сім’ї ромів, які придбали будинок на їх вулиці (ВІДЕО). In: Pershij. 17.09.2019. <https://pershij.com.ua/u-vynohradovi-liudy-zbuntuvalysia-proty-sim-i-romiv-iaki-prydbaly-budynok-na-ikh-vulytsi-video/>

<sup>46</sup> «НЕТ ДОСТУПА ДАЖЕ К ВОДЕ»: КАК КОРОНАВИРУС ПОВЛИЯЛ НА ЖИЗНЬ РОМОВ? In: Novost6i. 08.10.2020. <https://novosti.dn.ua/article/7678-net-dostupa-dazhe-k-vode-kak-koronavirus-povlyyal-na-zhyn-romov>

<sup>47</sup> Омбудсмен выступила против дискриминации ромов в одесских больницах. In: УСИ. 14.02.2017. <https://usionline.com/2017/02/14/ombudsmen-vystupila-protiv-diskriminatsii-romov-v-odesskih-bolnitsah/>

<sup>48</sup> Ukraine: Odessa is flooded with anti-Romani posters. In: Romea.cz. 02.01.2017. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/ukraine-odessa-is-flooded-with-anti-romani-posters#.WGwTw9upFoA.facebook>

<sup>49</sup> Привокзальний сквер у Івано-Франківську звільняють від ромів. In: MGK. 06.09.2018. <http://gk-press.if.ua/pryvokzalnyi-skver-u-ivano-frankivsku-zvilnyayut-vid-romiv/>

<sup>50</sup> Укрзалізниця попала в громкий скандал из-за ромов: подробности. In: RBK Ukraine. 12.03.2020. <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/styler/ukrzaliznytsya-popala-gromkiy-skandal-romov-1584020533.html>

<sup>51</sup> На Луцькій автостанції наклеїли попередження про циган, але ромів-прохачів поменшало (фото). In: Konkurent. 14.02.2022. <https://konkurent.ua/publication/88753/na-lutskiy-avtostantsii-nakleili-poperedzhennya-pro-tsigan-ale-romiv-prohachiv-pomen-shalo-foto/>



International reactions have been vocal, but results have been rather sparse. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission appealed to the regional police, the regional state administration and the human rights ombudsman in the Ivano-Frankivsk region to prevent possible violence against Roma;<sup>52</sup> the Council of Europe intervened;<sup>53</sup> and it started some projects.<sup>54</sup> All with a very limited impact, unfortunately.

One aspect that has been totally ignored in the press and in politics in both the Ukraine and abroad is the impact of the 2014 War with the annexation of Crimea and the creation of “autonomous” republics in the Donbas. First, this war displaced Roma, resulting in many more homeless Roma without work or abode,<sup>55</sup> but this conflict resulted in a spike of nationalism. And as already said, nationalism and minorities do not combine well.

In addition, the economical situation of Roma minorities in the Transcarpathian region and to a lesser extent in the South of the Ukraine led to an increased presence of Roma begging and stealing in open places, especially in Railway stations. The Ukrainian press pretty consistently has made Roma from Transcarpathia responsible for the criminality,<sup>56</sup> but the impact thereof was felt and widened to all Roma in the process.

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### *Living Conditions and Work*

The representation and the common views of the living conditions of Roma in the Ukraine are actually not really representative of reality. The views are seemingly tilted towards Roma living in segregated ghettos, without any amenities, under appalling conditions.<sup>57</sup> Camps built on garbage dumps, no access to clean water, corruption, both on the government but also on the Roma side. Appalling conditions for children, fires and other disasters, things are seldom good in those reports. The flip side of the coin is also to be found in reporting in the Ukraine, settlements such as the ones on Bessarabia are being put forward for their Roma “mansions”, something that is far from typical.<sup>58</sup> Also tilting towards the other sides are reports of thefts in graves on Kîrîmlides, as

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<sup>52</sup> Мониторингова місія ООН зауважила мову ворожнечі до ромів у Франківську. In: Kurs. 23.11.2020. <https://kurs.if.ua/politic/monitoryngova-misiya-oon-zauvazhyla-movu-vorozhnechi-do-romiv-u-frankivsku/>

<sup>53</sup> Newsletter "Strengthening protection of national minorities, including Roma and minority languages in Ukraine". In: COE. 01.10.2021. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/newsletter-strengthening-protection-of-national-minorities-including-roma-and-minority-languages-in-ukraine->

<sup>54</sup> Empowering the Roma communities to stand against discrimination in Ukraine. In: COE. 05.10.2021. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/inclusion-and-antidiscrimination/-/empowering-the-roma-communities-to-stand-against-discrimination-in-ukraine>

<sup>55</sup> Strangers in Their Own Land. In: TOL. 24.07.2017. <http://www.tol.org/client/article/27072-ukraine-donbas-roma-minorities-displaced-people.html>

<sup>56</sup> See the section on [Criminality](#)

<sup>57</sup> See the reference in the section on [living conditions](#)

<sup>58</sup> For example in: В Україні нашли секретний табір ромов, багатству которого позавидует даже Янукович: видео. In: ZNAJ. 13.12.2018. <https://znaj.ua/ru/society/192774-v-ukrajini-znayshli-sekretniy-tabir-romiv-bagatstvu-yakogo-pozazdrit-navit-yanukovich-video>

they tend to bury their heads with some of their favourite items.<sup>59</sup> Their key point is not present in the usual narratives in the Ukraine: That these segregated communities are by far not the norm for Roma in the country, except in selected regions - Transcarpathia and Bessarabia.

Concerning employment, we also see very varied results. A survey of representative Roma communities in Ukraine was conducted by the International Charitable Organization "Roma Women's Foundation Chirikli". According to the study, housekeeping is the most common main occupation of Roma (26%), 23% have unstable earnings / temporary part-time jobs, 15% are self-employed, 13% are unemployed, 10.5% have various occupations, employees, specialists, etc.<sup>60</sup> Another survey on employment among Roma in 7 regions of the Ukraine found that only 27% of the respondents had a regular job, mostly in the lower income bracket.<sup>61</sup>

As in any country, the issue with these surveys is that the number of Roma is somewhat unknown, and that most of these tend simply to miss out the more integrated Roma in the country. One should thus always take these results with a bit of suspicion. What is certain is that in regions such as in the South and in the Transcarpathian regions of the Ukraine unemployment is rampant. This also befell the Roma who worked on collective farms that were later privatised.

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## *Civil Society*

The lack of integration and acceptance for Roma and the need to review the policies of the states for this minority is not new.<sup>62</sup> A permanent working group was set up in Ukraine in 2018 to deal with the integration and protection of Roma rights. According to the press service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the working group includes representatives of the National Police, the State Migration Service, the National Academy of Internal Affairs, the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine, the Ministry of Social Policy, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, the SBU, the KSCA, as well as Roma NGOs.<sup>63</sup>

To this day, nothing has happened. The fact that three years later, the state was still planning measure for integration by 2030 says a lot of the priorities. No concrete measures yet, and the peren-

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<sup>59</sup> Могили ромів потерпають від вандалів на Херсонщині. In: Novyi Den. 03.07.2020. <https://newday.kherson.ua/mohyly-romiv-poterpaiut-vid-vandaliv-na-khersonshchyni/>

<sup>60</sup> Потреби ромів у громадах: в Україні провели дослідження. In: Ukrinform. 08.11.2021. <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-regions/3347023-potrebi-romiv-u-gromadah-v-ukraini-proveli-doslidzenna.html>

<sup>61</sup> Тільки чверть ромів у громадах має регулярний дохід. In: Zaholovok. 20.11.2021. <https://zaholovok.com.ua/tilki-chvert-romiv-u-gromadakh-mae-regulyarniy-dokhid>

<sup>62</sup> Still un-integrated: Ukraine's Roma Integration Strategy leads nowhere. In: ERRC Blog. 09.02.2017. <http://www.errc.org/blog/still-un-integrated-ukraines-roma-integration-strategy-leads-nowhere/155>

<sup>63</sup> В Україні створено спецгрупу для захисту ромів. In: UA News. 10.07.2018. <https://ua.news/ua/v-ukrayini-stvoreno-spetsgrupu-dlya-zahystu-romiv/>

МВС створило групу із захисту та інтеграції ромів у суспільство. In: Glavkom. 10.07.2018. <https://glavcom.ua/news/mvs-stvorilo-grupu-iz-zahystu-ta-integraciji-romiv-u-suspilstvo--511629.html>

В Україні почала роботу група з питань захисту та інтеграції ромів. In: Vysoki Zamok. 10.07.2018. <https://wz.lviv.ua/news/374019-v-ukraini-pochala-robotu-hrupa-z-pytan-zakhystu-ta-intehratsii-romiv>

nial problems of lack of funds, the fact that many Roma do not have identity papers or registration, and of course the latent racism against Roma does not make this simple.<sup>64</sup> The Ukrainian state has tried to create some regional authorities in regions with a “high” Roma minority, also without real traction.<sup>65</sup>

That the Ukrainian authorities are somewhat out of touch on how to tackle minorities is highlighted by the fact that the integration of the Roma minority in the Odessa region was put under the police direction. The head of the Department of Juvenile Prevention of the Odessa City Police Department, Colonel of Police Vitaliy Kapulyak, spoke with the head of the Romani congress, with whom he discussed ways of overcoming the problems related to violations of the legislation and minor offences by young Roma.<sup>66</sup>

Politicians in the Ukraine have not been really sensitive to the Roma minority. As an example, a politician bemoaning the fact that the police doesn't do anything against the “gangs” of Roma thieves in Kiev's central railway station, a situation that only can come to be if the police is corrupt and benefits; and second, the news of the “arrest” of a group of Roma from Transcarpathia by a militia and their subsequent release.<sup>67</sup> Worse, a Ukrainian government minister accompanied C14 nationalists after they “cleaned” Kyiv's central railway station of Roma criminals.<sup>68</sup> Arsen Avakov Volodymyr Martynenko, who regularly acted as a spokesman for the Ministry of Internal Affairs uses the terms “Roma” and “thieves” as synonyms.<sup>69</sup>

The mayor of Rivne a small town in Transcarpathian Ukraine, Oleksandr Tretyak, threatened to forcibly remove Roma out of the city if they did not leave on their own. But then he apologised.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Папір витримає все: як Кабмін взявся за інтеграцію ромів. In: Apostrof. 07.08.2021. <https://apostrophe.ua/ua/article/society/2021-08-07/bumaga-sterpit-vse-kak-kabmin-vzyalsya-za-integratsiyu-romov/41075>

Названо дві ключові проблеми інтеграції ромів в українське суспільство. In: Apostrof. 07.08.2021. <https://apostrophe.ua/ua/news/society/2021-08-07/nazvani-dve-klyuchevyye-problemy-integratsii-romov-v-ukrainskoe-obschestvo/240681>

Названы две ключевые проблемы интеграции ромов в украинское общество. In: Apostrof. 07.08.2021. <https://apostrophe.ua/news/society/2021-08-07/nazvani-dve-klyuchevyye-problemy-integratsii-romov-v-ukrainskoe-obschestvo/240681>

<sup>65</sup> Ukraine's govt supports creation of regional authorities for Roma affairs. In: 112.ua. 24.07.2018. <https://112.international/politics/ukraines-govt-supports-creation-of-regional-authorities-for-roma-affairs-30528.html>

112.ua: Cabinet supports creation of regional authorities for Roma affairs. In: Kyiv Post. 24.07.2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/112-ua-cabinet-supports-creation-of-regional-authorities-for-roma-affairs.html>

<sup>66</sup> Одесская полиция занялась интеграцией ромов в украинское общество. In: Slovo. 13.07.2018. <http://slovo.odessa.ua/news/28630-odesskaya-policiya-zanyalas-integratsiyey-romov-v-ukrainskoe-obschestvo.html>

<sup>67</sup> Нардеп Гришук рассказал, почему полиция на столичном ж/д вокзале “не противодействует группам ромов, которые грабят людей” (три видео). In: Kiev Vlast. 06.03.2020. <http://kievvlast.com.ua/news/nardep-grishuk-rasskazal-pochemu-politsiya-na-stolichnom-zhd-vokzale-ne-protivodejstvuet-grupпам-romov-kotorye-grabyat-lyudej-tri-video>

<sup>68</sup> UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT MINISTER ACCOMPANIES C14 NEO-NAZIS INSPECTING KYIV RAILWAY STATION FOR ROMA. In: Hope not Hate. 02.04.2020. [https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/04/02/ukrainian-government-minister-accompanies-c14-neo-nazis-inspecting-kyiv-railway-station-for-roma/?fbclid=IwAR38WIKCpgNR9kh1LyhJ6\\_3jRkYpGTw6xzRwz\\_58kRi2Vs-H5iwOVuJ9rqM](https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/04/02/ukrainian-government-minister-accompanies-c14-neo-nazis-inspecting-kyiv-railway-station-for-roma/?fbclid=IwAR38WIKCpgNR9kh1LyhJ6_3jRkYpGTw6xzRwz_58kRi2Vs-H5iwOVuJ9rqM)

<sup>69</sup> Радник Авакова похвалился кількістю затриманих на київському вокзалі ромів. Що не так із цією заявою? In: Hmarochos. 07.11.2020. <https://hmarochos.kiev.ua/2020/11/07/radnyk-avakova-pohvalyvysya-kilkisty-zatrymanyh-na-kyyvskomu-vokzali-romiv-shho-ne-tak-iz-tsiyevu-zayavoyu/>

<sup>70</sup> «Не хватает толерантности»: мэр Ровно пригрозил принудительно вывезти ромов из города, а затем извинился. In: Hromadske. 10.06.2021. <https://hromadske.ua/ru/posts/ne-hvataet-tolerantnosti-mer-rovno-ugrozhaet-prinuditelno-vyvezti-romov-iz-goroda>

On Radio, he said said on Radio Track: "I see that we are going to do something radical: we will pack everyone on a bus and take them to their native Transcarpathia."<sup>71</sup> The residents of the town, then signed a petition to pretty much exactly the same purpose.<sup>72</sup> To be fair, the police eventually investigated, but charges were not pressed.<sup>73</sup>

One may think this was an isolated event. Unfortunately not, as the mayor of Ivano Frankivsk openly called for the deportation of Roma. He then apologised, but was not sanctioned.<sup>74</sup>

That the president of the ultra nationalist Ukrainian C14, Eugene Karas, who missed a good opportunity to shut up was granted an interview with Glavkom, where he described how, according to him, in Ukraine it is possible to "socialize" Roma and described how his group "polices" the streets of Ukrainian cities shows that the state standards towards minorities have some way to go.<sup>75</sup>

One thing needs to be acknowledged: With the Zelenskyy presidency, attends and gestures have been made. For example, the Ukrainian First Lady invited women from different Ukrainian minorities to draw attention on the diversity in the Ukraine including many Roma.<sup>76</sup>

## Attacks and Pogroms

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### *The Start*

Historically, there have not been any anti-Roma pogroms that are recorded in the Ukraine prior to its second independence in 1991. Generally, except in the two regions appended to the Ukraine after World War Two, relations between Roma and the general population were rather good, and definitively better than in many Western European countries.

As in other former countries under Soviet influence, two factors contributed significantly to the worsening of the situation with Roma. First, the economic upheaval, and second the rise of nationalism. In that, the Ukraine does not differ from other places. The very same phenomena did happen in Bulgaria, a country with no historical presence of racism against Roma and a well integrated minority.

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<sup>71</sup> Мер Рівного вибачився за пропозицію «запакувати ромів в автобус». In: Varta 1. 10.06.2021. <https://varta1.com.ua/mer-rivnogo-vybachyvsvya-za-propozytsiyu-zapakuvaty-romiv-v-avtobus/>

<sup>72</sup> вняни підтримали петицію щодо притягнення ромів до відповідальності. In: Rivne Media. 11.06.2021. <https://rivne.media/news/rivnyani-pidtrimali-petitsiyu-shchodo-prityahnennya-romiv-do-vidpovidalnosti-45378>

<sup>73</sup> Полиция открыла производство против мэра Ровно, который пригрозил «запаковать ромов в автобус и вывезти в Закарпатье». In: Hromadske. 25.06.2021. <https://hromadske.ua/ru/posts/policija-otkryla-proizvodstvo-protiv-mera-rovno-kotoryi-prigrozil-zapakovat-romov-v-avtobus-i-vyvezti-v-zakarpate>

<sup>74</sup> Hromadske: Ukrainian mayor apologizes after calling for Roma expulsion. In: Kyivpost. 23.04.2020. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/hromadske-ukrainian-mayor-apologizes-after-calling-for-roma-expulsion.html?cn-reloaded=1>

<sup>75</sup> Націоналісти запропонували рецепт соціалізації ромів в Україні Повний. In: Glavkom. 13.07.2018. <https://glavkom.ua/news/nacionalisti-zaproponovali-recept-socializaciji-romiv-v-ukrajini-512457.html>

<sup>76</sup> Meeting of the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska with women from different national minorities groups, participants of the campaign "Svoya". In: COE. 04.03.2021. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/meeting-of-the-first-lady-of-ukraine-olena-zelenska-with-women-from-different-national-minorities-groups-participants-of-the-campaign-svoya->

The economic changes resulted in closure of collective farms and many factories, depriving many Roma from work. As quite a few did not have sufficient qualifications, they remained unemployed even when the first phase of the economic changes stopped and the economy picked up. Being unemployed meant that many had to resort to begging, sometimes stealing in order to survive, and many more just simply received social help. This, in turn resulted in an increase of racism and resentment against Roma, preventing them from ever finding a new job due to racism in addition to lack of qualifications. So, in the Ukraine as in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, etc., a significant number of Roma have been unemployed, a situation that has lasted 30 years and is difficult to counterbalance.

Nationalism, in the Ukraine as elsewhere is not compatible with minorities. The mere concept of nation-state goes against housing different cultures and ethnicities under one roof. This has been seen all over Eastern Europe since the fall of communism and of course also in Western Europe earlier, culminating in the racial laws in Germany. Populist politicians have also added fuel to the fire, blaming Roma for crime, from sucking up money from the state, etc. all the while not mentioning that the biggest thefts were the ones that resulted in the privatisation of properties and business and in the ongoing corruption of the elites. Roma were thus made convenient scapegoats.

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### *The Cases*

One of the earliest documented pogroms occurred in the Odessa region, in the village of Petrivka in 2002. The pogrom started after the murder of an Ukrainian that was attributed to a Rom. The mob destroyed the houses and chased the Roma away. This pogrom resulted in the condemnation of the Ukraine by the European Court of Human Rights in 2018.<sup>77</sup>

The pace of attacks picked up after the 2014 war in the Donbas and the annexation of Crimea by Russia. One of the better known events occurred in 2016 where a pogrom against Roma took place in Loshchinovka, near Odessa. Luckily no Roma were hurt as they had fled prior to the start of the pogrom. The Roma fled and have since not returned to their village.<sup>78</sup> The origins of this pogrom was the brutal murder of an 8 year old girl for which a Rom was accused, but where charges were

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<sup>77</sup> Roma victims of pogrom in Odesa Oblast get justice in European court after 16 years. In: Kyiv Post. 07.11.2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/roma-victims-of-pogrom-in-odesa-region-get-justice-in-european-court-after-16-years.html>

European court asks Ukraine to compensate Roma for 2002 attack. In: Al Jazeera. 07.11.2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/european-court-asks-ukraine-compensate-roma-2002-attack-181106174223838.html>

UNIAN: ECHR orders Ukraine to pay compensations to Roma applicants affected in 2002 'pogrom'. In: Kyiv Post. 06.11.2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/unian-echr-orders-ukraine-to-pay-compensations-to-roma-applicants-affected-in-2002-pogrom.html>

ECHR orders Ukraine to pay compensations to Roma applicants affected in 2002 "pogrom". In: UNIAN. 06.11.2018. <https://www.unian.info/society/10327374-echr-orders-ukraine-to-pay-compensations-to-roma-applicants-affected-in-2002-pogrom.html>

<sup>78</sup> Для изгнанных из Лощиновки ромов требуют компенсацию 700 тысяч гривен. In: KP. 30.01.2018. <https://kp.ua/incidents/599589-dlia-vezghnannykh-yz-loschynovky-romov-trebuut-kompensatsiyui-700-tysyach-hryven>

A year on from Odessa "pogrom", Ukraine's Roma face rise in mob justice. In: Reuters. 25.09.2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-rights-roma/a-year-on-from-odessa-pogrom-ukraines-roma-face-rise-in-mob-justice-idUSKCN1C01RN>

later dropped.<sup>79</sup> Roma went to court to protest against the eviction and against the actions of several village officials., including the police which did not do anything to protect the Roma. They lost – the eviction was deemed “self-government” of the village.<sup>80</sup>

2018 saw the start of a more systematic campaign to forcefully remove Roma makeshift camps from larger cities such as Kyiv,<sup>81</sup> Lviv,<sup>82</sup>, Ternopil,<sup>83</sup> etc.<sup>84</sup> In some of those attacks, people died, such as in Kyiv.<sup>85</sup> Some of the attacks were much more targeted, such as the one against a lawyer representing the victims of a Pogrom in the Kharkiv region,<sup>86</sup> or the case where a Roma activist was stabbed in Kharkiv<sup>87</sup> indicate a level of planning and organisation deliberately targeting Roma.

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### *The Nationalists and the Roma*

These attacks were mostly the actions of ultra nationalist and neo-Nazi groups such as the C14 group, a vigilante association that policed cities and chased “Roma criminals” away.<sup>88</sup> They openly broadcasted their deeds, and only in the case of the murder of a Rom in Kyiv did they initially deny

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<sup>79</sup> ‘More doubts than evidence’ in child murder case that triggered shocking Loshchynivka anti-Roma riot. In: KHPG. 09.09.2020. <http://khp.org/en/index.php?id=1599565821>

Halya Coynash: Child murder case that triggered shocking Loshchynivka anti-Roma riot. In: Kyiv Post. 09.09.2020. <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/opinion/op-ed/halya-coynash-child-murder-case-that-triggered-shocking-loshchynivka-anti-roma-riot.html?cn-reloaded=1>

<sup>80</sup> «С целью снять напряжение». Одесский суд решил, что требование выселить ромов из села Лощиновка — это самоуправление. In: Graty. 11.01.2022. <https://graty.me/news/s-czelyu-snyat-napryazhenie-odesskij-sud-reshil-cto-trebovanie-vyselit-romov-iz-sela-loshhinovka-eto-samoupravlenie/>

<sup>81</sup> Attack on Roma camp in Kyiv’s Holosiivky park. In: 112.ua. 08.06.2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/112-ua-attack-on-roma-camp-in-kyivs-holosiivky-park.html>

<sup>82</sup> Camp of Roma people was burned in Lviv, - Ombudsman. In: 112 International. 11.05.2018. <https://112.international/ukraine-top-news/camp-of-roma-people-was-burned-in-lviv-ombudsman-28426.html>  
<http://www.ombudsman.gov.ua/ua/all-news/pr/10518-dq-na-perekonannya-upovnovazhenogo-nepoodinoki-provavi-ksenofobii-potre/>

<sup>83</sup> ПРИЧИНОЙ НАПАДЕНИЙ РАДИКАЛОВ НА РОМОВ МОЖЕТ БЫТЬ ПОЛИТИКА ИЛИ ОТВЛЕЧЕНИЕ ВНИМАНИЯ. In: RU TSN. <https://ru.tsn.ua/video/video-novini/prichinoy-napadeniy-radikalov-na-romov-mozhet-byt-politika-ili-otvlechenie-vnimaniya.html>

<sup>84</sup> See references in the [Attacks and Pogroms](#) section.

String of attacks hit Roma settlements in Ukraine. In: Euronews. 26.06.2018. <http://www.euronews.com/2018/06/26/string-of-attacks-hit-roma-settlements-in-ukraine>

<sup>85</sup> Ukraine Roma camp attack leaves one dead. In: BBC News. 24.06.2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-44593995>

<sup>86</sup> Halya Coynash: Ukrainian prosecutor accused of brutal attack on Roma hate crime lawyer. In: Kyiv Post. 28.05.2018. <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/opinion/op-ed/halya-coynash-ukrainian-prosecutor-accused-of-brutal-attack-on-roma-hate-crime-lawyer.html>

<sup>87</sup> Roma activist hospitalized after Zaporizhia knife attack. In: the Kyiv Post. 24.10.2019. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/roma-activist-hospitalized-after-zaporizhia-knife-attack.html?cn-reloaded=1>

Ukrainian Roma Activist In Emergency Care After Stabbing. In: Radio Free Europe. 24.10.2019.

Ромов можно убивать – власть не против. In: Vesti. 25.10.2019. <https://vesti.ua/strana/355260-romov-mozhno-ubivat-vlast-ne-protiv>

<sup>88</sup> Националисты поймали компанию ромов на воровстве в центре Киева. In: Ukraina Nova. 22.02.2019. <https://uanova.net/accidents/8338-nacionalisty-pojmali-kompaniju-romov-na-vorovstve-v-centre-kieva.html>

Орудует банда ромов: момент наглой кражи карманниками в Киеве попал на видео. In: Obozretavel. 21.02.2019. <https://www.obozretavel.com/kiyany/crime/oruuet-banda-romov-moment-nagloj-krazhi-karmannikami-v-kieve-popal-na-video.htm>

their involvement. Other groups include the well known Azov one, with some of its members then incorporated in the Ukrainian Army Azov brigades and providing fuel to Russian propaganda.<sup>89</sup>

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### *The Reactions and Justice*

The reactions of the police and justice to these attacks has unfortunately proven to be often weak and very lenient. In the case of the murder of a Rom in Kyiv by C14, the police reacted only after videos of the attack surfaced<sup>90</sup> and refused to speak about potential suspects.<sup>91</sup> It took them several months to name a suspect for the attack.<sup>92</sup> At some point, the head of the Ukrainian security alleged a Russian hand in the latest attack against Roma in the Ukraine.<sup>93</sup>

Justice has not been much better. Sergei Mazur, the mastermind behind many anti-Roma pogroms was condemned to house arrest.<sup>94</sup> A year after the most violent attacks in Kyiv and Lviv, no one had been condemned.<sup>95</sup> The main perpetrators of the attack in Livi that killed a Rom were sentenced to 1.5 years of jail, and many came out without any prison sentence.<sup>96</sup> When Roma tried to sue, as in the case of the Odessa eviction, they lost.

So all in all, the police and justice were definitively leaning more towards the anti-Roma attacks than on the side of the victims. This behaviour and the number of attacks prompted many reactions in the West, the EU, the UN as well as numerous NGOs.<sup>97</sup>

To be fair to the Ukraine, after this spike of attacks in 2018 and 2019, the situation improved with the arrival of the new Zelenskyy government and a much clearer clamp down on neo-Nazis and ultra-nationalist activities.

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<sup>89</sup>Inside the Extremist Group That Dreams of Ruling Ukraine. In: Haaretz. 23.02.2019. <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/premium-inside-the-extremist-group-that-dreams-of-ruling-ukraine-1.6936835>

<sup>90</sup>Police Break Silence After Video Shows Far-Right Attack On Kyiv Roma. Radio Free Europe. 26.04.2018. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-police-break-silence-after-video-shows-far-right-attack-on-kyiv-roma/29194216.html>

<sup>91</sup>Погром лагеря ромов: полиция отказалась говорить о подозреваемых. In: Liga. 04.06.2018. <http://news.liga.net/incidents/news/pogrom-lagerya-romov-politsiya-otkazalas-govorit-o-podozrevaemyh>

<sup>92</sup>Полиция сообщила о подозрении участнику разгона лагеря ромов на Лысой горе в Киеве. In: 112.ua. 10.07.2018. <https://112.ua/glavnye-novosti/politsiya-soobshhila-o-podozrenii-uchastniku-razgona-lagerya-romov-na-lysoy-gore-v-kieve-453329.html>

<sup>93</sup>Ukrainian State Security Chief Alleges 'Russian Hand' in Attack on Roma. In: Polygraph. 26.06.2018. <https://www.polygraph.info/a/ukrainian-intelligence-chief-alleges-russian-hand-in-attack-on-roma-camp/29322090.html>

<sup>94</sup>Подозреваемому в погроме лагеря ромов Мазуру смягчили меру пресечения. In: 112. 07.08.2018. <https://112.ua/obshchestvo/podozrevaемому-v-pogrome-lagerya-romov-mazuru-smyagchili-meru-presecheniya-457287.html>

Координатору С14 смягчили меру пресечения за нападение на ромов. In: Komsomolskaya Pravda. 07.08.2018. <https://kp.ua/politics/614916-koordinatoru-s14-smiahchyly-meru-presecheniya-za-napadenye-na-romov>

Напад на табір ромів у Києві: координатору С14 Мазуру можуть скасувати арешт у вересні. In: RBK. 07.08.2018. <https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/napadenie-lager-romov-kieve-koordinatoru-1533652851.html>

<sup>95</sup>Ukraine: A year after attack on Roma camp in Kyiv, no justice for victims. In: Amnesty International. 16.04.2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/04/ukraine-a-year-after-attack-on-roma-camp-in-kyiv-no-justice-for-victims/>

<sup>96</sup>Побили ромів і розгромили табір: суд озвучив вердикт банді львівських малоліток, вийшли сухими з води. In: Znaj. 26.08.2019. <https://lviv.znaj.ua/256724-pobili-romiv-i-rozgroмили-tabir-sud-ozvuchiv-verdikt-bandi-lvivskih-malolitok-viyshli-suhimi-z-vodi>

<sup>97</sup>See references in the section [Attacks and Pogroms](#).

## The Transcarpathian Roma, Ukraine and Hungary

Viktor Orban, the now long time Hungarian Prime Minister, decided early that granting Hungarian speakers Hungarian passports had potential both for his Hungarian popularity as well as for gaining additional votes. Clearly, after the creation of modern day Hungary with the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War One, enshrined in the Trianon Treaty, the newly created and independent Hungarian nation left many Hungarian speakers outside of its borders. Slovakia, Vojvodina, Transylvania, and nowadays Transcarpathian Ukraine all had sizeable Hungarian speakers minorities. As usual in Central and Eastern Europe, the notion of a nation state is a very new idea. So historical borders of the Hungarian Kingdom encompassed many other people, Slavs such as the Slovaks, the Croats, Germans, as all cities up till Brašov, in Romania were German, Romanians, and so on. Further North and East, cities in the Polish Lithuanian Union were mostly Polish, resulting for example in Lviv being one of the cradles of Polish culture.<sup>98</sup>

After Orban's return to power with a supermajority in 2010, Orban raised the stakes and started pitching the defence of the Hungarians outside of Hungary and of course the disaster of the Trianon treaty, which ironically finally allowed Hungary independence after 6 centuries under foreign rule. In 2011, his government passed a new citizenship law, allowing ethnic Hungarians to apply for simplified naturalisation if they can speak Hungarian and provide evidence of Hungarian ancestry.<sup>99</sup> In 2014, he asked the Ukrainian government to grant autonomy to Hungarians in the country, mostly from the Transcarpathian region of the Ukraine.<sup>100</sup> Ironically, that region was part of Czechoslovakia after Trianon until its annexation by the USSR after World War Two.

A bit later, upon meeting with the Ukrainian president Poroshenko, Orban raised the issue of dual citizenship but insisted he was all for the territorial integrity of the Ukraine.<sup>101</sup> Shortly thereafter, Hungary started issuing passports to Hungarian speakers in the Ukraine resulting in a diplomatic spat.<sup>102</sup> Orban's tactics were of an electoral nature. First, boosting his local credential as a defender of the Hungarians, going against the dreadful outcome of Trianon. Second, getting new citizen who could and have voted in subsequent elections in Hungary under much simplified voting require-

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<sup>98</sup> For more on the history of Central Europe we can only recommend two books which explain the complexities and relationships of these countries from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. de Cévins, Marie Madeleine. *L'Europe centrale au moyen age*. Presses Universitaires de Rennes. 2013

de Cévins, Marie Madeleine. *Démystifier l'Europe Centrale. Passés Composés*. 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Hungarian nationality law. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian\\_nationality\\_law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_nationality_law)

<sup>100</sup> Orbán to Ukraine: give Hungarians autonomy. In: Politico. 15.05.2014. <https://www.politico.eu/article/orban-to-ukraine-give-hungarians-autonomy/>

<sup>101</sup> Viktor Orban holds talks with President of Ukraine on dual citizenship of Hungarians in Ukraine. In: Miniszterelnok. 30.03.2017. <https://miniszterelnok.hu/viktor-orban-holds-talks-with-president-of-ukraine-on-dual-citizenship-of-hungarians-in-ukraine/>

<sup>102</sup> Diplomats thrown out in Ukraine-Hungary passport row. In: BBC News. 04.10.2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45753886>



ments: they could vote by mail, whereas Hungarian abroad need to register and go in person to a consulate or embassy to vote in elections.

As a result, a significant number of Hungarian speaking Roma from the Transcarpathian region obtained EU passports, also allowing them to work and travel in the EU. They kept their Ukrainian citizenship. This would prove to be an issue when flying the conflict in the Ukraine as we will see in the next section.

How many Roma from the region obtained a Hungarian passport is impossible to know. They, as many others, did not declare themselves as Roma in the process, and it is extremely difficult to find out how many passports Hungary did issue to Hungarian speakers outside of their borders.

Key facts that need to be known beyond the passport controversy on this region is its rather high density of Roma, with official estimates, i.e. lower bounds in the range of 80'000 Roma living there.<sup>103</sup> Their living situation is not good, as highlighted in a video from 2018.<sup>104</sup> Experts from the UN Office in Ukraine paid a working visit to Transcarpathia in 2020. They were particularly interested in the issue of documenting Roma. According to them, One third of the total Roma population of Ukraine lives in Transcarpathia. Most Roma settlements are in Mukachevo, Beregovo, Uzhhorod districts. The lack of identity documents (in some cases for generations) puts these Roma at risk of statelessness. Also, undocumented Roma become particularly vulnerable due to the inability to access basic services such as housing, employment, education, and state social protection, which is targeted at low-income categories.<sup>105</sup> So we have a somewhat confusing situation with some Roma having no Ukrainian IDs, some yes, and some having the Hungarian one in addition.

All in all, if you look at the local Ukrainian press coverage, Transcarpathian Roma are the ones begging in the streets, stealing in railway stations, responsible for petty criminality in several Ukrainian cities except those in the South and so on.<sup>106</sup> Myroslav Horvat, head of the Uzhhorod Roma Association, spoke about the problems of the Transcarpathian Roma minority.<sup>107</sup>

It would be wrong to blame them and their Southern Bessarabia Vlach brethren for all ills, but fact is, the more segregated and the more discriminated, the higher the chances are to see petty crime. And Roma there are on the sidelines and mostly unemployed. This, together with living in ghettos is a recipe for disaster.

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<sup>103</sup> На Закарпатті проживає близько 80 тисяч ромів. In: Zaholovok. 06.12.2018. <https://zaholovok.com.ua/v-Uzhhorodskomu-ta-mukachivskomu-raionakh-prozhivaje-blizko-80-tisyach-romiv>

В Ужгороді обговорювали проблеми працевлаштування ромів (ВІДЕО). In: 0312. 04.07.2019. <https://www.0312.ua/news/2443520/v-uzgorodi-obgovoruvali-problemi-pracevlastuvanna-romiv-video>

<sup>104</sup> Отрезанные от общества: жизнь ромов в Закарпатье (ВИДЕО). In: UA Reporter. 21.05.2018. <https://ua-reporter.com/news/otrezannye-ot-obshchestva-zhizn-romov-v-zakarpate-video>

<sup>105</sup> На Закарпатті міжнародні експерти цікавилися проблематикою документування ромів. In: Zakarpattya. 02.10.2020. <https://zakarpattya.net.ua/News/206067-Na-Zakarpatti-mizhnarodni-eksperty-tsikavylisia-problematykoiu-dokumentuvannia-romiv>

<sup>106</sup> We refer to the sections on Mainstream View on Roma and on the Pogroms as well as references therein.

<sup>107</sup> З перших вуст»: про проблеми та досягнення закарпатських ромів розповів Мирослав Горват (ВІДЕО). In: Pershij. 03.06.2021. <https://pershij.com.ua/z-pershykh-vust-pro-problemy-ta-dosiahnennia-zakarpatskykh-romiv-rozpoviv-myroslav-horvat-video/>

## The War

### Roma and the War

Roma historically have tried to avoid conflicts. They seldom enrolled in armies, and, even though historically, especially in Central Europe and in the Balkans they were often weapon makers, they seldom fought. Clearly, after conscription was introduced in the 19th century, they had to, and there are numerous such examples, but traditionally, killings and wars are not a Roma thing.

There are many documented Roma who fought in World War Two against the Nazis.

In this war, Roma are doing their duty and there were several reports of Roma fighting in the ranks of the Ukrainian army.<sup>108</sup> In one case, we have the testimony of Romnja who fled while their husbands were fighting.<sup>109</sup>

To have a glimpse of what is happening, Romea interviewed a group of Roma soldiers serving on the front line. They are all from one city, but now, like other Roma in Ukraine, they have volunteered to defend their homeland the attack by the Russian army. "We get up at four or five in the morning, as needed. There are days when we don't sleep at all," says a Romani soldier.<sup>110</sup>

Many of the Roma who are fighting in the ranks of the Ukrainian army fear that once the war is over, discriminations will return, highlighting the fact that discriminations are the norm in the Ukraine.<sup>111</sup>

### Roma Refugees

Roma fled the war as did a large part of the Ukrainian population. We have cases where families fled prior to the interdiction of men to leave the Ukraine, especially from the South of the Ukraine, meaning that many Roma did not wait long to flee the war.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to the usual plight of refugees, the disorganisation and lack of means of the governments confronted to a huge wave of refugees, Roma have been facing discrimination at the borders as well as in their host countries.

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<sup>108</sup> Myroslav Horvat: Many Roma have gone to war to fight for Ukraine. Pray for Ukraine! In: Romea. 02.03.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/myroslav-horvat-many-roma-have-gone-to-war-to-fight-for-ukraine.pray-for-ukraine>

<sup>109</sup> Romani refugee from Ukraine: My husband is defending the nuclear plant in Zaporozhzhia. In: Romea. 13.03.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/romani-refugee-from-ukraine-my-husband-is-defending-the-nuclear-plant-in-zaporozhzhia>

<sup>110</sup> ROMEA TV EXKLUZIVNĚ: Rozhovor s romskými vojáky sloužící v ukrajinské armádě přímo na frontové linii. In: Romea. 29.03.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/romea-tv-exkluzivne-rozhovor-s-romskymi-vojaky-slouzici-v-ukrajinske-armade-primo-na-frontove-linii>

<sup>111</sup> Ukraine's long-persecuted Roma minority joins war effort. In: Al Jazeera. 26.04.2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/26/ukraines-persecuted-roma-community-joins-war-effort>

<sup>112</sup> For example, we have a 12 person family who fled the war via Moldova and are now in Switzerland. We have also cases in Poland.

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## Discrimination

The discriminations that Roma faced when fleeing the war in the Ukraine have taken numerous forms. In some cases, they were denied transportation and left at the border, with bus drivers simply refusing to take them on, such as in Slovakia. They were not alone in being subject to outright racism, as this was also the case for other non-European refugees.<sup>113</sup> This also happened in the Czech Republic, train conductors who ejected Roma refugees from trains were even defended.<sup>114</sup> We saw this firsthand in Hungary where Africans were simply denied entry or left to their own means.<sup>115</sup> This has not been limited to Eastern Europe as a case in a train in Germany raised questions of systemic racism against Roma. In conclusion the report stated these were single events.<sup>116</sup> In other cases, Roma reported attacks, as in the Czech Republic.<sup>117</sup>

Most common was to actually deny them lodgings or chasing them out, as in Poland.<sup>118</sup> In fact, Dr. Hanna Machińska, Polish deputy Ombudsman declared that Poland is applying double standards concerning refugees. Better not be coloured or Rom.<sup>119</sup> This has proven unfortunately to be very much the norm in all countries faced with Roma refugees from the Ukraine.<sup>120</sup>

In more recent times, Roma are not only facing discrimination, in many cases they also face the accusation of not being from the Ukraine at all, especially since many do not have any Ukrainian ID or passport. Well, they have to fight against stereotypes, and since quite a few of them do not have Ukrainian IDs or passports, they are being accused of not being from there.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Rasizmus na slovenskej hranici. Ukrajinských Rómov nechali čakať niekoľko dní. In: HN Online. 12.03.2022. [https://hnonline.sk/Svet/23550197-ukrajinski-romovia-a-zahranicni-studenti-celia-na-hraniciach-rasizmu](https://hnonline.sk/ Svet/23550197-ukrajinski-romovia-a-zahranicni-studenti-celia-na-hraniciach-rasizmu)

Keine Hilfe für flüchtende Roma aus der Ukraine. Rassismus in Zeiten des Krieges. In: RAN. 07.03.2022. <https://ran.eu.com/keine-hilfe-fur-fluchtende-roma-aus-der-ukraine-rassismus-in-zeiten-des-krieges/?fbclid=IwAR2tyvW0HB2BYOlbgC-H8luF7DE5Qlc-FYko1DyaBkx8lfzPAVKQLdDivtLw>

<sup>114</sup> Czech Railways defends conductor who forced Romani refugee women with young children from Ukraine to disembark from train. In: Romea. 27.04.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-railways-defends-conductor-who-forced-romani-refugee-women-with-young-children-from-ukraine-to-disembark-from-train>

<sup>115</sup> Roma Foundation - March 2022.

<sup>116</sup> Kein struktureller Antiziganismus bei der Deutschen Bahn. In: MiGazin. 15.05.2022. <https://www.migazin.de/2022/05/15/einzelfaelle-kein-antiziganismus-deutschen-bahn/>

<sup>117</sup> Romani Ukrainian refugees leave Czech Republic for Germany, say local teenagers assaulted their children with glass bottles and accommodation manager attacked a little boy. In: Romea. 23.08.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/romani-ukrainian-refugees-leave-czech-republic-for-germany-say-local-teenagers-assaulted-their-children-with-glass-bottles>

<sup>118</sup> Wolontariusze odganiają ukraińskich Romów. "Bo będą jedzeniem i ubraniami handlować jak patelniami". In: Wyborcza. 29.03.2022. <https://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/7,124059,28275260,wolontariusze-odganiaja-ukrainskich-romow-bo-beda-jedzeniem.html>

<sup>119</sup> Hanna Machińska: Po początkowym chaosie instytucje państwa działają lepiej. In: MSN. 17.03.2022. <https://www.msn.com/pl-pl/wiadomosci/polska/hanna-machińska-po-początkowym-chaosie-instytucje-państwa-działają-lepiej/ar-AAVd3v0?li=BBr5KbO>

<sup>120</sup> See for example: Roma-Flüchtlinge aus der Ukraine berichten von Diskriminierung. In: ORF. 15.03.2022. [https://volksgruppen.orf.at/roma/meldungen/stories/3147498/?fbclid=IwAR2KhaVyVdAUbLE7O44-1vqnDb0-AERmPCyQQPdyHyl\\_aeLTILMQPL-k5ZI](https://volksgruppen.orf.at/roma/meldungen/stories/3147498/?fbclid=IwAR2KhaVyVdAUbLE7O44-1vqnDb0-AERmPCyQQPdyHyl_aeLTILMQPL-k5ZI)

Wie geflüchtete Roma aus der Ukraine gegen Vorurteile kämpfen. In: Bayerische Rundfunk. 01.06.2022. <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/wie-gefluechtete-roma-aus-der-ukraine-gegen-vorurteile-kaempfen,T7PCdEQ>

<sup>121</sup> Undocumented Roma Refugees Facing Discrimination As They Flee Ukraine. In: Vice. 23.03.2022. [https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjbapq/undocumented-roma-refugees-facing-discrimination-as-they-flee-ukraine?fbclid=IwAR2Ly9eM\\_bWnyeyCGL6i6np9UN-JAVfILkjI9Uc9yqjApWr8-4SjKYQrsiY](https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjbapq/undocumented-roma-refugees-facing-discrimination-as-they-flee-ukraine?fbclid=IwAR2Ly9eM_bWnyeyCGL6i6np9UN-JAVfILkjI9Uc9yqjApWr8-4SjKYQrsiY)

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## Ukraine

With the start of the war, Roma activists in the Ukraine started organising themselves and help displaced Roma inside the country. Organisations such as Chirikli helped feed refugees and helped organised housing. Other cases, such as three Ukrainian Romnja, Tetjana, Natalia and Zola who organised humanitarian help in the Ukraine out of a bomb shelter with the help of others in Berlin.<sup>122</sup> Volodymyr Yakovenko, director of the Ukrainian Youth Agency for the Promotion of Roma Culture (ARCA), asked the social network for help for the Ukrainian people, who are currently facing a humanitarian catastrophe as a result of the Russian military invasion. "I call on the entire world community to appeal to its leaders to call on Russia and Belarus to withdraw their troops from Ukraine. Stop this war! We do not want this war, we want to stay alive!"<sup>123</sup>

Following the scandal pictures of Roma bound with yellow tape to a post in Lviv, pictures that literally went viral in social medias,<sup>124</sup> Ukrainian Roma activists criticised the ongoing discrimination against Roma in the Ukraine, the self-law that led to the pictures, and highlighted that this is being used by Russian propaganda to brand Ukrainians as "Nazis".<sup>125</sup> That racism against Roma in the Ukraine is still strong is testified by Roma who fled but also by those who had to shelter from bombs are reported being hounded in the Ukraine.<sup>126</sup>

The war displaced many Roma and resulted in many IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) within the country. We know of Roma from Kyiv who sheltered in villages near the Romanian border, of Roma from the Kharkiv region going to villages near Lviv, and so on. This has not been highly commented in the press in general, but is an issue, as highlighted by a reportage in the Western Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod, near the Slovak and Hungarian borders, a city with a large Roma minority which now takes care of many additional Roma refugees from other places in the Ukraine.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "Lebst du noch?" Roma organisieren Hilfe in und für die Ukraine. In: Deutsche Welle. 04.03.2022. <https://www.dw.com/de/lebst-du-noch-roma-organisieren-hilfe-in-und-für-die-ukraine/a-61017665>

Ukraine's Roma activists working to help at-risk community. 07.03.2022. <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraines-roma-activists-at-work-for-their-community/a-61032799>

<sup>123</sup> Mladý romský aktivista z Ukrajiny: Zastavte tuto válku! Apelujte na své představitele, aby vyzvali Rusko ke stažení vojsk z Ukrajiny. In: Romea. 27.02.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/cz/publicistika/komentare/mlady-romsky-aktivista-z-ukrajiny-zastavte-tuto-valku-apelujte-na-sve-predstavitele-aby-vyzvali-rusko-ke-stazeni-vojsk-z>

<sup>124</sup> See the references cited in the Introduction of this report.

<sup>125</sup> Romani activist from Ukraine: The rights of Romani people are neglected and they are persecuted, Russia takes advantage of this for its propaganda about neo-Nazi tensions in Ukraine. In: Romea. 24.04.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/romani-activist-from-ukraine-the-rights-of-romani-people-are-neglected-and-they-are-persecuted-russia-takes-advantage-of>

<sup>126</sup> "Viele Rom:nja fürchteten sich vor Rassismus in den Notunterkünften". In: Die Zeit. 02.06.2022. [https://www.zeit.de/zett/2022-05/gefluechtete-romnja-ukraine-russisches-militaer?utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F](https://www.zeit.de/zett/2022-05/gefluechtete-romnja-ukraine-russisches-militaer?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F)

<sup>127</sup> Guerre en Ukraine : les Roms, « derniers des derniers parmi les réfugiés » à Oujhorod, à la frontière slovaque. In: Le Monde. 24.03.2022. [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/24/guerre-en-ukraine-a-oujhorod-les-roms-derniers-des-derniers-parmi-les-refugies\\_6118946\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/24/guerre-en-ukraine-a-oujhorod-les-roms-derniers-des-derniers-parmi-les-refugies_6118946_3210.html)

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## Poland

Poland bore the brunt of the refugee wave, with 3.79 millions refugees crossing the Polish border.<sup>128</sup> This massive influx of refugees did not go without disruptions in the country. The state was unprepared and overwhelmed, lodgings need to be found, financial aid be organised, and so on. A massive issue which in all due respect, Poland mastered really well. Civil society stepped up, with many regular citizen going to the railway stations and centres where refugees were gathering with food, medication, clothing. All in all a really positive and massive effort from the Polish population. In some cities, the population grew by more than 10% resulting in massive shortage of lodgings. We can testify to this as we have seemed (and eventually found) places to stay for refugees in Krakow. This shortage of lodging hit all refugees from the Ukraine but has been particularly hard for Roma.<sup>129</sup>

However welcome Ukrainian refugees are, Roma are less so welcome in Poland. The “W Stronę Dialogu” Foundation, together with the Feminist Fund, has drawn attention to discrimination of Roma refugees in Poland. According to an aid organisation volunteer, "Roma people are treated with contempt". They are also segregated, and treated differently.<sup>130</sup>

There is a bitter saying about the hospitality that the Polish government boasts in the world: everyone helps the Ukrainians, and the Roma help the Roma. In brief, by an large, Poles do not want them. At the end of March, when the war was already a month old, one of the volunteers said she called the voivode's helpline to place a group of Ukrainian Roma in a refugee centre. She heard: "Gypsies have lice and we don't take them."<sup>131</sup> The international press caught on this dichotomy of Polish refugees politics and reported.<sup>132</sup>

Ou experience is very similar. We have set up a low key network of Roma helpers who have been travelling through Poland to meet Roma refugees. Our helpers have been present in Krzyżowice, Łomża, Łowicz, Przemiśl, Młyny, Radom, Waplewo, Warszawa, Wasilków, etc. In Młyny, several Roma were stuck at the border for quite a while, before being allowed to move on. Authorities are dragging their feet on Roma, avoiding helping. We have had to organise transports to other places,

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<sup>128</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293564/ukrainian-refugees-in-poland/>

<sup>129</sup> Invasion de l'Ukraine : Les offres de logement pour les Ukrainiens à Varsovie « se tarissent » alors que les réfugiés peinent à trouver un endroit où dormir | Nouvelles du monde. In: News 24. 14.03.2022. <https://news-24.fr/invasion-de-lukraine-les-offres-de-logement-pour-les-ukrainiens-a-varsovie-se-tarissent-alors-que-les-refugies-peinent-a-trouver-un-endroit-ou-dormir-nouvelles-du-monde/>

<sup>130</sup> "Osoby romskie oddziela się od ukraińskich, dzieci czasem nie dostają łóżek, śpią na podłodze". In: O Feminin. 13.04.2022. <https://www.ofeminin.pl/swiat-kobiet/to-dla-nas-wazne/osoby-romskie-oddziela-sie-od-ukrainskich-dzieci-czasem-nie-dostaja-lozek/44xkefl>

<sup>131</sup> Cyganów nie bierzemy? Ukraińscy Romowie, uchodźcy gorszego sortu. In: Polityka. 19.04.2022. <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/2162527,1,cyganow-nie-bierzemy-ukrainscy-romowie-uchodzcy-gorszego-sortu.read>

<sup>132</sup> REPORTAGE. Guerre en Ukraine : l'accueil à plusieurs vitesses des réfugiés en Pologne. In: L'Express. 07.05.2022. [https://www.l-express.fr/actualite/monde/europe/reportage-guerre-en-ukraine-l-accueil-a-plusieurs-vitesses-des-refugies-en-pologne\\_2172230.html](https://www.l-express.fr/actualite/monde/europe/reportage-guerre-en-ukraine-l-accueil-a-plusieurs-vitesses-des-refugies-en-pologne_2172230.html)

for example helping Roma go to Lithuania where they had relatives in spite of the fact that transports in the EU for refugees from the Ukraine should have been free.

What we have also observed, is that there has been nearly no financial help for the Roma refugees. We have had to find sponsors to purchase medicaments, clothing, etc. for Roma, especially for children and elderly people. We have also helped the Roma in the places we have been to enrol their children in schools, something that Poland did immediately for all Ukrainians or to find short term jobs, for example in the agriculture. Key part of the job of our volunteers has been translating for Roma and mediating with the local administration to help the Roma refugees to access the same services and funding as the other Ukrainians.<sup>133</sup>

An interview with Ludmila Krikunova who fled the Ukraine and is now in Poland highlights what refugees went through and what they are facing.<sup>134</sup> A more recent articles with interviews from Roma in Krakow shows that Roma are not wanted either in Poland and summarises also some of the discrimination they had faced in the Ukraine.<sup>135</sup>

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## Slovakia

In Slovakia, the initial response was led by Roma pastors in the region close to the Ukrainian border.<sup>136</sup> Entire Roma communities pitched in to help, especially in the regions close to the border.<sup>137</sup> The press coverage of Roma refugees in the Slovak press has been rather subdued, to say the least, and even the large number of Roma refugees who were hanging out in the Košice railway station, helped by volunteers did not make headlines.<sup>138</sup> Clearly, there were the abuses we highlighted in the section on discrimination, with Roma being denied transport from the border, but by and large, the wave of Roma refugees through Slovakia have left very little traces.

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<sup>133</sup> The Rroma Foundation has a network of volunteers in Eastern Poland helping the refugees from the Ukraine.

<sup>134</sup> »Wir haben nach den Angriffen alles stehen und liegen lassen« In: Der Spiegel. 22.04.2022. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/gefluechtete-frauen-aus-der-ukraine-wir-haben-nach-den-angriffen-alles-stehen-und-liegen-lassen-a-9004337b-d1ce-4347-a1ef-870add5c8c3c>

<sup>135</sup> Ukraińscy Romowie: Uciekliśmy przed tą samą wojną. In: Plus. Gazeta Krakowska. 03.06.2022. <https://plus.gazetakrakowska.pl/ukraincy-romowie-uciekli-smy-przed-ta-sama-wojna/ar/c15-16412611>

<sup>136</sup> V Pavlovciach pomáhajú utečencom, ktorých nikto nechce. In: Pravda. 04.03.2022. <https://spravy.pravda.sk/regiony/clanok/618919-v-pavlovciach-pomahaju-utecencom-ktorych-nikto-nechce/>

Pastor sa ujal rómskych utečencov. Jeho ľudí odmietli previezť, pomoc prišla z Česka. In: Aktuality. 05.03.2022. <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/6LFu0MW/pastor-sa-ujal-romskych-utecencov-jeho-ludi-odmietli-previezt-pomoc-prisla-z-ceska/>

<sup>137</sup> V Pavlovciach pomáhajú utečencom, ktorých nikto nechce. In: Pravda. 04.03.2022. <https://spravy.pravda.sk/regiony/clanok/618919-v-pavlovciach-pomahaju-utecencom-ktorych-nikto-nechce/>

Útek z biedy do obrovskej neistoty. Prípád ukrajinských Rómov ukáže, či pomôžeme každému. In: Dennik. 07.03.2022. <https://dennik.sk/2756319/utek-z-biedy-do-obrovskej-neistoty-pripad-ukrajinskych-romov-ukaze-ci-pomozeme-kazdemu/>

<sup>138</sup> One of our Roma correspondent helped in the Košice railway station as a doctor.

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## Czech Republic

In stark contrast to the low key coverage in Slovakia, the case of Roma refugees in the Czech Republic had made much more headlines.

Clearly the attitude in the Czech Republic is that Roma refugees from the Ukraine are not wanted. The editor-in-chief of the Info.cz server, Michal Půr, went to the assistance centre for refugees, where Ukrainians are registered, and he was unpleasantly surprised by what he witnessed. He described on Twitter how he was shocked by the Roma camp and what would need to be improved within the organisation without delay.<sup>139</sup>

In an interview with Právo, the director of the non-profit organization Khamoro, which focuses on helping the Roma minority, explained why it is a problem for Roma refugees from Ukraine to find accommodation. It is simply called racism...<sup>140</sup> The treatment of Ukrainian Roma Refugees in the Czech Republic says a lot about the prevalent racism against Roma in the country.<sup>141</sup> That Roma were not wanted is shown by the fact that many Roma refugees from the Ukraine landed in detention centres for accommodation. They were looking for housing in vain. The last resort was the detention facility.<sup>142</sup>

Soon there was more and more talk about refugees from Ukraine who have Hungarian passports in addition to Ukrainian citizenship. Politicians talked about these refugees mainly in connection with the Roma fleeing the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The South Moravian Governor Jan Grolich from KDU-ČSL was the first to mention "Hungarian Ukrainians" without any knowledge and context and to accuse them to abuse social benefits in the Czech Republic. The mayor of the capital city of Prague, Zdeněk Hřib, also justified the Hungarian citizenship to not to register them.<sup>143</sup>

The authorities in the Czech Republic were soon effectively refusing to register Roma refugees from the Ukraine and send them further to Hungary and to Germany. Officially, the reason has

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<sup>139</sup> Romové ve stanech před centrem pro uprchlíky. To není dobrá vizitka! Novinář udeřil na neziskovky. In: Parlamentní Listy. 20.04.2022. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Romove-ve-stanech-pred-centrem-pro-uprchliky-To-neni-dobra-vizitka-Novinar-uderil-na-neziskovky-699713>

<sup>140</sup> Romští uprchlíci z Ukrajiny se bojí, že už se neuvidí, když se rozdělí, říká šéf neziskovky. In: Novinky. 15.04.2022. <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/clanek/vorac-romsti-uprchlici-se-boji-ze-uz-se-neuvidi-kdyz-se-rozdeli-40393907>

<sup>141</sup> Renata Berkyová at Lety u Písku: How is the current Romani society living in the Czech Republic to comprehend the open racism toward Romani refugees from Ukraine? In: Romea. 09.05.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/renata-berkyova-at-lety-u-pisku-how-is-the-current-romani-society-living-in-the-czech-republic-to-comprehend-the-open>

<sup>142</sup> Czech reporter: "Why are Romani refugees ending up in detention facilities? Because nobody else wants them!". In: Romea. 03.05.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-reporter-why-are-romani-refugees-ending-up-in-detention-facilities-because-nobody-else-wants-them>

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<sup>143</sup> Romští uprchlíci z Ukrajiny s maďarským pasem. Kde se vzali? Kolik jich v ČR je a mají nárok na nějakou pomoc? In: Romea. 17.04.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/romsti-uprchlici-z-ukrajiny-s-madarskym-pasem.kde-se-vzali-kolik-jich-v-cr-je-a-maji-narok-na-nejakou-pomoc>

been that many of these refugees also have a Hungarian passport, something that Orban granted to many resident of the Transcarpathian Ukraine.<sup>144</sup> The Czech Republic soon thereafter tightened its rules on refugees due to the influx of Roma from the Ukraine with dual Hungarian and Ukrainian nationality.<sup>145</sup> The Czech government started denying Roma from the Ukraine having a Hungarian passport or no Ukrainian proof of citizenship asylum. They ended up sleeping in Prague's central railway station. End of May, the state opened a tent camp to lodge them and offered them the opportunity to return home or to Hungary, if they also have Hungarian citizenship, free of charge.<sup>146</sup> These Roma refugees sleeping in Prague's main railway station did make many headlines.<sup>147</sup>

The Ukrainian Roma refugees which were in the Prague central railway station were the moved to a camp in Troja and other one was soon opened.<sup>148</sup>

Civil society in the Czech Republic did react to this situation. The RFK and Kolektiv 115 groups convened a demonstration in support of Ukrainian Roma in front of the Czech Interior Ministry on Thursday. The organisers wanted to express that, according to them, the Czechia did not ensure basic security for all people fleeing Ukraine before the war.<sup>149</sup>

In a latest twist to this story, the Czech police started that of the more of 5'000 Roma refugees from the Ukraine they checked, only 150 had a Hungarian passport.<sup>150</sup> This clearly indicates that the Hungarian passport was more of a pretext than a fact, which is truly shameful.

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<sup>144</sup> Romští uprchlíci mají problém se v Česku registrovat, centra je nechťejí pustit dovnitř, tvrdí dobrovolníci. On: 24. 16.04.2022. <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/specialy/rusko-ukrajinsky-konflikt/3473610-romsti-uprchlici-maji-problem-se-v-cesku-registrovat>

<sup>145</sup> Czechia to tighten refugee rules due to Roma influx. In: Euractiv. 11.05.2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short-news/czechia-to-tighten-refugee-rules-due-to-roma-influx/>

<sup>146</sup> Rómovia z Ukrajiny už nebudú môcť prespávať na pražskej hlavnej stanici. In: RTV. 31.05.2022. <https://spravy.rtv.sk/2022/05/romovia-z-ukrajiny-uz-nebudu-moct-prespavat-na-prazskej-hlavnej-stanici/>

<sup>147</sup> Ukraine : les réfugiés roms obligés de dormir à la Gare centrale de Prague. In: Radio Prague International. 13.05.2022. <https://francais.radio.cz/ukraine-les-refugies-roms-obliges-de-dormir-a-la-gare-centrale-de-prague-8750389>

'They won't accept us': Roma refugees forced to camp at Prague train station. In: The Guardian. 25.05.2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/25/they-wont-accept-us-roma-refugees-forced-to-camp-at-prague-train-station>

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<sup>148</sup> Romští uprchlíci z Ukrajiny skončili na Moravě. A naši tam společnou řeč. In: Seznam Pravy. 03.04.2022. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/porady-zahady-pomahaji-ukrajinskym-romum-v-cesku-a-nepotrebuji-ani-tlumocnika-196631>

Roms d'Ukraine : les « réfugiés de la gare » déplacés dans un camp à Troja. In: Radio Prague International. 17.05.2022. <https://francais.radio.cz/roms-dukaine-les-refugies-de-la-gare-deplaces-dans-un-camp-a-troja-8750659>

<sup>149</sup> Aktivisté demonstrovali před vnitřem za romské uprchlíky z Ukrajiny. In: iDnes. 19.05.2022. [https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/ukrajina-romove-demonstrace-praha-uprchlici.A220519\\_144700\\_domaci\\_pukk](https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/ukrajina-romove-demonstrace-praha-uprchlici.A220519_144700_domaci_pukk)

<sup>150</sup> Czech Police tell public broadcaster that of more than 5 000 Romani refugees from Ukraine who have been vetted, just 150 have Hungarian passports. In: ROMEA. 12.06.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-police-tell-public-broadcaster-that-of-more-than-5-000-romani-refugees-from-ukraine-who-have-been-vetted-just-150>



Finally, the Czech President, who was definitively pro Russian, in spite of a recent change of mind, did state that Roma refugees were “economic migrants”.<sup>151</sup> This definitively gives the tune to the reception of Roma in that country.

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## *Hungary*

Hungary did not want to have Roma refugees from the Ukraine, not even those who were granted Hungarian citizenship in the Ukraine. Initially, they even tried to prevent them from crossing into Hungary, with reports of Romnja being stuck for several days at the Hungarian border.<sup>152</sup>

The Roma were and are unwelcome in Hungary is evident in the number of Roma with Ukrainian passport who are currently in the Czech Republic, prompting the Czechs to curtail aid to Ukrainian refugees.<sup>153</sup>

Help for Roma was not really available and help was stingy and strictly controlled for Roma.<sup>154</sup> In any case, lodgings in Hungary for Roma were not easy to obtain and many Roma reported strong discrimination.<sup>155</sup> Thus, for many of those who fled via Hungary, that country was only a station on a journey that brought them further.<sup>156</sup>

Others, faced with the discrimination in Hungary preferred to return home in the Ukraine.<sup>157</sup>

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## *Moldova and Romania*

The Rroma Foundation as well as other organisations have had contacts to Roma in Moldova from the onset of the war. Many Roma from the South of the Ukraine fled via Moldova and Romania, especially since many have connections across the borders. Moldova was somewhat shielded from the influx of refugees due to the existence of Transnistria, a definitively pro soviet region with a rather large Russian military presence.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Czech President calls Romani refugees from Ukraine "economic migrants". In: Romea. 02.05.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-president-calls-romani-refugees-from-ukraine-economic-migrants>

<sup>152</sup> Romani mothers and children groundlessly prevented from leaving Ukraine three times before finally crossing into Hungary. In: Romea. 04.04.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/romani-mothers-and-children-groundlessly-prevented-from-leaving-ukraine-three-times-before-finally-crossing-into-hungary>

<sup>153</sup> See the Section on the Czech Republic and references therein.

<sup>154</sup> The New York Times: Humanitarian aid workers in Budapest, Hungary are stingy and strict when the refugees are Romani. In: Romea. 09.03.2022. <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/the-new-york-times-humanitarian-aid-workers-in-budapest-hungary-are-stingy-and-strict-when-the-refugees-are-romani>

<sup>155</sup> Flüchtende Roma aus der Ukraine: Beschimpft und beschämt. In: Freitag. 15.04.2022. [https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/fluechtende-roma-aus-der-ukraine-beschimpft-und-beschaemt?fbclid=IwAR2lCufcTmG1uNONxwj3tNV2OgiAtb3aC0cO0aYp-FLlrf8eXr\\_X-EqwvqU](https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/fluechtende-roma-aus-der-ukraine-beschimpft-und-beschaemt?fbclid=IwAR2lCufcTmG1uNONxwj3tNV2OgiAtb3aC0cO0aYp-FLlrf8eXr_X-EqwvqU)

<sup>156</sup> Guerre en Ukraine : en Hongrie, les réfugiés ne font que passer. In: Le Monde. 18.03.2022. [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/18/guerre-en-ukraine-en-hongrie-les-refugies-ne-font-que-passer\\_6118130\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2022/03/18/guerre-en-ukraine-en-hongrie-les-refugies-ne-font-que-passer_6118130_3210.html)

<sup>157</sup> Faced with discrimination, Ukrainian Roma refugees are going home. In: Euractiv. 14.04.2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/non-discrimination/news/faced-with-discrimination-ukrainian-roma-refugees-are-going-home/>

<sup>158</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transnistria>

In spite of this, it seems that quite a few Roma made it through Chisinau but it also seems that many of them simply went further.<sup>159</sup> There are very few news overall on the situation of Roma refugees in Moldova, but one can assume that with the fear of the country to be the next in line for a Russian invasion, that many Roma from the Ukraine simply went further.

Local Roma, at least according to some reports, seem to be somewhat nostalgic to the society times and a such, also pro-Putin, creating a clash within the Roma community, as those who fled certainly did not share these views.<sup>160</sup>

In an environment where discriminatory attitudes toward Roma are widespread, Moldovan authorities have allowed - and in some cases suggested to volunteers - to prevent Roma refugees from staying in official accommodation, according to a report by Human Rights Watch.<sup>161</sup>

In spite of a very long border between Romania and the Ukraine, both in the south, in Bessarabia and in the north, along the carpathian arc, there have been few reports of Roma refugees in the country that we have found. This may be in part that we are not following the Romanian press as closely as other states in Europe, but is also an effect that many of the Roma fleeing the Ukraine actually continued. We have examples of Roma from the Odessa region who fled via Romania but ended up in Poland where we helped them to cross over to Lithuania where they had relatives; we have Roma refugees in Switzerland whom we have advised who also fled via Romania but ended up in Zurich before being moved to another canton.<sup>162</sup>

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## *Western Europe*

Western Europe was rather silent on the fate of Roma refugees in Western Europe, with one notable exception: Germany. The reason for this silence on the medias is difficult to assess, especially since in nearly all Western European countries, the press reported extensively on Roma refugees in Poland, in the Czech Republic, in Hungary, etc.

Right now it is impossible to say how many Roma refugees are in Western Europe. There are no numbers, only anecdotal evidence. We know of Ukrainian Roma who have been trying to get to the UK where they have relatives, thus ending in France; we know of a small number of Roma refugees in Switzerland; we have contacts with organisations who have helped refugees in Sweden; but we have almost no information on Latin countries: France, Italy, and Spain.

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<sup>159</sup> Discussions between Rroma Foundation and local Roma organisations.

<sup>160</sup> Début des problèmes»: en Moldavie, les Roms sont pro-Poutine. In: Slate. 25.05.2022. <http://www.slate.fr/story/228280/roms-guerre-ukraine-russie-soroca-moldavie-chisinau-abandon-stigmatisation>

<sup>161</sup> Roma od drugih izbeglica iz Ukrajine. In: Radio Free Europe. 25.05.2022. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/human-rights-watch-moldavija-ukrajina-izbeglice-romi/31867297.html>

<sup>162</sup> In both cases, the Rroma Foundation was involved.

In Germany, there have been many reports of actions in cities to help Roma refugees, such as in Freiburg<sup>163</sup> and other cities. In Munich “A small town made up of Sinti and Roma” developed itself on the Munich exhibition grounds. The member of parliament Andreas Lorenz (CSU) visited the exhibition halls. His conclusion: “Today, 2,100 people are housed here. 1,200 of them are children. 90 percent are Sinti and Roma.” Apparently not all those who arrive come from the Ukraine. “Around 30 percent have no papers”, can be heard in the exhibition halls. Lorenz: “I found that many don't even know the Ukrainian government districts.”<sup>164</sup> This highlights the issue of the lack of papers of some of the refugees, but also highlights the propensity of authorities to concentrate minorities. This is a worrisome trend and should be combatted as much as possible.

Germany took a very similar stance as the Czechs and started not helping refugees without papers.<sup>165</sup> As we wrote, a fair proportion of Roma in the Ukraine do not have official IDs. To check whether they come from the Ukraine is nevertheless fairly easy: they all speak Ukrainian, with the exception of those from Transcarpathian Ukraine.

Some of the refugees did not help their cause. There were reports of riots by Roma refugees when they were being housed in a gym when they were apparently expecting to be housed in a hotel,<sup>166</sup> some had to be sent back after having protested against the housing conditions,<sup>167</sup> and there were reports of “endless problems” with Roma in refugee housing.<sup>168</sup> In this last example, one also see the western press’ use of stereotypes - Roma always come in large family clans.

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<sup>163</sup> Ukrainische Roma-Kriegsflüchtlinge suchen Zuflucht in Freiburg. In: SWR. 24.03.2022. <https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/suedbaden/ukrainische-roma-kriegsfluechtlinge-suchen-zuflucht-in-freiburg-110.html>

Freiburg-Lviv-Freiburg: Simon Waldenspuhl hilft Geflüchteten aus der Ukraine. In: Badische Zeitung. 20.07.2022. <https://www.badische-zeitung.de/freiburg-lviv-freiburg-simon-waldenspuhl-hilft-gefluechteten-aus-der-ukraine--210682902.html>

<sup>164</sup> Ukraine-Flüchtlinge: Münchner Messe wird zur Kleinstadt von Sinti und Roma!. In: Deutschland Kurier. 04.04.2022. <https://deutschlandkurier.de/2022/04/ukraine-fluechtlinge-muenchner-messe-wird-zur-kleinstadt-von-sinti-und-roma/>

<sup>165</sup> Ohne Pass nicht willkommen. In: ND Aktuell. 07.04.2022. <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1162845.ukraine-fluechtlinge-in-berlin-ohne-pass-nicht-willkommen.html>

<sup>166</sup> Randal-Flüchtlinge lehnten Turnhalle als Unterkunft ab. In: Bild. 02.04.2022. <https://www.bild.de/bild-plus/regional/muenchen/muenchen-aktuell/fluechtlingsheim-muenchen-fluechtlinge-lehnten-turnhalle-als-unterkunft-ab-79643158.bild.html>

<sup>167</sup> Landkreis schickt sie zurück nach München. Ukrainische Flüchtlinge pöbelten gegen die Unterkunft in Miesbach. In: Die Freie Welt. 18.03.2022. <https://www.freiewelt.net/nachricht/ukrainische-fluechtlinge-poebelten-gegen-die-unterkunft-in-miesbach-10088498/>

<sup>168</sup> „Nerven liegen blank“: Ärger um Roma-Großfamilien in Heim für Ukraine-Geflüchtete. In: Focus. 08.04.2022. [https://www.focus.de/politik/probleme-mit-grossfamilien-kleinstadt-aus-sinti-und-roma-wirbel-um-heim-fuer-ukraine-fluechtlinge-in-muenchen\\_id\\_80658952.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/probleme-mit-grossfamilien-kleinstadt-aus-sinti-und-roma-wirbel-um-heim-fuer-ukraine-fluechtlinge-in-muenchen_id_80658952.html)

There was also outright discrimination against Roma refugees from the German side.<sup>169</sup> Several cases were documented in the German Railway, for example in Mannheim.<sup>170</sup> Romani Rose, the chairman of the Council of German Sinti and Roma vehemently denounced the racism shown by personnel from the Deutsche Bahn against Roma refugees from the Ukraine and asked for a thorough investigation.<sup>171</sup> The Deutsche Bahn, the German railway company launched an investigation and tried to sort out their bias against Roma.<sup>172</sup> The final report investigating these incidents stated that there was no systemic anti-Roma bias in the German Railways, only single cases of racism among the staff.<sup>173</sup>

In brief, the bias against Roma and the usual stereotypes common in Western Europe were present in the case of Roma refugees from the Ukraine. Some of the stereotypes are totally out of context for Ukrainian Roma, such as the deeply anchored belief in France and Germany that Roma are "travellers". For the quite well integrated Roma in the Ukraine, many of these stereotypes are anyhow totally unfit. Large families among Serve and Xaladytka are uncommon, education is prevalent, and many are not necessarily poor. It is thus a pity that journalists and politicians simply rehash their biased views in the case of Ukrainian Roma.

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<sup>169</sup> „An Pranger gestellt“: Aus Ukraine geflohene Roma beklagen Ausgrenzung in Deutschland. In: Focus Online. 01.04.2022. [https://www.focus.de/politik/unbeliebte-fluechtlinge-roma-familien-aus-der-ukraine-stossen-oft-auf-ablehnung\\_id\\_77117005.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/unbeliebte-fluechtlinge-roma-familien-aus-der-ukraine-stossen-oft-auf-ablehnung_id_77117005.html)  
Kein Zugang für Rom\*nja. In: TAZ. 30.03.2022. <https://taz.de/Rassismus-gegen-Ukraine-Gefuechtete!/5845419/>  
"Keiner will uns haben". In: Wochenzeitung. 13.04.2022. <https://www.kontextwochenzeitung.de/gesellschaft/576/keiner-will-uns-haben-8132.html>

<sup>170</sup> Deutsche Bahn diskriminiert geflüchtete Roma aus Ukraine. In: Frankfurter Rundfunk. 30.03.2022. <https://www.fr.de/politik/ukraine-krieg-roma-flucht-deutsche-bahn-opfer-diskriminierung-antiziganismus-rassismus-news-zr-91445455.html>  
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<sup>171</sup> Romani Rose beklagt antiziganistische Vorfälle bei Deutscher Bahn. In: Migazin. 31.03.2022. <https://www.migazin.de/2022/03/31/systematische-diskriminierung-romani-rose-vorfaelle/>

Zentralrat: Diskriminierung von Roma aus Ukraine bei Bahn. In: Schwäbisches Tagblatt. 30.03.2022. <https://www.tagblatt.de/Nachrichten/Zentralrat-Diskriminierung-von-Roma-aus-Ukraine-bei-Bahn--540447.html>

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<sup>172</sup> Bahn-Chef verurteilt Antiziganismus. In: Rhein Neckar Zeitung. 14.05.2022. [https://www.rnz.de/politik/hintergrund\\_artikel,-mannheim-bahn-chef-verurteilt-antiziganismus-\\_arid,887374.html](https://www.rnz.de/politik/hintergrund_artikel,-mannheim-bahn-chef-verurteilt-antiziganismus-_arid,887374.html)

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<sup>173</sup> Kein struktureller Antiziganismus bei der Deutschen Bahn. In: MiGazin. 15.05.2022. <https://www.migazin.de/2022/05/15/einzelfaelle-kein-antiziganismus-deutschen-bahn/>

## The Future

The fate of Roma refugees and Roma in general in the Ukraine raises several questions. First and foremost, what will happen to the Roma refugees who fled the Ukraine and are dispersed in several European countries. How will they be received as we have seen that this was not often positively in many countries? Will they be able to stay? Will they be treated differently than the other Ukrainian refugees? Many questions are open at this stage, especially if the conflict perdures for many months with no formal peace treaty, something that is a plausible outcome in case of a stalemate on the front.

Regarding Roma in the Ukraine itself, we will need to watch carefully how the situation evolves and how Ukraine tackles the problems of racism and nationalism, and of attacks against Roma. Up till now, the country has not been really proactive in combating these, and has been very lenient towards the perpetrators. This is unfortunate, and, if the Ukraine is serious about democracy and of a state of rights, will become an acid test of their resolve.

It will also be interesting to watch what happens with returning refugees. The fact that Roma often have little if any documents means also that their property is not necessarily registered, a pattern we have seen in many countries, for example in Bulgaria where it is used to evict Roma. We can easily envision situations where the rest of the population will simply say “there were no Roma here” and as there are no documents, this will leave these Roma as IDPs. This is a pattern that occurred during and after the Bosnian war that we hope will not be repeated.

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