

## REPORT

### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

# "Roma as an Integral Part of Ukraine"

**Berlin, 14 June 2023.**

**Evangelical Academy of Berlin**

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## FOREWORD

The Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma and the Roma Youth organisation from Ukraine ARCA, organised in cooperation with the Evangelical Academy in Berlin, the Society for Threatened People from Germany and the International Charitable Organisation "Roma Women's Fund Chiricli" from Ukraine the conference "Roma as Integral Part of Ukraine" 13. June 2023 in Berlin.

The intention was to raise more awareness on the situation and the needs of Roma in Ukraine and inform representatives of governments, embassies, international organisations and civil society about these needs.

Already in September 2022, the Chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma met with the Foreign Minister of Germany, Ms. Annalena Baerbock to discuss the need to pay particular attention to the situation of Roma in Ukraine. We highly appreciate the support we receive since then from the Federal Foreign Office of Germany.

Fifteen representatives of the Roma community from Ukraine could participate at the conference and bring their position and needs to a wider audience of representatives of governments, embassies, international organisations and civil society. They could also present a policy paper with clear recommendations to the Government of Ukraine and to the international community which has been developed prior to the conference.

The conference was another step in the efforts of the Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma in cooperation with the Roma civil society from Ukraine to raise awareness on their needs and to strengthen their participation in decision-making processes affecting them.

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## INTRODUCTION

Before the full-scale Russian invasion, there were approximately 400,000 Roma living in Ukraine. An estimated 100,000, mostly women and children, have fled the country. The number of internally displaced persons in Ukraine is unknown.

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Roma, as an integral part of Ukrainian society, have stood with the Ukrainian government against the aggressor. Roma defend the country as members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), while others support the fight in various ways, such as organising and delivering humanitarian aid, collecting donations for the AFU, or promoting the Ukrainian cause internationally.

The contribution of Roma to the fight against Russian aggression has been assessed by the authorities, such as the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, or the media.

The alliance of Roma in Ukraine with the authorities and Ukrainian society in general is strong, despite the fact that Roma were subjected to discrimination and antigypsyism before the war, and after the outbreak of active hostilities, cases of discrimination and antigypsyism became known.

During wartime, minorities are at particular risk and are often discriminated against in accessing assistance and are not taken into account in post-war plans. Therefore, it is important to promote equal participation of Roma in time and take measures to prevent the (further) exclusion of the community after the war.

The political transformations currently underway in Ukraine - both as part of the envisaged process of accession to the European Union and as part of the (planned) reconstruction and

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rehabilitation of Ukraine - provide opportunities to ensure the equal participation of Roma as an integral part of Ukrainian society.

In particular, the Recovery Plan for Ukraine and the Concept of the State Targeted National and Cultural Programme "Unity in Diversity" for the period up to 2034 are relevant, but at the same time, the "Strategy for Promoting the Rights and Opportunities of Persons Belonging to the Roma National Minority in Ukrainian Society for the Period up to 2030" should be revised.

Roma civil society organisations commend the steps taken by the Ukrainian authorities and the international community to address and improve the situation of Roma in Ukraine. They welcome that the Ukrainian authorities also appreciate the contribution of Roma and other minorities to the defence of the country against Russian aggression.

Roma civil society organisations identify these processes as opportunities for policy change and addressing the needs of Roma in Ukraine, but also identify shortcomings. Therefore, civil society organisations have jointly developed a position paper and recommendations for improving policies aimed at addressing the needs and problems of Roma in Ukraine.

### Conference objectives

The conference brings together representatives of the government, Roma civil society, intergovernmental organisations, and civil society organisations to discuss ways to include Roma needs and concerns in all relevant short- and long-term policies and plans.

The Ukrainian Roma will present their position and recommendations, but only through joint efforts of the Government of Ukraine, the Roma community of Ukraine and international partners can equal participation of Roma be achieved.

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## Agenda

**09.00** Arrival of participants

### **09.30 – 10.00 Opening Remarks: Roma As Integral Part of the Society of Ukraine**

**Mr Emran Elmazi**, Director, Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma  
**Dr Tobias Lindner**, Minister of State, Federal Foreign Office Germany

**H.E. Oleksii Makeiev**, Ambassador of Ukraine to Germany

**Ms Yulia Kondur**, President of the International Charitable Organization "Roma women fund Chiricli" Ukraine

**Dr Friederike Krippner**, Director Evangelische Akademie Berlin

**Moderator: Jonathan Mack, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma**

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### **10.00 – 10.15 Break**

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### **10.15 – 10.25 Setting the Scene: Roma as Integral Part of Ukraine:**

**Mr. Volodymyr Yakovenko**, ARCA: Presentation of Position of Roma Civil Society

Roma civil society advocate a set of recommendations in order to improve Roma equality, inclusion and participation of Roma in Ukraine, including the priority to address the fight against antigypsyism on all levels. These recommendations shall contribute in particular to current policy developments such as the envisaged State Programme "Unity in Diversity", the Recovery Plan, the new Roma Strategy and programmes in the framework of the accession process.

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### **10.25 – 11.30 Panel discussion 1: National Policies of Ukraine and Strengthening the Position of Roma in Ukraine**

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Panel 1 is dedicated to the current situation in Ukraine and the policy developments intended to improve the situation of Roma, in particular the State Programme "Unity in Diversity", the Recovery Plan, the new Roma Strategy.

The keynote will set the framework and outline the state of affairs of these developments. The panel will highlight in addition what are the needs and requests of the Roma civil society and what institutions can contribute to realise to strengthen the position of Roma in Ukraine

**Keynote: Dr Ihor Lossovskyi**, Deputy Head of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnopolitics and Freedom of Conscience

**Mr Mykhailo Spasov**, Representative of the Commissioner for Equal Rights and Freedoms of the Rights of National Minorities of Political and Religious Views (**online**)

**Ms Valentyna Zolotarenko**, Roma mediator

**Ms Eleonora Kulcsar**, Head of the Charitable Fund "Blago"

**Ms Evhinia Sadovska**, Council of Europe (**online**)

**Moderator: Martin Mühleck**, DG NEAR, European Commission

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### 11.30 – 11.45 Coffee Break

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### 11.45 – 13.00 Panel discussion 2: Roma, Ukraine and the European Union

International institutions and organisations as well as individual countries support Ukraine in its fight against the full-scale invasion of Russia. European Union, World Bank or individual countries such as Germany are important actors when it comes to promote the equality, inclusion and participation of Roma.

The panel will discuss the possibilities of supporting Roma in Ukraine and their needs, also taking into account the importance of fighting antigypsyism as highlighted in the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation and experiences of Roma in other war or post-war societies such as Kosovo.

**Keynote: Ms Katarína Mathernová**, Deputy Director General European Commission DG (**online**)

**Ms Tetyana Stefiuk**, Head of the Ukrainian Parliament Deputy Speaker's Office (**online**)

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**Ms Yasmin Raya**, Deputy Head of Unit Ukraine, Moldova, Black Sea cooperation, German Federal Foreign Office

**Ms Gabriela Hrabanova**, Director ERGO Network **(online)**

**Mr Isak Skenderi**, Director Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians Kosovo

**Mr Yulian Kondur**, International Charitable Organization "Roma women fund Chiricli" Ukraine: **(online)**

**Mr Myroslav Horvat**, City Counsellor Uzhhorod

**Moderator: Stephan Müller, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma**

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## 13.00 – 14.15 Lunch Break

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## 14.15 – 15.30 Panel discussion 3: Cooperation with Civil Society

Civil society is an important actor which should always understand Roma as integral part of Ukraine and include them in their activities. Civil society should contribute in different ways to promote Roma as integral part of Ukraine.

Such contributions can cover a variety of fields and should go beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance or technical assistance – as much as this is necessary.

**Keynote: Ms Natali Tomenko**, ARCA: Expectations of the Roma civil society

**Ms Kateryna Rietz-Rakul**, Head of the Representative Office of the Ukrainian Institute in Germany

**Ms Anzhelika Bielova**, Director Voice of Romni, Ukraine

**Dr Andrea Despot**, Chief Executive Officer Foundation EVZ

**Ms Anna Goos**, Managing Director SODI International

**Moderator: Jonathan Mack, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma**

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## 15.30 Closing remarks

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**Stephan Müller**, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

**15.45 – 16:15**

**Informal conversations over coffee**

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## SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND KEY DISCUSSIONS

### Introduction: Roma as an integral part of Ukrainian society

**Moderator: Mr Jonathan Mack**, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

**Mr Emran Elmazi**, Director of the Documentation and Culture Centre of German Sinti and Roma and also speaking on behalf of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma opened the conference. He emphasised that the conference is one important step in the activities of both organisations to advocate German government and European Union and to raise more awareness on the need to support Roma in Ukraine and to include them in all relevant policy-making.

In summer 2022, the Documentation centre opened a hotline for Roma refugees from Ukraine where Roma can receive information and assistance. In September 2022, Mr. Romani Rose, the chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma met with Foreign Minister Baerbock to discuss the situation of Roma in Ukraine and with other members of the German government to discuss the situation of Roma refugees in Germany. In December 2022, Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma and the Central Council together with ARCA organised a Civil Society Forum of Roma from Ukraine.

The conference was not the start and will not be the end of the support of the two organisations to Roma in and from Ukraine.

**Dr Tobias Lindner**, State Minister at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany reminded the participants that for over one year we have been confronted with dismaying news of the terror of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine and that Ukrainian citizens had to

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flee their homes after the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station has been destroyed on week before the conference.

Mr. Lindner stated that although Roma have been part of and have contributed to European societies for many centuries they have also faced discrimination and lack of recognition of their contribution to society – in Ukraine and all over Europe. However, Sinti and Roma are part of European society. Acknowledging that Roma are an integral part of European societies and combating anti-Roma-discrimination against them is a priority in both domestic and foreign policy in Germany and the European Union as a whole.

Ukraine is part of Europe and of our community. Germany supports Ukraine's European integration. The key to making progress in the accession process is the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria and thus the implementation of reforms. Advancing and respecting the rights of the Roma community is an important aspect of this process.

**Mr Oleksiy Makeev**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Federal Republic of Germany welcomed the initiative and referred to the Position Paper, developed by Roma civil society from Ukraine for the conference. He said that he gladly read the Position Paper since it contains clear messages and concrete recommendations for the Government.

The Ambassador also mentioned that he recently met with Ukrainian refugees in Thuringia, among them also Roma representatives.

He finally emphasised that only the victory of Ukraine can make all Ukrainian citizens feel safe.

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**Ms Yulia Kondur**, President of the International Charitable Organisation "Roma Women's Fund Chiricli" Ukraine emphasised that from the first day of the full-scale aggression, Roma organisations and activists joined the fight against the aggression and provided assistance to Roma communities. Such active work became possible due to the previous work and support of international partners.

The protection of the rights of national minorities, including Roma, is one of the priorities of the Ukrainian government in light of Ukraine's accession to the EU, however, currently, the interaction between Roma organisations and the authorities at the local and national levels is poor. She welcomed Ukraine's efforts to develop a Law on national minorities (communities), a national programme on national minorities and measures to implement the Roma Strategy 2030.

Ms. Kondur raised the need to address the needs of Roma IDPs and refugees and emphasised the need for support from European countries, humanitarian organisations and the Ukrainian government and that the Roma should be included in the reconstruction efforts of Ukraine already now, including women.

**Dr Friederike Krippner**, Director of the Evangelical Academy Berlin referred to the activities of the Academy with Sinti and Roma. The Academy is not only a platform for exchanging views and discussion, it also established together with Roma and Sinti organisations and other evangelical academies a network to ensure equal participation of Roma and Sinti and to overcome antigypsyism. She also referred to the situation of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Germany and that they often are treated as second-class citizens.

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## **An overview of the current situation: Roma as an integral part of Ukraine**

**Mr. Volodymyr Yakovenko**, Chairman of the Board of the Youth Agency for Advocacy of Roma Culture "ARCA" presented the Position Paper of Roma civil society from Ukraine that has been produced for this conference.

Mr. Yakovenko first outlined that Roma have been living in Ukraine for over 600 years and became so intertwined with Ukrainians and other communities that it is hard to imagine a modern Ukraine without Roma. Therefore, we chose as the title of the conference and the Position Paper "Roma as an integral part of Ukraine".

Roma in Ukraine prove every day that these aren't empty words: Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, they have been resisting the aggressor together with the Ukrainian authorities. Roma people defend the country as part of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) and others support the fight in various ways, such as organising and delivering humanitarian aid, collecting donations for the Armed Forces or advocating for Ukraine's interests at the international level.

The cooperation of Roma in Ukraine with the authorities and Ukrainian society in general is strong, despite the fact that Roma people were subjected to discrimination and antigypsyism before the war, and after the outbreak of the full-scale invasion.

The purpose of this conference is to discuss ways to include Roma needs and concerns in all relevant short and long-term policies and plans. He emphasised that the purpose of the conference is not to criticise Ukraine and the Ukrainian authorities, but to offer cooperation, because Roma civil society organisations identify opportunities for policy change and addressing the needs of Roma in Ukraine despite existing shortcomings. Therefore, civil society organisations have jointly developed the Position Paper with recommendations for improving policies to address the needs and problems of Roma in Ukraine.

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The political transformations currently taking place in Ukraine - both as part of the planned accession process to the European Union and as part of the (planned) reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine - create opportunities to ensure the equal participation of Roma as an integral part of Ukrainian society.

Roma civil society organisations highly appreciate the steps taken by the Ukrainian authorities and the international community to address and improve the situation of Roma in Ukraine. We welcome the fact that the Ukrainian authorities also highly value the contribution of Roma and other minorities to the defence of the country against Russian aggression.

The will and desire of the Ukrainian authorities to hear and solve the problems of Roma is noted, which was not sufficiently present before. Even the presence of representatives of the Ukrainian authorities at this conference is a visible indicator.

Finally he emphasised three issues: (i) Roma understand that now all efforts are aimed at the victory of Ukraine, (ii) that the good will of the Ukrainian authorities and Roma organisations alone is not enough to achieve the equality, participation and inclusion for Roma, but that assistance is necessary and (iii) in particular that the needs of Roma have to be addressed now, since time is working against us, and if we do not start solving problems now, they will only increase like a snowball rolling down a mountain.

### **Panel discussion 1: National policy of Ukraine and strengthening the position of Roma in Ukraine**

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*The first panel will focus on the current situation in Ukraine and the policies developed to improve the situation of Roma, including the State Programme "Unity in Diversity", the Recovery Plan, and the new Roma Strategy.*

*The main report sets the framework and outlines the status of all developments. In addition, the discussion highlights the needs and demands of Roma civil society and the institutions that can contribute to strengthening the situation of Roma in Ukraine.*

**Moderator: Mr Martin Mühleck**, DG NEAR, European Commission

**Speaker: Mr Igor Lossovsky**, Deputy Head of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience, emphasised that his office is fully aware of the participation of Roma in the fight against the Russian aggressor and that he can confirm all activities mentioned.

His office has three priorities during the war:

- 1) Reform of Ukrainian legislation on national minorities
- 2) Roma community in Ukraine: Working on finalising and implementing the Roma Strategy 2030
- 3) Indigenous peoples of Ukraine

The Cabinet of Ministers approved the Roma Strategy 2030, which was developed by the State Department of Social Policy in cooperation with other state authorities, international organisations such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and with the involvement of Roma organisations and activists.

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The process on developing the Action Plan for the implementation of the Roma Strategy 2030 has also started. 8 working groups were created with experts, representatives of Roma and local governments as well as international organisations, such as UN Women, OSCE Monitoring Mission, UNICEF.

A first Action Plan was developed a few days prior the large-scale invasion which delayed its implementation. However, the work has been resumed focusing on the period 2023-2025, on the changes caused by the invasion and on 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2023, the first discussion of the new Action Plan was held with the participation of international organisations, German partners and Roma activists. The new Action Plan has already been published for public discussion and more than 30 recommendations and criticisms were processed while further recommendations are still being prepared.

A special resolution on the implementation of the Roma Strategy 2030 was adopted to promote the rights and interests of the Roma community.

**Mr Mykhailo Spasov**, Representative of the Commissioner for Equal Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities of Political and Religious Persuasion stated that today every Ukrainian is fighting for Ukraine, regardless of their ethnicity and support the Armed Forces, regardless of their religion or language.

The Office of the Commissioner launched the third project to issue documents to members of the Roma community. Many Roma don't have any documents or at least don't have some crucial documents. The office is engaged in monitoring and in collecting the necessary papers that people can receive the missing documents.

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**Ms Valentyna Zolotarenko**, Roma mediator, emphasised that Roma face various forms of discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, social status, gender, both within the community and in external communications - in employment, obtaining documents, etc. Further, access to healthcare needs to be addressed. Due to persistent discrimination and lack of funds, and in some cases documents, many Roma women and children are particularly vulnerable.

When developing the Strategy and the Action Plan it is important to include specific measures that ensure access to healthcare, quality of education for Roma women and girls, adequate housing, political and civic participation, and documentation. It is important to strengthen the position of the mediator to help local governments to communicate with Roma communities and to take in particular into account the problems of Roma women and children and IDPs.

However, all these issues have to be addressed in policies beyond the Roma Strategy such as programmes for the recovery of Ukraine, but also at local level.

**Ms Eleonora Kulchar**, Head of the Blago Charitable Foundation, focused on the situation of children and in particular IDP children.

Since years, Blago Charity Foundation is professionally engaged in the development of Roma children, pre-school and school programmes, as well as programmes for parents. Today, these programmes also include Internally Displaced Persons (IDP).

Since February 2022, many Roma have become IDPs. Currently, more than 20.000 Roma live as IDPs in the Transcarpathia region of Ukraine. They are facing problems with access to social housing or temporary housing. Shelters do not always accept large Roma families or do not accept them at all. Many Roma were even forced to sleep in the streets.

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In March 2022, Blago Charitable Foundation opened a shelter in Uzhhorod, which provides free accommodation, meals, educational services, psychological and legal support. More than 2,500 IDP Roma have already lived in the shelter. Recently, a second similar shelter was opened in Transcarpathia.

There are also issues with access to medicines, education, medical services, and social services for IDPs due to the lack of identity documents. NGOs are trying to address these issues, but it is not enough.

Roma should also be part of the reconstruction of Ukraine. Particular attention should be paid to the education of Roma children: the development of pre-school training, the construction of kindergartens and schools. Particular attention should be paid to employment (especially for those Roma who do not have higher education), and to simplifying the documentation system.

**Ms Eugenia Sadovska**, Council of Europe, highlighted the contributions of the Council of Europe that started directly after the start of the full-scale invasion with consultations with Roma communities and has already provided nine grants to Roma civil society.

There have also been various activities to implement the Roma Strategy 2030, with the Council of Europe providing experts. This strategy was discussed with more than 150 experts and stakeholders. The discussions took place at a high level in Strasbourg, as well as in Transcarpathia. There are also active groups in 6 regions that facilitate the implementation of the Roma Strategy 2030.

### Highlights from the discussion

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**Mr Yuriy Ivanenko**, President of the Roma Council of Ukraine

According to polls, the attitude of the local population towards Roma in the de-occupied territories changed. The objects of hatred have shifted towards the occupiers, but in turn, the Roma have shown cohesion and a desire to defend their homeland, which was welcomed by the majority. The Roma Council of Ukraine includes 46 local NGOs and tries to actively influence local and national policy. Most of the NGO leaders are members of public councils at regional and district state administrations, there are deputies of local councils, ambassadors of culture and sports.

- With regard to the Roma Strategy and the Action Plan for its implementation, we see positive changes within DESS (the body responsible for the implementation of the Roma Strategy)

For a civil servant, this is just a job, but for us it is life. Roma experts should join the work on the Action Plans in the regions and places where Roma live. It is impossible to develop a plan for a long period of time in the conditions of war. Roma are shot for wanting to live on their land and for supporting their state, for being Ukrainian Roma. We are now a shield for Europe.

- 1) What we need now: Due to the decentralisation that has taken place in the country, there is an increasing need to organise and conduct local advocacy campaigns to influence policy for Roma communities in difficult financial situations.
- 2) We need knowledge, skills, consulting and financial support for those teams of Roma specialists who will drive local policy on Roma in communities, responding quickly to the challenges of war, but knowing the specifics of the regions and methods of working with local authorities and having cooperation with executive authorities.

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**Mr. Volodymyr Yakovenko** - The problems in different regions have certain specifics, but the Roma community is united today as never before. In fact, in all our speeches, we raised the same issues and have a vision of their solution. Therefore, we need support from both the state and the community.

**Mr. Ihor Lossowskyi expressed his gratitude to** the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma for organising this conference. This is a very important event for the discussion of Roma issues. It is a very good opportunity for communication between government agencies, international organisations and Roma activists.

We need to change the Action Plan to implement the Roma Strategy 2030, and this conference will help us do that.

## **Panel discussion 2: Roma, Ukraine and the European Union**

*International institutions and organisations, as well as individual countries, support Ukraine in its fight against Russia's full-scale invasion. The European Union, the World Bank or individual countries such as Germany are important actors when it comes to promoting equality, inclusion and participation of Roma.*

*The panel will discuss opportunities to support Roma in Ukraine and their needs, taking into account the importance of combating anti-Roma sentiment, as outlined in the EU Roma*

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*Strategic Framework for Equality, Integration and Participation, as well as the experiences of Roma in other war or post-war societies, such as Kosovo.*

**Moderator: Mr Stephan Müller**, Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma

**Ms Tetyana Stefiuk**, Head of the Secretariat of the First Deputy Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine emphasised the diversity of Ukraine. According to the last population census in 2001, more than 22% of Ukraine's 48 million people identified themselves as members of ethnic communities, and according to unofficial figures, this includes about 400,000 Roma.

This diversity enriches cultures but requires a balanced ethnic policy and other decisions to preserve social cohesion. This requires significant resources, and is currently complicated by the unprovoked war waged by the Russian Federation

Ukraine needs an institutional approach to ensuring the rights of national minorities. This is mainly done through the adoption of the Law on National Minorities (Communities), and the approval of the Concept of the State Targeted National and Cultural Programme "Unity in Diversity" until 2034, which was developed to implement this law, and the Roma Strategy 2030.

Roma and national minority issues are in the constant focus of the Verkhovna Rada, and recently a bill was passed on the educational process during martial law. Ukraine is also steadfastly fulfilling all its obligations related to the rights of national minorities.

Thanks to the Council of Europe, an active dialogue between the authorities and Roma activists has become possible and she mentioned in particular the work of Roma mediators from the Roma Women's Fund Chiricli. It should be reiterated that Roma belong where

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decisions are made. Roma should be included in the development of resettlement and reconstruction plans and should be directly involved in the process of rebuilding Ukraine.

**Ms Yasmin Raya**, Deputy Head of Department for Ukraine, Moldova, Black Sea Cooperation, Federal Foreign Office of Germany, highlighted the contribution of Germany to Ukraine, including Roma.

Germany supports Ukraine not only at the political level, but also at all other levels. We immediately sent humanitarian aid in response to the explosion of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station. Overall, Germany is the second biggest contributor of assistance to Ukraine – we will continue to do so as long as it takes.

Roma are part of Ukrainian society, German society and European society. They are fighting side by side with other Ukrainians against the aggressor. But they can still be discriminated against.

Supporting national communities is important on the path to European integration, and Germany supports Ukraine on this path. It is important to continue reforms, taking into account the experience of the European Union and individual countries. Ukraine is indeed making very big commitments to improve the situation of national communities, including the Roma community. Germany supports this and helps with educational activities and other work.

**Ms Gabriela Hrabanova**, Director, ERGO Network, outlined the general activities of ERGO which are also relevant for Roma in and from Ukraine. It is important to understand that the fight against antigypsyism is crucial, since it is the root cause of discrimination and exclusion.

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It is also important to involve Roma in decision-making and the development of state policies in all areas. The role of civil society is very important. The ERGO Network of civil society organisations supported Roma in Ukraine from the beginning of the full-scale invasion.

The process of accession to the European Union has a great impact on the protection of Roma rights and this will be relevant for Roma in Ukraine too.

**Mr Isak Skenderi**, Director of the Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians of Kosovo, provided an insight in possible lessons learnt for Roma from the war and post-war period in Kosovo for Roma in Ukraine.

Mr. Skenderi first expresses his support and condolences as Ukrainians go through armed aggression every day, regardless of their ethnicity.

Currently, in Kosovo, members of the Roma community remain the most marginalised members of society and face problems in accessing education, healthcare, employment and much more.

Anti-Roma sentiment in Kosovo stems from ignorance and lack of information. And the war has certainly exacerbated these processes and worsened the situation of the Roma in Kosovo. Roma were excluded from many areas of life. There were cases when Roma families were driven out of their homes by the police, and there were deadly attacks on Roma. There were also violent acts by the military.

We have evidence that Serbian police forced Roma to commit illegal acts against other citizens. After the withdrawal of Serbian troops in 1999, Roma were called colonialists and accused of collaborating with the Serbs. Such sentiments were fuelled, in part, by fake news

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about Roma. The number of attacks on Roma increased, including arson attacks and murders of Roma, and many Roma refugees never returned to Kosovo.

People have a right to justice and to the truth, to reparations and justice. We must make sure that this does not happen again.

**Mr Yulian Kondur**, International Charitable Organisation "Roma Women's Fund Chiricli" Ukraine noted that the approximation of Ukrainian legislation to the standard and requirements of the European Union is a window of opportunity to build a stronger state, to respect human rights in general and to build a system of social services.

It seems that it is difficult to make long-term plans now. Plans can only be short term now, when you are glad that you survived the night. There was some shelling last night, but it also passed.

The major obstacles for Roma are the housing situation and poverty. Currently, most IDP Roma remain below the poverty line.

It is indispensable fighting antigypsyism and to talk open about it and its consequences.

He reiterated that despite the full-scale aggression of Russia and the obstacles and challenges for the Roma, there is also a reason to be optimistic because there is a window of opportunity to build a strong society, since Ukraine is more united and Roma are active and have already achieved a lot.

It is very important to address the policy level which should go beyond the Roma Strategy 2030, since there are many other relevant policies and strategies. He emphasised the need to think about how to motivate people to return to Ukraine, including Roma refugees. It requires a better coordination between different ministries and other state authorities.

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Another important point is to support people who continue to work on the ground. These are local activists and Roma mediators. We need to increase the potential of people working on the ground.

**Mr Myroslav Horvat**, City Councillor of Uzhhorod, first emphasised that the Roma Strategy 2030 provides for the opportunity to shape the agenda and it is important to take into account the situation at local level where the actual implementation takes place.

At present, in particular the respective situation in education and with regard to employment is even more acute and where more activities would be necessary. Without an education, young people have no opportunity to find a job and find a decent job.

### Highlights from the discussion

**Ms Yulia Kondur** mentioned that today is a historic day, since Roma issues are raised at international level. No EU programme gives an answer on how to live and develop under bombing, replacement fields, etc... There is an IPA fund that helps candidate countries to build institutions. Ukraine needs grants to build institutions and to support entrepreneurship.

**Mr Isak Skenderi** replying to the question how the housing issue has been solved in Kosovo after the war, stated that, first, Roma were not adequately considered in reconstruction and housing programmes and then it was focused on the material aspect - just building housing. The fact social relations should have been built new too, was missing. As a result, so-called

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Roma ghettos were built, houses that were not of very high quality and thoughtful design and were intended for Roma only.

This demonstrates how important it is to include all groups in the process of reconstruction, including Roma. If not nothing will be built or in a wrong way. Government, society, international community and Roma have to work against negative narratives and discrimination and at the same time have to pay attention to positive examples and situations in order to make them more known.

### **Panel discussion 3: Cooperation with civil society**

*Civil society is an important actor that should always perceive Roma as an integral part of Ukraine and involve them in its activities. Civil society should contribute to the promotion of Roma as an integral part of Ukraine in various ways.*

*Such contributions can cover a variety of areas and should go beyond humanitarian or technical assistance, to the extent necessary.*

**Moderator: Mr Jonathan Mack**, Central Council of German Sinti and Roma

**Speaker: Ms Natali Tomenko**, ARCA: Expectations of Roma civil society

Roma civil society has been a significant force in lobbying for the interests and rights of various Roma communities in Ukraine, especially since the war. Since the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion, Roma have mobilised all possible resources to participate in political life and defend their homeland - Ukraine, to help civilians (including the most

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vulnerable groups such as children, women and the elderly, particularly in the occupied territories), to help the frontline by sending humanitarian aid. And we should not forget that many, many Roma joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine to fight the aggressor Russia.

Reflecting on the first recommendation regarding the documentation process, since the beginning of the war, we, ARCA, with the support of the Network for Assistance to Victims of Nazi Persecution in Ukraine, have been able to help 120 Roma survivors, and we have begun to record video and audio testimonies with Roma survivors who have unique experiences of witnessing the Second World War and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

All the initiatives that have been implemented since the beginning of the war have been made possible through close cooperation with international civil society, which has responded immediately and offered support, for example, the EVZ Foundation and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma.

Several key points need to be emphasised that we believe are necessary and indispensable: first, that cooperation with civil society should go beyond the provision of humanitarian or material assistance - as much as is necessary. We also need cooperation and assistance from international civil society in other areas, such as culture, youth leadership, women's rights, children's rights, and curriculum development.

We, the Roma civil society do not want to be treated as "something special" - we want to be perceived as an integral part of Ukrainian society.

From the experience of other countries that have gone through wars, it is extremely important that the reconstruction of society includes all groups, including Roma, from the very beginning. And this inclusion means not only that Roma benefit from physical reconstruction, but also that we are seen as an integral part of society, that we are valued as part of the new post-war narrative of society and Ukraine.

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It is also very important to provide special support to Roma youth who have lost several years of schooling after first Covid-19 and then the full-scale Russian invasion.

Once again, I would like to emphasise several recommendations to the international civil society community, which are detailed in the position paper:

Once again, I would like to emphasise a few recommendations to the international civil society community, which are detailed in the position paper:

- Promoting and documenting a positive narrative about Roma defending Ukraine and supporting the establishment of intercultural dialogue.
- When providing financial and technical assistance to the Ukrainian government, take into account the needs of Roma on the ground.
- In the course of restoration and reconstruction, it is necessary to take into account the lack of documents confirming ownership and possible refusal of non-Roma to include Roma in housing programmes.
- Humanitarian organisations and volunteer groups should fully adhere to a human rights-based approach in their work, including the principle of non-discrimination.
- countries that host Roma refugees from Ukraine should develop programmes to assist Roma refugees, offer language and educational courses, and ensure that children attend schools.

**Ms Kateryna Ritz-Rakul**, Head of the Ukrainian Institute in Germany shared her experience that Ukrainians often hear from German society that they are a “white nation” that has never experienced repression. But Ukrainians know very well what repression is.

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Ukraine is also known for its strong civil society. In our work, the Ukrainian Institute tries to include many different perspectives. Last year the focus was on Crimean Tatars, but it will pay attention to all ethnic groups in Ukraine and include them in its projects, and Roma are among them.

There is a need to work on long-term narratives, but it is very important to collect testimonies from those who have lived through the experience of war. These testimonies must be presented with dignity and their voices must be heard. The voices of Roma witnesses cannot be drowned out by the voices of more powerful communities, as was the case after the Second World War.

Roma should be represented in academic circles. Academic articles on Roma issues should be published. Even Ukrainian voices are not always heard, and the stories and voices of Ukrainian Roma are not reflected in many ways.

**Ms Anzhelika Belova**, Director of Voice of Roma, Ukraine, outlined the work of her organisation which works in most regions of Ukraine. Since the Russia's full-scale invasion began, they distributed humanitarian aid, provided multi-purpose cash assistance or legal and psychological counselling, created spaces for children for distance-learning and evacuated people from Zaporizhzhia region.

The main message and suggestion for donors and partners is to support small local Roma organisations (especially youth organisations), develop their potential, strengthen their team and capacity. Promote the idea of networking and cooperation between Roma NGOs, including the mediation component. After all, it is local organisations that know the local context best and can respond quickly to crisis situations on the ground.

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And the global message is to support Ukraine financially in the implementation of the Roma Strategy 2030, which contains the most important tasks for the Roma community. It should focus on:

- 1) Support educational projects for children, because during the war, the education of all children in Ukraine is at a low level, and most Roma children do not have access to it at all.
- 2) Support women's education (including sexuality education and reproductive health) and women's leadership. Roma women also face discrimination within the community.
- 3) Support the task of improving the living conditions of Roma communities, which are unacceptable in Transcarpathia, Lviv and Dnipro regions.

**Dr Andrea Despot**, Director of the EVZ Foundation stated that cooperation with Roma of Ukrainian origin has always been on the agenda of EVZ Foundation, not just since last February. However, since February 2022, the Foundation has become even more engaged with Roma from Ukraine.

The situation of the Roma is a strategically and structurally important issue, so now more than ever it is necessary to contribute to improving the situation of the Roma in the form of humanitarian aid. This is what EVZ Foundation is doing, but EVZ also supported young people and activists through a scholarship programme since 2016.

Now it is important to go beyond this dramatic time and think about how to integrate Roma communities really and structurally in the country when it comes to education, when it

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comes to equal and fair participation, when it comes to empowerment, when it comes to really giving Roma communities an opportunity.

There are many opportunities for real cooperation and this event today provides for the opportunity to listen to and to learn.

**Anna Goiss**, Managing Director of SODI International

SODI works in 18 countries, including the global south and the so-called global east, focusing on directly working with local organisations in a number of areas such as civil society empowerment of marginalised groups, combating discrimination, supporting their economic, social and political participation. These activities are always combined with capacity building for the partner organisations.

SODI is guided by the "Roma for Roma" approach when we support Roma organisations, the organisations themselves define their needs, i.e., what they want to implement on the ground, these organisations have the right to self-representation, and we are the project management cycle.

SODI worked in Ukraine before the full-scale invasion and with Roma, both in Ukraine and in other countries.

We had already worked with Roma organisations before the full-screen screening of Invasion, both in Ukraine, as mentioned in the background, and in other countries. Now, SODI proposes to take the current momentum and to invest in empowering Roma and members of the Roma communities.

## Highlights from the discussion

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**Mr Volodymyr Yakovenko mentioned that a** few years ago, the Roma Education Fund left the country, and that the Roma programme of the Renaissance Foundation was closed. They left a gap when it comes to support Roma in Ukraine which has to be filled by other actors.

**Mr Vadym Matiushenko reminded that there is a** need to support young Roma activists and to encourage and support Roma who are representatives of the authorities at the local level. This motivates others and debunks negative stereotypes in general. Another important aspect is to support legal support in cases of hate crimes against Roma.

**Mr. Mykola Burlutskyi** stated that public control over humanitarian aid for Roma is needed to make sure that this aid reaches the final beneficiaries.

\*

- Policy Paper

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