



**Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre:  
Update on the Situation for Ukrainian Roma Refugees in Ireland**

*“Undocumented Roma fleeing a conflict, including children, face additional obstacles and risks crossing the borders. Human trafficking is one of them, as discrimination and racism may increase vulnerability to trafficking during conflicts. Moreover, those Roma who reach neighbouring countries risk remaining invisible in the receiving countries, without decent assistance and access to protection. Therefore, States must ensure that all those fleeing a conflict are granted equal access to security and protection, without possible discrimination”.*

**Statement from the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues:**

**Introduction**

Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre (‘Pavee Point’) has been following the situation for Ukrainian Roma refugees across Europe since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine through our connections with European and International NGOs and Human Rights bodies. Since March 2022, we became aware of Ukrainian Roma families seeking refuge in Ireland and since then we have linked with Ukrainian Roma families, State agencies and all relevant stakeholders where needed.

The purpose of this briefing paper is to give an overview of the work of Pavee Point in relation to the response to Ukrainian Roma seeking refuge, as well as to highlight some emerging issues that have been brought to our attention. Given that the National Ukraine Response does not gather ethnic data, we do not know the number of Ukrainian Roma who have come to Ireland this year. However, based on our work so far and engagement with groups working in this area, we estimate that at least 200 Ukrainian Roma (mostly women and children) have travelled to Ireland. We are conscious and concerned that the cases brought forward to us represent only a small portion of the lived experiences of Ukrainian Roma seeking protection but these cases serve to highlight their complex, and specific needs, particularly in terms of health and social inequalities.

**Pavee Point’s Work with Ukrainian Roma Refugees:**

Over the last 8 months, Pavee Point has sought to support Ukrainian Roma refugees in collaboration with the wider National Ukraine response by:

- Direct advocacy and lobbying work. Highlighting our human rights concerns for Roma and other ethnic minorities at this time of crisis in Europe both nationally and

internationally, including raising the issue with the Taoiseach and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

- Providing information and advice when contacted by local Roma churches and European Roma NGOs about Ukrainian Roma families coming to Ireland
- Linking with the Department of Justice, Immigration, HSE, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and relevant NGOs
- Providing information sessions for those working with Ukrainian Roma in Ireland
- Operating a phonenumber for Ukrainian Roma, available Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9am-5pm since October 2022. While Pavee Point is not a service provider, given the context of rising concerns, this phonenumber is an interim measure to provide information and to signpost Ukrainian Roma to appropriate supports. This phone is managed by a Roma community worker who can provide information through Romani language. Leaflets and posters were shared at the airport, Citywest and across wider Networks.

### **Context: Roma in Ukraine**

There were an estimated 400,000 Roma living in Ukraine before the Russian invasion<sup>1</sup>. Roma face high levels of racism, discrimination, poverty and lack of access to employment, education, and health care in Ukraine. Additionally, Roma in Ukraine can be subject to active prejudice, hate speech, and violent attacks by radical groups<sup>2</sup>. This was widely publicised in 2018<sup>3</sup>, with violent attacks on Roma settlements involving extreme violence and the burning down of people's homes.

Following the conflict in and around Ukraine in 2014, the OSCE published a situation assessment of Roma in Ukraine<sup>4</sup>. In this report, a lack of access to personal documents (civil registration and identification documents) was identified as a main challenge facing Roma communities in Ukraine. It also identified that many Roma have to work across the border in neighbouring countries (Poland, Czech Republic) in seasonal and informal jobs, while their families live in Ukraine.

In 2022, the European Parliament<sup>5</sup> highlighted the widespread mistreatment of Roma when fleeing Ukraine. According to the report, Ukrainian Roma face increasing difficulties along the evacuation route, at border crossing points and on arrival in Europe. Roma families (mostly women and children) are reportedly discriminated against in the provision of humanitarian assistance, transportation, and shelter.

### **Context: Ukrainian Roma in Ireland**

Since April 2022 Pavee Point has worked closely with a number of Roma families, State agencies and other relevant stakeholders to highlight the specific needs of Ukrainian Roma Refugees in the National Ukraine Response. Pavee Point is a national Traveller and

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, Brussels, 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com\\_2011\\_173\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com_2011_173_en.pdf) (Accessed 10 December 2013).

<sup>2</sup> European Roma Rights Centre (2018) Anti Roma Pogroms <http://www.errc.org/news/anti-roma-pogroms-in-ukraine-on-c14-and-tolerating-terror>

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch (2018) Ukraine: Fatal Attack on Roma Settlement <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/26/ukraine-fatal-attack-roma-settlement> ERRC (2018) Anti Roma Pogroms in Ukraine <http://www.errc.org/news/anti-roma-pogroms-in-ukraine-on-c14-and-tolerating-terror>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/124494>

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament (2022) Russia's war on Ukraine: The situation of Roma people fleeing Ukraine [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729411/EPRS\\_ATA\(2022\)729411\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729411/EPRS_ATA(2022)729411_EN.pdf)

Roma Organisation which seeks to promote the rights of Travellers and Roma in Ireland, and within this remit, we highlighted any emerging concerns, worked with key agencies to promote positive approaches, and signposted Ukrainian Roma families to the appropriate supports and services.

Through this work, we recorded 14 cases<sup>6</sup> where Ukrainian Roma Families were seeking additional support/advice. These cases primarily involve Ukrainian Roma families who had difficulties accessing Temporary Protection, or queries about their health, accommodation or social protection entitlements. A common thread throughout most cases was the concern about discriminatory attitudes, differential treatment, or use of derogatory language when seeking support.

### **Temporary Protection**

Through our work, we have logged 10 cases involving Ukrainian Roma families being refused Temporary Protection on arrival by the Department of Justice.

- With Pavee Point's direct support, 5 of these refusals were successfully reversed and Temporary Protection was granted. In the other 5 cases, families left the country or contact with the family was lost.
- 3 families who were initially refused Temporary Protection stayed in Dublin Airport for a number of days. Families were forced to sleep on floors or benches, without any humanitarian supports. All families had very young children, including babies. 1 family eventually had their decision reversed and Temporary Protection was granted, and 2 families had to leave the country to seek protection elsewhere.

### **Accommodation and Social Protection**

Pavee Point received 2 reports of accommodation issues and 1 case regarding social protection:

- A Roma family was expelled from their IPASS allocated accommodation due to a complaint from a settled Ukrainian family living in the same accommodation. IPASS were not notified of this incident and the family returned to Dublin to look for support. Once it was reported to IPASS, new accommodation was provided to the family.
- Donegal Travellers Project is supporting a large number of Ukrainian Roma Refugees (18 adults and 35 children) in the North West region. Issues of overcrowding, unsuitable living conditions and isolated/remote locations are reported.
- A case in Cavan highlighted difficulties for Roma accessing social welfare entitlements due to a lack of understanding in DEASP that Roma people can also be from Ukraine. This caused significant delays to supports being given.

### **Discrimination**

Ukrainian Roma refugees we engaged with have expressed significant concerns about discriminatory behaviour from support/interpreter staff which they believe impacted on the service/help provided to them. Two examples include:

- Pavee Point staff directly witnessed 1 incident of discriminatory behaviour displayed by a Ukrainian interpreter at Dublin Airport and this directly impacted the Ukrainian Roma's initial Temporary Protection decision. An older Ukrainian Roma woman was at the airport and she requested to have her Temporary Protection decision reassessed as she had been refused the previous day. The interpreter intervened and informed Pavee Point and Immigration staff that the woman was 'a liar' and she was not a

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<sup>6</sup> It is noted that there are likely other cases that have not been reported or brought to the attention of support agencies or NGOs

genuine refugee. Pavee Point spoke to the woman who showed us her valid passport and documentation and we requested that Immigration staff review them. The woman was automatically approved and Immigration apologised. This was reported to the interpreter's manager by Pavee Point staff. As a result of this incident, Pavee Point delivered anti-racism training to all interpreters in that organisation.

- Donegal Travellers Project highlighted incidents where hosts/managers of Refugee accommodation in the North West used discriminatory language towards Roma when contacted.

### **Health Inequalities**

Similar to Roma in other Eastern European countries, Ukrainian Roma experience poorer health outcomes, including higher rates of morbidity and mortality, chronic health conditions, extreme poverty, and the lack of access to mainstream health services. This means that many Ukrainian Roma families are coming to Ireland with additional, complex health needs which need urgent attention. Given that the vast majority of Ukrainian Roma refugees are women and children, we are particularly concerned about their health and welfare on arrival to Ireland. Pavee Point has received a number of calls regarding Roma families' health needs:

- Donegal Travellers Project reports that many Roma families in the North West do not have access to GPs or medical cards
- In Cavan, a Roma family had complex health needs requiring urgent attention. The family were subsequently moved to another part of the country and they had to begin the process of finding a GP again.
- We note a case of a Ukrainian Roma family in Co. Cavan requesting support for a young man with intellectual disability and complex needs who requires additional health and social supports.

Pavee Point are conscious of the existing health and social inequalities faced by Roma currently living in Ireland, including those listed in the box below. We are concerned that the barriers now facing Ukrainian Roma families are repeating the patterns of existing exclusion experienced by the wider Roma community in Ireland.

#### **Existing Challenges for the Roma Community: in Ireland**

-20% of Roma living in extreme poverty

-1 in 3 Roma do not have a GP and 50% do not have a medical card. Where they do, they do not speak enough English to communicate on the phone to the GP (61% of Roma in Ireland speak Romani, followed by Romanian at 14.3%, Czech at 10.4%, English at 9.7% and Slovakian at 4.5%).

-Most Roma people live in overcrowded and unsafe accommodation, with 46% reporting being homeless at some stage in their lives

-24% of women do not access health services while pregnant and their first point of access is when giving birth

### **Conclusion**

This is a very challenging time for the Irish Government, responding to an unprecedented crisis. During this time, the State has shown a welcome commitment to ensuring the rights and safety of those fleeing conflict in Ukraine. Notwithstanding current challenges, humanitarian supports and fair procedures should be available to all those meeting key requirements under the Temporary Protection Directive. Therefore, it is important that

Ukrainian Roma refugees have equal access to and outcomes from these supports under the Temporary Protection Directive and according to the Government's legal obligations outlined in the Equality and Human Rights Public Sector Duty.

Pavee Point will continue to work in partnership with State agencies and all relevant stakeholders to highlight the specific needs and barriers experienced by Ukrainian Roma refugees when fleeing the conflict and to identify positive ways of working with the Ukrainian Roma community. In order to address the issues highlighted in this briefing paper, Pavee Point recommends the following key actions:

1. Ensure a **coordinated response between State agencies, Pavee Point, and other relevant NGOs** working with refugees and the Roma community to address the specific needs of Ukrainian Roma seeking protection in Ireland, considering the commitments under the Temporary Protection Directive and the State's wider commitments to Roma equality under the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy.
2. All relevant State agencies involved in the Ukraine Response (DoJ, DCEDIY, DEASP, HSE, DoH) to implement **ethnic equality monitoring**, including the introduction of a standard ethnic identifier across the relevant datasets. Only through reliable data can the specific needs of Roma and other ethnic minorities/third country nationals be assessed and adequate responses be designed to promote equality.
3. All staff and officials working in the Ukraine Response to receive **anti-racism and discrimination training** (inclusive of anti-Roma racism), and training on appropriate use of interpreters.
4. Ensure there is **clear criteria on evidence required for Temporary Protection**, as well as a process for applicants who are refused Temporary Protection, whereby they are given a **clear reason for refusal in writing** and introduce a clear mechanism for raising a concern about a Temporary Protection decision and a pathway for appeal.
5. HSE and Department of Health to develop a **clear plan with indicators, timelines, and an allocated budget to address the specific health needs of Ukrainian Roma** refugees. This plan needs to be developed in collaboration with those already working to address Roma health inequalities in Ireland