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Freedom of movement and protection for Roma from Ukraine!

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Not all Roma leave Ukraine and not all are victims of discriminatory treatment. But reports of discrimination against Romnja* **at the borders** are increasing. They are not taken in cars, bus companies turn them away. In the places of arrival they are separated from the „white“ Ukrainians for unknown reasons. There are also difficulties in the places of arrival in Germany.

Large spaces are needed

Most of the refugees are women and children, with young people and sometimes relatives in need of care. They had to separate from their husbands of „military age“ and do not want to split up further. In addition to the war traumas they suffered, they report **massive discrimination** and insults along the escape routes to the West.

Ukrainian Roma are descendants of survivors and victims of persecution and extermination during National Socialism. We would like Germany in particular to provide funds and offer protection now.

Many Romnja speak Romanes, Ukrainian or Russian, but not the languages of the countries to which they flee. Some cannot read, and if they can, they know only Cyrillic characters. The whole situation is extremely unsettling and threatening. Family members and friends, who support each other, do not want to separate in this situation and would like to stay together, also to be accommodated together. That is why there is a need for larger accommodation facilities where people can be housed together.

Racism affects Roma also now

The structural discrimination that unfortunately existed also before the war includes the fact that many Roma in Ukraine are undocumented and have no passports. Of the estimated 400,000 Roma living in Ukraine, about 20 percent, or tens of thousands of people, have no papers. Others have lost their documents in the course of fleeing. For all these people, it is significantly more difficult to cross the borders and reach safety from the war.

This particularly vulnerable group has so far not been included at all in the groups of people who can officially receive protection in the countries of the European Union in the current situation.

They may or must fight even without papers, but fleeing is a problem. There are reports that the Ukrainian border guards do not allow paperless Roma to cross the EU borders. Therefore, they have to cross the border into the Moldavian Republic. There, the white Ukrainian refugees are **housed separately from the Roma refugees**. European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) human rights activist Jonathan Lee calls this practice **segregation** and also criticizes the very desolate accommodations on the ground.

No members of the majority society from Ukraine were found in these specially segregated centers. The ERRC obtained an overview on the ground and found that the authorities in Moldova are transporting hundreds of refugee Romnja from Ukraine to the Romanian border. The Romnja are not informed about how the immigration process works and are often turned back at the border because they do not have the right documents or no documents at all.

Equal rights and opportunities for all refugees!

According to Al Jazeera news channel, the authorities in **Moldova** are being pressured to draw up a redistribution plan for fleeing Roma that does not require them to produce any documents. The channel does not report by whom they are being pressured. Moldovan MP Dorian Istratii, coordinates work at the Manej refugee center. He says the Moldovan government is working to persuade the Romanian government to take in fleeing undocumented Roma from Ukraine so they can be granted asylum there. Under EU law, however, this would mean that they would then have to stay there. This would be a clear discrimination of the undocumented, since all other Ukrainians can currently choose their place of stay in Europe.

Permanent right to stay also after the war

We know from the wars in Yugoslavia that many of the Roma who fled at that time are still only tolerated („Duldung“) in Germany or other countries 30 years later and are still being deported. A repetition of this history must be avoided. However, the current

treatment of the paperless Romnja from Ukraine gives reason to fear this.

We know from experience that in 1999 there was ethnic cleansing against Roma in Kosovo after NATO operations. Due to war and expulsion, people lost their property. After the war ended, they could not return to their old lives. There are already large numbers of Roma in the diaspora in Europe who can never go back.

The arming of the Ukrainian armed forces, but also of paramilitary fighters and, of course, neo-Nazis, will not be reversed so quickly in the coming years, even if the war is over. It is to be feared that members of minorities such as Roma will become defenseless in an extremely armed society. The **riots against Roma in 2018**, for example, raise fears of the worst.

The situation is also potentially dangerous for other people belonging to minorities. We fear for these people. For us, this means that we are already advocating for those affected by racism, anti-Semitism, sexism and homophobia to be granted permanent secure rights to stay.

We need:

- A reception program for undocumented Roma in Western European countries (as well as transportation from the Ukrainian borders and shelters on the escape routes). Roma must be able to choose the destination of their flight just like all other Ukrainians.

- This includes the consideration of Romnja and Roma – especially without documents – from Ukraine in the direct

admission of refugees from Moldova, which has already been announced by the German Foreign Minister Baerbock.

- The immediate stop of all deportations to Ukraine's neighboring countries (Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Russia).

- Provision of places where groups of 10-20 people can be housed together. Suitable vacant state buildings, hotels, youth hostels or similar should be freed for this purpose.

- We urgently need funds to establish support structures – for example, (psychological) telephone counseling (Romanes/ Ukrainian/ Russian). Counseling about registration possibilities and the registration of paperless persons, support in cases of experienced discrimination, networking offers, discrimination- and language-sensitive counceling for Roma refugees, coordination of accommodation offers and search.

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In this text we write predominantly „Romnja", because mostly women are on the flight.

Support the joint statement of the Bundes Roma Verband, the Roma Centre/ RAN, Romani Phen and other Roma organisations now!

If you would like to sign as an organisation, please send an e-mail to presse[at]bundesromaverband.de.
Spread the word.

Initial signatories:
Bundes Roma Verband e.V. • Roma Center e.V./ Roma Antidiscrimination Network • Romani Phen e.V. • Romani Kafava

Wilhelmsburg e.V. • Gruppe gegen Antiromaismus • Wakti Romano e.V.

Amadeu Antonio Stiftung • Anlaufstelle / Netzwerk Pro Sinti & Roma • Arbeitskreis Asyl Cuxhaven e. V. • Bildung in Widerspruch e.V. • Bündnis der Roma Organisationen • B.R.O. • Internationaler Kultur und Sport Verein der Roma Carmen e.V. • Amaro Foro e.V. • Bildungswerk für Friedensarbeit e.V. Berlin • VVN-BdA Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg • Flüchtlingsrat Brandenburg • Flüchtlingsrat Bremen • Flüchtlingsrat Thüringen e.V. • Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht & Migration e.V. • Förderverein Roma e.V. • Poliklinik Hamburg Veddel • Queer Roma • save space e.V. • 1. Sinti-Verein Ostfriesland e.V. • Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas • Stiftung Zusammen_Wachsen • Virtuelles Denkmal „Gerechte der Pflege“ • Beratungsstelle für Sinti und Roma e.V.

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