

ALMANAC KYIV INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON ROMA INCLUSION 2021

ISSUE 1 - AUGUST 2021



On 27 May 2021 the Kyiv International Forum on Roma Inclusion was held at the initiative of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Liudmyla Denisova with the support of the Council of Europe projects “Strengthening the Protection of National Minorities, including Roma, and Minority Languages in Ukraine” and “Strengthening access to justice for victims of discrimination, hate crime and hate speech”.

The forum was attended by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović, the Head of the UN Monitoring Mission for Human Rights in Ukraine Matilda Bogner, the Chairman of the Head Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations Dmytro Lubinets, ombudspersons and representatives of equality bodies from 14 European countries, delegates from Roma NGOs.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović during the meeting emphasised the seriousness of the challenges of racism and discrimination against Roma communities, reaffirming the key role of human rights institutions in combating this phenomenon.

“Statistical and information invisibility is a key factor in discrimination against Roma. Both in Ukraine and in other European countries, the state authorities do not have complete and reliable data on the birth rate, mortality of the Roma population and living conditions”, - stressed Liudmyla Denisova.

Based on the results of the Kyiv International Forum, it was decided to publish an Almanac, which will be published quarterly. The first issue dedicated to the Forum is offered to you.



LIUDMYLA DENISOVA,
Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner
for Human Rights

DEAR COLLEAGUES, FORUM PARTICIPANTS!

Welcome to the Kyiv International Forum on Roma Inclusion!

I would like to thank the Ombudspersons and the representatives of equality bodies for responding to our invitation and participating to the event. Paying attention to the problems of national minorities and treating them as an integral part of our society are indicators of a civilised state. It is fair to say that the most socially vulnerable national minority in Europe is the Roma.

Unlike most national minorities, Roma do not have their own statehood. The traditional feature of the internal social structure of Roma communities is that they reside in compact and uncontrolled settlements, mostly separate from other nationalities. This deepens their segregation.

The main problems of Roma are more or less the same in all countries: social isolation from the local population, low educational level, poor living conditions, overwhelming poverty, terrible housing conditions, poor health, and the lack of representation in government authorities.

A key factor of their discrimination is statistical and informational invisibility. Public authorities in Ukraine and other European countries do not have complete and reliable data on the birth rate, mortality, and living conditions of the Roma population.

According to various estimates, the Roma community in Ukraine comprises 200,000 to 400,000 people living in all regions of the country. The recording of members of the Roma national minority is complicated due to the lack of identity documents in a significant number of Roma. This leads to the violation of their fundamental rights to social protection, health care, education, work, and adequate living conditions.

We constantly find facts of discrimination against the Roma national minority through reports of rights violations and media monitoring:

- inability to receive social assistance, including assistance for low-income persons (primarily due to the lack of documents);
- limited medical services (they are provided to a lesser extent or in worse conditions);
- neglect of the specificities of the Roma minority when engaging them in the educational process (“language barrier” – Roma children entering school often do not even know the Ukrainian alphabet, which leads to a lag in their education);
- denial of employment due to ethnicity;
- lack of information on the rights and freedoms in Romani provided by public authorities.

These persons’ rights are often restored only after the intervention of our office with the public authorities. Ukraine, like the rest of the world in 2020, faced the detrimental effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, which primarily affected the most vulnerable populations.

In this regard, the Commissioner's Secretariat, together with the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine and the International Charitable Organisation "Roma Women Fund Chiricli", conducted monitoring of the observance of Roma rights during the pandemic. In order to do this, we prepared guidelines for the Secretariat staff and community monitors on the specifics of visiting and communicating with representatives of the Roma community. Checklists were developed and training was conducted for the participants of the monitoring visits. Roma mediators were engaged in these visits.

A total of 20 monitoring visits to Roma settlements, local authorities, educational, health, and social protection institutions were carried out in May–June of the last year. Additionally, Roma mediators conducted 286 interviews with representatives of this community.

The monitoring has shown that the pandemic made the situation with the Roma rights and freedoms worse:

- local authorities and health institutions did not ensure that Roma were informed about quarantine measures and regulations to prevent the spread of the disease. In fact, Roma could obtain information from community organisations and Roma mediators;
- due to complete poverty, most Roma families were unable to provide themselves with the necessary personal protection and hygienic equipment, food, and medication;
- a number of cases of discrimination against Roma in accessing health care during the pandemic were documented (segregation in "Roma wards" in maternity hospitals, refusal to provide free services);
- due to the distance learning, some Roma children lost the opportunity to study, as most of them live in low-income families, do not have computer equipment, usually do not have smartphones and access to the Internet;
- due to the shutdown of some enterprises during the lockdown, many Roma lost their jobs and means of subsistence (they mostly had seasonal and fixed-term jobs).

The monitoring results formed the basis of first Europe's special report of the Commissioner "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Roma community in Ukraine".

I made recommendations in the report to central and local authorities to ensure respect for the rights of the Roma national minority:

- drafting legislative acts;
- implementing practical measures;
- carrying out awareness-raising work.

In order to coordinate the implementation of the recommendations provided, I established an Inter-Agency Working Group comprising deputy heads of the central executive authorities to whom the recommendations were made and representatives of the Roma community. The Inter-Agency Working Group planned at its meetings to conduct monitoring visits to the Roma mass settlements and to local communities with a positive experience in overcoming the negative developments in the Roma community.

I believe the next important step to ensure respect for Roma rights is to create an international platform for sharing best practices of integration of Roma citizens in all European countries.

The dissemination of experience in solving certain issues in enhancing Roma access to social and legal protection, health care, and education is beneficial not only for the Ombudspersons as human rights defenders but also for the public authorities of the countries we represent. I am sure that joining our efforts will make it possible to find the best ways of solving the problems of the Roma community in our countries.

The result of today's work will be a Forum Resolution that will provide the main directions and recommendations to the public authorities of our countries on Roma inclusion. I hope that the event will be only the first step in further fruitful cooperation aimed at ensuring equal rights and freedoms for all nationalities.

Thank you for your attention!

PROGRAMME

10:30

11:00

REGISTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS

11:00

11:30

GREETING



LIUDMYLA DENISOVA

Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights



MATILDA BOGNER

Head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine



DUNJA MIJATOVIĆ

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights



MODERATOR:

HALLVARD GORSETH

Head of Anti-discrimination Department, Council of Europe (Strasbourg)



DMYTRO LUBINETS

Member of Ukrainian Parliament, Chairman of the Committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories in Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the City of Sevastopol, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations

11:30

12:10

PRACTICE OF STATE ROMA POLICY. THE ROLE OF EQUALITY BODIES IN PROMOTING GOOD STATE ROMA POLICY



OLENA BOHDAN

Head of the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience (Ukraine)



WERNER AMON

Ombudsman of the Austrian Ombudsman Board (video message)



BIRUTE SABATAUSKAITE

Equal Opportunities Ombudswoman of Lithuania



PETER SVETINA

Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Slovenia (video message)



JASMINKA DŽUMHUR

Human Rights Ombudspersons of Bosnia and Herzegovina (video message)



KRISTIINA KOUROS

Representative of the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman (Finland)



TENA ŠIMONOVIĆ EINWALTER

Ombudswoman of the Republic of Croatia



MODERATOR:

OLHA VESNIANKA

Council of Europe expert, human rights activist (Ukraine)

12:10
13:00

COUNTERING HATE SPEECH AGAINST ROMA IN THE MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKS



IAN FELDMAN

President of the Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality, Republic of Moldova



MARIJAN PONJAVIC

State Counselor of the Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia



ADAM BODNAR

Commissioner for Human Rights Poland (video message)



KETEVAN SHUBASHVILI

Head of the Equality Department of the Office of the State Defender of Georgia



MARIAN MESÁROŠ

lawyer of the National Center for Human Rights of the Slovak Republic



MODERATOR:

IRENA GUIDIKOVA

Head of Inclusion and Anti-discrimination Division, Council of Europe (Strasbourg)



ZORAN PAŠALIĆ

Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia

13:00
13:25

ADOPTION OF THE FORUM RESOLUTION AND SUMMING UP



VIKTOR IVANKEVYCH

Representative of the Commissioner for Equal Rights and Freedoms (Ukraine)



MARA GEORGESCU

No Hate Speech and Cooperation Unit, Council of Europe



ZEMFIRA KONDUR

Project Manager, "Strengthening protection of national minorities, including Roma and minority languages in Ukraine", Council of Europe

13:25
13:30

CLOSING SPEECH



LIUDMYLA DENISOVA

Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights

FORUM HIGHLIGHTS



DUNJA MIJATOVIC,

Council of Europe Commissioner
for Human Rights

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the impact and discrimination against the Roma population. Lack of access to drinking water, hygiene facilities, internet, health services, as well as social exclusion and poor living conditions, have increased the vulnerability of Roma. In April 2020, I brought up an issue of hate speech and discrimination against Roma and Travellers across Europe in the context of the pandemic. The first lockdowns in Europe have primarily affected the most vulnerable and marginalised populations. Many felt Roma threatened public health, and some demanded to close Roma settlements, even to involve the police and army to establish checkpoints. All of this happened in Council of Europe Member States.

The report prepared by Ms Denysova is therefore very important in countering hate speech, as this problem is not new. It existed before the pandemic. It is worth noting that the report contains positive examples of necessary measures taken by the authorities to help this vulnerable group. This report is the first indication of mistakes to be corrected. It is up to the human rights bodies to address these issues, correct the mistakes and help develop appropriate policies. In February this year, I prepared a report on the need for health care for Roma and the important role of Ombudsmen who remain active in this area even during the pandemic and appeal to authorities demanding respect for human rights. The forum is a platform for sharing experience, joining and strengthening efforts on this issue, with the possibility to coordinate the problem through relevant institutions. I encourage us to continue our work, follow the recommendations and insist that governments fulfil their obligations to protect the rights of Roma and Travellers.



DMYTRO LUBINETS,

Member of Ukrainian Parliament
Chairman of the Committee on Human
Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration
of Temporarily Occupied Territories in
Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts

The problems Roma most often face are discriminatory treatment and prejudice by society, problems with identity documents, or rather the lack thereof in a majority of Roma, problems with access to social and health services, education and employment.

The lack of adequate living conditions has been an issue of concern for a long time for Roma communities residing in compact settlements in various regions of Ukraine. This problem has become particularly acute during the pandemic, as the high density of Roma settlements, particularly uncontrolled ones, means that infections can spread very quickly. Roma had limited access to health care even before the pandemic, but the situation has become critical under current conditions.

Another relevant issue is the education of Roma children and the lack of distance learning opportunities.

The situation of Roma women and girls that has deteriorated should also be mentioned.

Unfortunately, we can also observe increased instances of xenophobia in society against Roma and an increased number of incidents involving hate speech. As Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, I believe such cases are unacceptable in a democratic country.

I hate to say that sometimes, there are cases of discrimination against Roma on the part of law enforcement agencies and local authorities. The Committee receives such complaints from representatives of Roma NGOs. The Committee always appropriately responds to such complaints within its powers.

The list of Roma problematic issues is not exhaustive. Moreover, given their legal situation, each of the problems I have mentioned entails a whole range of other issues that are difficult to address on their own. The help of Roma NGOs, international organisations and the state is therefore required at both national and regional levels.

I hope that a new Roma Strategy and a corresponding Action Plan (which will be supported in terms of resources, institutions and clear indicators) will be approved soon, and I also hope that the new Strategy will be implemented properly and its results will not be the same as the previous ones. For my part, I would like to say that the Committee I chair consistently supports the integration of the Roma national minority into Ukrainian society and the protection of the rights of all members of the Roma community in Ukraine and will use its best endeavours to address the problems of the Roma community.

**MATILDA BOGNER,**

Head of the UN Human Rights
Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
and the Autonomous Republic of
Crimea, the City of Sevastopol,
National Minorities
and Interethnic Relations

The issue of Roma minority and Roma inclusion is a key issue not only in Europe but also in Ukraine. “Leave no one behind” is a principle lying in the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Strategy. Most countries are determined to end discrimination against all vulnerable groups, including Roma. This problem is all too acute during the pandemic as it exacerbates the inequalities existing in society. The facts we have established, as reported in our special briefing and thematic reports, in particular, the January one, only confirm the conclusions made by the Ombudsman in her report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Roma minority in Ukraine. We hope that our cooperation with the Commissioner’s Secretariat will be successful. Unfortunately, Roma still suffer from hate speech, bias and discrimination. After 2018, we have seen a decrease in violent attacks against Roma, but the investigation of previous crimes is ineffective. We know that law enforcement agencies often pay insufficient attention to such crimes. We are also concerned about manifestations of hate speech inciting violence against Roma in Ukraine. This includes online forums and the slogans you may see on the street. According to the monitoring activities that we constantly carry out in Ukraine, hate speech is often directed exactly against Roma.



WERNER AMON,
Ombudsman of the Austrian
Ombudsman Board

Ladies and gentlemen. It is an honour and pleasure for me to participate in this forum dedicated to the protection of the rights of Roma people. I would like to thank Liudmyla Denysova, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, for organising this event. I want to acknowledge her efforts to combat discrimination against Roma in Ukraine and to promote international cooperation in protecting the rights of Roma. On that note, I would like to give you a brief overview of the efforts to ensure the rights of the Roma minority in Austria. According to prudent estimates, the number of Roma in Austria is around 30,000. It is important to understand that this is a diverse group with significant differences in socio-economic mindset, lifestyle and legal status. However, the joint experience of discrimination still affects most of them. The Austrian legal framework, including strict anti-discrimination laws, introduces important tools to combat the restriction and marginalisation of the Roma minority. A system of independent bodies, including the Austrian Ombudsman Board and public authorities, ensures equal rights and freedoms for all citizens.

Recognising that Roma require additional legal guarantees, Austria granted them ethnic minority status in 1993. Since then, the Romani language and culture have been enjoying increased governmental protection and support. In 2011, Austria implemented a national strategy for Roma integration within the European Union framework. This programme includes increased funding with a special focus on labour market integration. These legal introductions are important milestones. However, changing mindset is just as important as changing laws. There are still stereotypes and negative attitudes towards Roma in all sectors of Austrian society. This is often due to a lack of knowledge about Roma culture and history. Roma civil society organisations and several state institutions, including the President of the Austrian Parliament, advocate the creation of a national memorial dedicated to victims of the Nazi genocide of Roma people. The Austrian National Strategy for Roma Inclusion focuses on close cooperation between Roma civil society and the Austrian authorities to promote exchange and understanding. The National Contact Point established in the Federal Chancellery is responsible for information activities and cooperation. This body regularly organises communication platforms. Previously, the Austrian Ombudsman administration, among other organisations, had the honour of organising this event. Such events create space for minorities and monitor the situation to determine the necessary measures to be taken to fully realise the rights of Roma in Austria.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that this short presentation has given you an insight into the particularities of the Austrian approach to protecting and promoting the rights of the Roma minority. I am sure that we will all benefit from increased international exchange of experiences in this area. I am sincerely grateful to the organiser of this Forum and hope you will have an interesting further discussion.

Thank you!

**JASMINKA DŽUMHUR,**

Human Rights Ombudsperson of
Bosnia and Herzegovina

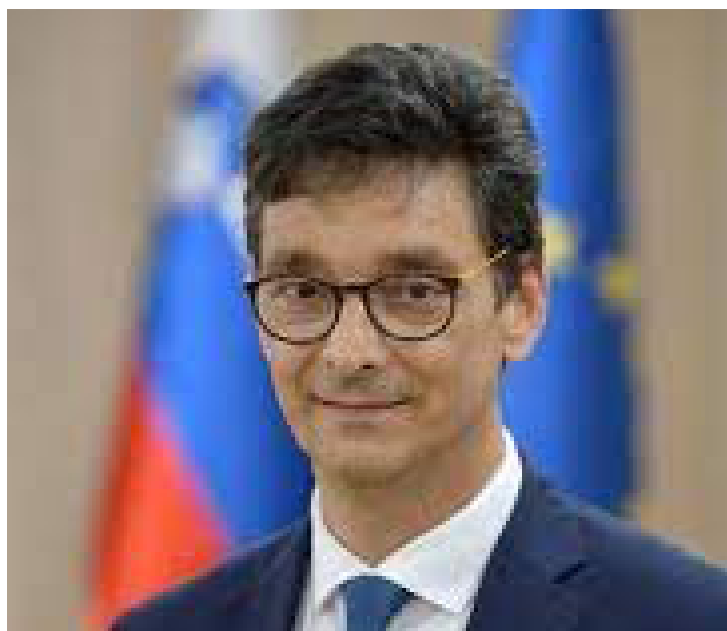
The Office of the Ombudsperson of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a national institution for the protection and observance of human rights. At the same time, we are a body established to promote equality. In the past years, we significantly focused on the situation of minorities, including Roma, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is worth noting that in 1991, there were only 8,000 registered Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in 2010, their number was 17,000. According to unofficial data, the number of Roma is 30,000 to 40,000, as we still have a significant number of unregistered Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Taking into account Roma problems, the Ombudsman prepared a special report on the situation of the Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We also prepared a follow-up report to see how our recommendations are implemented.

Based on this special report and further work, we see that Bosnia and Herzegovina has made significant progress in the situation of Roma, as is evident from the legislation adopted in many areas. Mechanisms have also been established, including a Commission for Roma Issues at the Council of Ministries, and an Action Plan on Roma has been adopted. It is worth mentioning the improved situation of Roma resulted from a global project "Roma Decade 2005–2015". This improvement is evident as an increasing number of children born in health facilities. Due to this problem, Roma were not officially registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Without registration, they had no access to some rights, including access to health care and social rights. Another improvement is the increase in primary and secondary school enrolment, which is very important when it comes to their further development, employment and other sectors. And finally, there are improvements in health care. Despite this progress, the Ombudsman Office is still concerned about Roma housing, the level of education, the enjoyment of economic rights and, most importantly, employment.



ADAM BODNAR,
Commissioner for Human Rights
Poland

I would like to thank Liudmyla Denysova, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Ukraine, for inviting me to express my position on the protection of Roma minorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. I think the idea of a pan-European report on the situation of the Roma community is an excellent one, and I am sure it will contribute greatly to the discussion of Roma minority issues in Europe. As the Ombudsman of the Republic of Poland, I take certain measures to protect the Roma community. I want to stress that there are 2 categories of Roma communities in Poland. The first category is a national ethnic minority residing mainly in southern Poland. This community faces many different challenges, including housing, social services and equal access to education. However, there is a second category, a community of Roma migrants mostly coming from Romania. They use the right to free movement within the European Union and settle in cities such as Wroclaw, Poznan and Gdansk. Their problems vary considerably depending on the category they belong to. I would like to stress three of them. The first one is housing. Unfortunately, in Poland, some Roma minorities live in conditions that do not meet human rights protection standards. I recently visited one Roma settlement in southern Poland where we managed to improve the protection of the rights of people living there only thanks to inexorable pressure from my office and the Parliament. However, what we understand in this context is that local communities should have additional investment funds to support Roma communities. Sometimes funds and programmes established and implemented at the central level are insufficient, especially if the local community is unable to allocate funds in a way that supports the Roma community, especially in the context of their residence and housing conditions in the settlements. The second problem is access to education. Please note that all pupils in Poland have been studying online since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 and till now. Does this mean that any Roma family has proper access to the Internet or sufficient methodological training to receive online education? In my opinion, the pandemic has illuminated the fact that we have unequal access to education, and if you belong to a traditionally much more vulnerable group, this inequality becomes much more visible. In the coming years, we should all focus on how to level out inequalities in education that are particularly disturbing for the Roma community. Finally, I would like to say that we are constantly witnessing prejudice against Roma communities. We often hear hate speech against Roma, which leads to public misunderstanding of why the Roma community should be supported. It also leads to hate crimes. I believe in order to combat this, whether during the pandemic or in usual times, we should exert all powers to shape people's mindset not only through education and awareness-raising but also through making prosecutors more effective and independent. To express my latter point, I would like to emphasise that the independence of the prosecution service and the rule of law, as well as relevant thought-out educational activities, are important in combating prejudice. I am very pleased to be invited and to have the opportunity to record this short message. I will even send Ms Denysova a report on this topic.



PETER SVETINA,
Commissioner for Human Rights
of the Republic of Slovenia

Dear colleagues, Ms Liudmyla Denysova, participants, ladies and gentlemen!

Allow me to pay compliments to you on my behalf and on behalf of the Ombudsman Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address you today and share the Slovenian experience of Roma issues. You are probably wondering about the number of Roma living in Slovenia. According to the existing legislation, the relevant institutions in Slovenia are not supposed to register the number of residents based on their ethnic origin, but there is a survey conducted by the National Institute for Social Welfare several years ago. The survey showed that, according to unofficial data, 12,000 Roma lived in Slovenia. In Slovenia, this marginalised ethnic minority has a low level of education and a high rate of unemployment, as well as poor living conditions.

That is why they are driven out, and our institutions often warn of problems that have not been solved for decades. Extremely poor living conditions in some Roma settlements are substandard and are certainly a major problem. The lack of legal norms and communal infrastructure in Roma settlements makes it difficult for them to access drinking water. It is worth noting that the right to drinking water was enshrined in the Slovenian Constitution in 2016, so it is impossible that in 2021, some people still find it difficult to access this basic need in Slovenia where there is no water reserve. This problem became particularly acute during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no way people without access to drinking water will follow hygiene recommendations in order to bring the epidemic down to a satisfactory level.

This is why I have urged the responsible authorities to find necessary solutions. In recent years, I often warned of significant and obvious disparities in the education of children. After talking to leading teachers of primary schools with Roma children, my colleagues and I have found that, compared to their peers, the education of these children is hampered by the lack of access to electricity, computers or the Internet. Some of them do not even have basic facilities such as desks, chairs, and materials for school work. Most parents cannot write and do not know the Slovenian language. We, therefore, called upon the authorities and teachers to pay attention to the difference in the living conditions of their pupils and make sure they are not further disadvantaged by the anti-epidemic measures.

It is worth mentioning the Institute for Roma Aid, which is extremely important for pre-schools and primary schools and partly for secondary schools.

It is the main link between the education system and Roma communities.

Despite some positive developments, I can say that the numerous activities aimed at addressing Roma issues in Slovenia generally have not resulted in the required progress. The situation in certain aspects is even deteriorating. One of the main reasons is that the progress or regress in the situation of the Roma community is not controlled in Slovenia. This is

perhaps very convenient for those who prepare and carry out such activities, as they are not obliged to show any specific result and do not have to face disturbing data, such as the actual success or lack thereof in educating Roma children and providing members of the Roma community with access to the labour market. This is what the Ombudsman of the Republic of Slovenia often warns about. We still face many challenges in this area, and I think cooperation between states, local communities and members of the Roma community is important. This is the only way to make progress in improving the situation and reducing the number of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the long run. Dear participants, let me conclude by encouraging you to continue taking steps towards co-existence, unity, mutual respect and tolerance and the elimination of prejudice and exclusion, no matter how small these steps may seem. Our work and strong voice is a crucial contribution to change for the better. Thank you for your attention. Have a successful event! Best regards from Slovenia!

**HALLVARD GORSETH,**

Head of Anti-discrimination Department,
Council of Europe (Strasbourg)

The Council of Europe welcomes the initiative of Ms Liudmyla Denysova, who brought together equality bodies to discuss the obstacles to equality for representatives of the Roma community. In Recommendation No. 2, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) calls on the Member States to combat all forms of racial discrimination; and Recommendation No. 13 on combating anti-Semitism and discrimination against Roma includes a multidisciplinary approach, mutual trust and countering discrimination. Today I look forward to a fruitful discussion on the issues proposed in the programme and the Resolution. Equality bodies have different powers in each country, but the independence of these bodies in combating discrimination is very important. These organisations should connect gaps between authorities and civil society to achieve equality. Combating discrimination and understanding the discrimination Roma face every day are of particular importance. The unique position of equality bodies makes their role particularly significant. This Forum is extremely important during the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers on achieving equality and combating discrimination state that at this time there is the challenge of stigmatisation and marginalisation, and vulnerable groups are under great pressure. What is important is that equality bodies are willing to talk about problems, promote best practices and combat manifestations such as hate speech. Hate destroys society even more than the pandemic. Communication has mainly moved to online platforms, which makes countering and preventing hate speech indispensable.

**OLENA BOHDAN,**

Head of the State Service on Ethnic
Policy and Freedom of Conscience
(Ukraine)

The issue of Roma inclusion was raised in 2013 as part of the Roma Strategy, which ran until December 2020. Our Service on Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience started developing a new Roma Strategy. This work requires a lot of political decisions, which is why we have involved various institutions both at the national and local levels. The Coordination Centre for Minority-Language Broadcasting of the Public Broadcasting Company is a positive example in Ukraine. The first important step is to understand the needs and specificities of national minorities. Engaging representatives of national minorities is an important indicator of the Centre's work. The Coordination Centre has programmes showing the life of the Roma community, such as Romano Givipen broadcasted twice a month. The documentary "Invisible Truth" about a child living in poverty was recently produced and presented. The film shows how the child's life can change thanks to society. Such films are a powerful tool to break stereotypes and better understand the problems Roma may face. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine and the State Migration Service in registering and issuing birth certificates and identity documents. The Council of Europe is doing very important work in Ukraine. I would also like to mention the programme of Roma mediators.



BIRUTE SABATAUSKAITE,

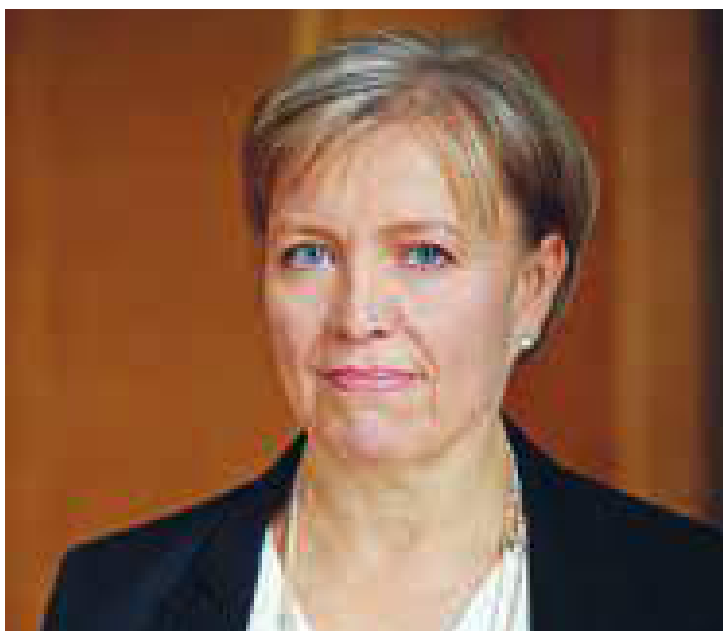
Equal Opportunities
Ombudswoman of Lithuania

The network of “equality bodies” is extremely important. There are about 2,500 Roma living in Lithuania and being Lithuanian citizens. The housing situation has improved considerably: 90% live below the poverty line, and 67% live in extremely poor conditions. Roma have a large number of problems, including disability. According to the survey, other people do not want to live and work having Roma around. Although special measures are needed, it is very important that any programme treats Roma as part of society, not separate from it. The pandemic affects those who do not have access to social and health services. Lithuania does not yet have a National Action Plan for Roma Integration but is in direct contact with Roma communities. During the quarantine, Roma have completely lost access to many services. The Roma Strategy, therefore, should be developed in close cooperation with Roma communities and constantly monitored.



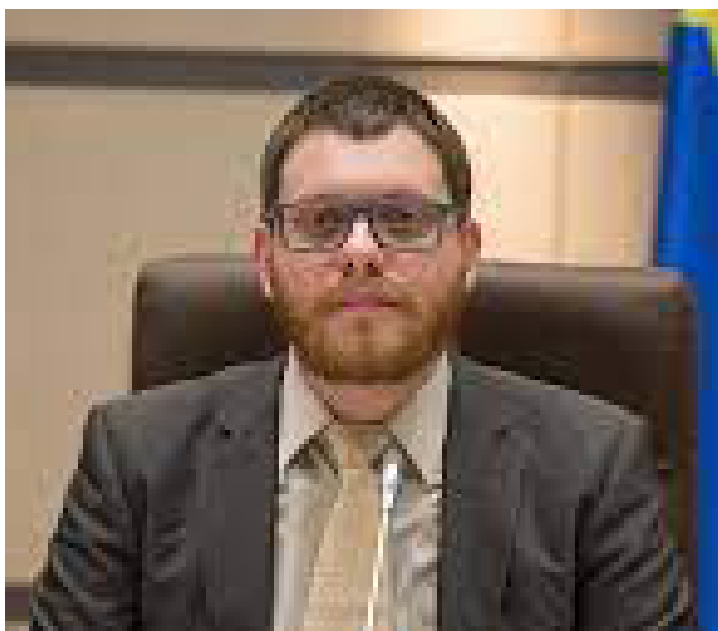
TENA ŠIMONOVIĆ EINWALTER,
Ombudswoman of the Republic
of Croatia

Poverty greatly affects Roma, as many of them depend on social payments: in some regions, up to 80% of the payment recipients are Roma. Poverty creates a vicious circle: sometimes Roma who do not have full-time employment are not able to receive additional social payments. Roma also are more affected by social exclusion. However, the Constitution lists Roma among the 22 recognised national minorities, enabling them to access their rights. I would like to point out that Roma are underrepresented in state authorities and Parliament. We hope to have a new report this year with more accurate information about the number of Roma in Croatia and their participation in the life of the country. Successful activities in the field of employment and education yield results. There are scholarships and access to jobs, which means all these activities are effective. More Roma children are studying in schools and universities. In 2020, there were the highest number of Roma students and officially employed Roma (compared to previous years). We monitor these trends in our annual reports, as it is important for us to see trends. Unfortunately, the pandemic has greatly affected Roma employment rates. A new Roma Inclusion Programme for the period up to 2027 is currently underway, and the Office representatives have joined in drafting the Programme. We will monitor the Programme implementation in order to assess its effectiveness.

**KRISTIINA KOUROS,**

Representative of the Office of the
Parliamentary Ombudsman (Finland)

I would like to say about two completely different groups of Roma: 1) Roma who arrived 500 years ago, live in settlements and closely cooperate with different institutions; 2) another group, newly arrived Roma, who came from the Eastern EU countries. In the 1960's, work started on the inclusion of Roma in Finnish society, and in 1975, constitutional amendments on Roma rights were adopted, which enabled the development of the Roma language and culture. The Advisory Body for Roma Issues at the Ministry of Social Policy of Finland has existed for over 60 years and comprises Roma members. In 1992, a body for the development of education and culture was established at the Ministry of Education of Finland. There are also regional advisory bodies comprising Roma.

**IAN FELDMAN,**

President of the Council for the Prevention
and Elimination of Discrimination and
Ensuring Equality, Republic of Moldova

When it comes to combating hate speech against Roma in the media and social networks, it is important to remember press releases prepared by public authorities and various agencies. The research showed that ethnicity is often mentioned in the press releases of our Ministry of Interior Affairs only when it comes to the Roma minority. We decided to take appropriate measures and work with the Ministry to change this practice. Change can start with the thousands of websites that duplicate this information: we can contact media editorial offices and explain ethnic, linguistic and other specificities. Together with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, we have developed guidelines explaining who national minorities are, what their specificities are, what rights every representative of a national minority should know, and what kind of statements should be avoided. When a politician wants to make a speech, he/she should use the appropriate wording. Another tool is an apology by a politician to a Roma ethnic group.

**KETEVAN SHUBASHVILI,**

Head of the Equality Department of the
Office of the State Defender of Georgia

Roma in Georgia is a minority, but their number is small – about 600 people. According to unofficial data, the number is up to 2,000 people. It is one of the least protected groups in Georgia. Roma rights are not often a subject matter of various events. Social exclusion manifests as a lack of access to education, medical services, and proper living conditions. Roma usually live in compact settlements. They do not have active representatives to fight for their rights and talk openly about their problems. Authorities hardly mention Roma. Statements about their living conditions and level of education are negative. This prevents Roma from integrating into society. We try to communicate with Roma, visit their settlements and build contact with them. We also make recommendations to the authorities on the need to mention Roma in media commentaries. We still have much work to do in the future to promote the social inclusion of Roma.



MARIAN MESÁROŠ,
Lawyer of the National Center for Human
Rights of the Slovak Republic

We have established an equality body and promote equality in society. In previous years, the number of hate crimes was very high. Special attention should be paid to social networks, electronic media, and communication on the Internet. Ensuring the security of computer data is of great importance. Attention should be focused on statements on the Internet. It is necessary to identify anonymous persons expressing hatred against Roma and promote the proper investigation of such crimes. To improve identification, police and prosecution representatives should be provided with recommendations on how to collect information.



ZORAN PAŠALIĆ,

Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia

I believe that the situation of Roma in Serbia is one of the best. Roma rank 27th among the registered minorities in Serbia. Since Roma do not have their own state, the Serbian government pays special attention to them. We have no systematic cases of hate speech registered. When it comes to the protection of Serbian citizens, the number of violations is small. There are three main problems. The first, a small one, is that some Roma women cannot get an education because they get married early. The second problem is housing. We contact various institutions to solve the issue of housing, especially in high-rise buildings. Surveys show that in over 80% of cases, this issue can be resolved by providing Roma with a large house with a yard. The third particularly important issue is the employment of Roma with a high level of education. The Roma population in Serbia is very diverse. Roma from the Kosovo region moved at the time of the bombing. They brought their traditions, religion and language. This requires certain actions from state institutions to help and promote unity with other Roma groups, which is not always easy. We should encourage young people, especially women, to go into higher education. In addition, a museum of Roma culture was opened.

RESOLUTION

Resolution of Kyiv International Forum on Roma Inclusion Kyiv, 27 May 2021

We,

representatives of Equality Bodies and Ombudsman Institutions from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Lithuania, Moldova, Northern Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Finland and Croatia, representatives of international human rights organisations, met in Kyiv on 27 May 2021 to reaffirm our joint interest in resolving the issue of Roma inclusion by creating an international cooperation platform,

Having regard to General Policy Recommendation No. 13 on combating antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma and all the other relevant policy recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and other standards on human rights;

Referring to the recommendations, opinions and declarations of the Council of Europe on the Roma population (Strasbourg, 20 October 2010), EU Strategic Framework on Roma and Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020–2025), the OSCE Action Plan for the Development of the Roma Population (December 2003); *Having regard* to the Special Report of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Roma Community in Ukraine”, reports of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), and the report of CPRSI ODIHR;

Acknowledging that the Roma national minority, as one of the most segregated and marginalised, needs additional protection and urgent positive action to ensure the fulfilment of their rights and freedoms;

Recognising that the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened inequalities of Roma in accessing rights to social protection, health, education, and employment,

Reaffirm our interest in consolidating efforts to protect the rights of the Roma community members and their integration into the society of the countries we represent, to counteract violence and discrimination against Roma, to ensure accountability for hate crimes and to counter hate speech on ethnic grounds.

We call on

Bodies of the Forum participating states responsible for shaping and implementing State policy in the field of protecting the rights of national minorities:

1. When developing or amending laws and regulations, strategic and programme documents on the observance and protection of human rights and freedoms, to provide for the equality of such rights for members of national minorities, including the Roma national minority.

2. To prioritise the collection of comprehensive data on the demographics of the Roma national minority to form effective policy/decision making.

3. To stipulate legal rules on positive actions concerning members of the Roma national minority in obtaining their IDs, expanding opportunities for access to social protection and medical care, education, official employment.

4. To ensure respect for the “leave no one behind” principle that lies at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and represents an unequivocal commitment to end discrimination and exclusion of all groups, including Roma, including in COVID-19 response measures.

5. To provide the Roma community with information in a language they understand about the benefits of obtaining IDs, education, official employment, access to social protection, medical and legal assistance.

6. To involve representatives of the Roma communities in making strategic and programme documents on Roma inclusion according to the principle: nothing for Roma without Roma.

7. To implement inclusive education programmes for Roma children, ensure access to education for Roma young people and reduce the expulsion rates of Roma students.

8. To provide access to the labour market for the Roma population at the national and local levels.

9. To ensure that programmes for the development and improvement of territories include the provision of decent housing conditions, sanitation, access to communication networks for residents of compact settlements of the Roma national minority.

10. To promote the dissemination of information on the inadmissibility of discrimination on the grounds of national origin in the media and at institutions that provide public services, in particular social and medical assistance.

11. To extend the practice of considering racist and xenophobic motivation as an aggravating circumstance by national courts in the determination of sanctions.

12. To support gender-balanced participation of representatives of Roma civil society organisations in political life and in national and local policymaking regarding Roma.

13. To address all the above issues with due regard to Roma women and girls, in particular, to reduce various forms of discrimination against them.

14. To foster international cooperation on Roma inclusion.

National Equality Bodies and Ombudsman Institutions:

15. To ensure coordination of the implementation of the recommendations set out in this Resolution, participate in the development of relevant laws and regulations, programme and strategic documents implement measures and initiate the involvement of representatives of the Roma civil society.

16. To carry out systematic monitoring of the observance and protection of Roma rights in all spheres of life and inform relevant national authorities about the results of such monitoring.

17. To conduct information campaigns involving the media to ensure equal rights for national minorities, including the Roma national minority.

18. To introduce the practice of exchanging views and developing mechanisms for cooperation in intergovernmental working groups in the areas identified during this Forum.

This Resolution was adopted in Kyiv on 27 May 2021 and is open for accession by national Equality Bodies and Ombudsman Institutions by letter of notification to the Ukrainian Ombudsman.

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: forum.equalitybodies@gmail.com
hotline@ombudsman.gov.ua