

BUILDING RESILIENCE

ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE
AND NEEDS OF THE ROMA
YOUTH SECTOR IN UKRAINE

«**THE FUTURE** IS BORN
WHERE YOUTH **HAVE THE**
RIGHT TO A VOICE, AND
THE PAST BECOMES A
SOURCE OF STRENGTH,
NOT A BURDEN.»

his research was conducted by the NGO «TENET Center for Social Transformations» as part of the project «**Building Resilience: Roma Youth Movement Initiative**» with the support of the European Youth Foundation.

The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Youth Foundation or the Council of Europe.



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1. Introduction

Context of the Research

This report was created by young experts and activists from the public organization TENET – Center for Social Transformations within the framework of the Building Resilience: The Roma Youth Movement Initiative project supported by the European Youth Foundation. The primary goal of the research is to assess the current state of the Roma youth movement in Ukraine, identify the key needs of young Roma, and outline challenges that have emerged due to the war.

In the context of a full-scale war, the situation for Roma youth has become more complicated. Many young people have lost access to education, housing, and employment, resulting in deteriorating socio-economic conditions. This study emphasizes the importance of developing the Roma youth movement as a tool for social cohesion, human rights advocacy, and the creation of an inclusive society. The document also examines the impact of the war on Roma youth in Ukraine, providing analysis and recommendations to address these challenges.

Importance of the Research for Roma Youth

This research is considered a tool to support Roma youth, who are an important part of Ukrainian society. The report addresses issues such as limited access to education, labor market discrimination, difficulties in social integration, and new challenges created by the war.

Special attention is given to the prospects for developing the Roma youth movement through the implementation of the Council of Europe recommendations on Roma participation in public life. This approach helps to determine how strategic international frameworks can be adapted to the local context in Ukraine.

Strategic Orientations and Educational Function of the Research

The research is based on a critical reflection of the main directions of the Youth Sector Strategy of the Council of Europe until 2030¹ and the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on Roma youth participation from 2023, which include the interests of Roma youth² and are relevant for young Roma in Ukraine and the organizations representing their interests.



The strategic priorities of the Youth Sector Strategy include:

- revival of pluralistic democracy;
- access to rights;
- peaceful and inclusive coexistence;
- youth work.

A similar focus is highlighted in another strategic document — the Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation in public life.

¹ Engaging young people with the Council of Europe's values. Youth Sector Strategy 2030. // <https://edoc.coe.int/en/youth-in-europe/8837-youth-sector-strategy-2030-engaging-young-people-with-the-council-of-europes-values-background-document.html>

² Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation // <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680aacef2>

Objective and Tasks of the Research

Our objective was to assess the state and needs of the Roma youth civic sector in Ukraine, taking into account the challenges caused by the war, and to formulate the vision of Roma youth regarding the further implementation of the recommendations and strategies of the Council of Europe.

It is worth noting that both documents turned out to be largely unfamiliar even to Roma activists, which further underscores the importance of their joint discussion for the subsequent monitoring and advocacy of the state's implementation of the recommendations presented in the strategic documents. The current awareness of Roma-related issues and Roma inclusion exists at the level of the Council of Europe but needs to be effectively communicated at the national level. Accordingly, this analysis also serves an educational purpose, aiming to disseminate information about both strategic documents.

During the preparation process, we not only analyzed existing open-source information and research but also conducted structured in-depth interviews with ten Roma youth leaders from various organizations between April and May 2024.

The document is structured around the following key issues concerning youth policy related to Roma:

- participation and representation of interests;
- protection of rights and non-discrimination;
- sustainability of movements and initiatives;
- the impact of war.

2. Research Methodology

The research is based on a combined approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative Approach

A survey was conducted with 50 representatives of Roma youth from different regions of Ukraine. The survey covered topics such as education, employment, participation in civic life, and the impact of war.

Qualitative Analysis

Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with young Roma activists working in the fields of education, human rights, and social integration.

Analysis of Strategic Documents

Key international documents were reviewed, including the Council of Europe recommendations on involving young Roma in public life and the Council of Europe's Youth Sector Strategy 2030, which outline directions for enhancing youth participation in social and civic processes.

Data collection took place between March and September 2024. The research geography spans both urban and rural communities in Ukraine and includes participants who were forced to relocate to other European countries due to the war. This allowed for the consideration of diverse social contexts and the specific experiences of Roma youth both within the country and abroad.

Target Audience

This report is intended for representatives of governmental bodies, civic organizations, international institutions, and all stakeholders who possibly can contribute to improving the conditions for Roma youth of Ukraine.

The research aims to establish sustainable support for Roma youth by fostering a deeper understanding of their needs and providing tools for implementing support strategies at both the national and international levels.

Value for International Partners

This research can also serve as a valuable resource for international organizations working with Roma communities across Europe. It sheds light on the overall state of the Roma youth civic movement, activists' vision for the future, and offers recommendations for mobilizing international support to address the challenges they face. Key recommendations include creating and supporting educational programs, strengthening legal assistance, and developing platforms to facilitate interaction between Roma youth organizations, government institutions, and international partners.

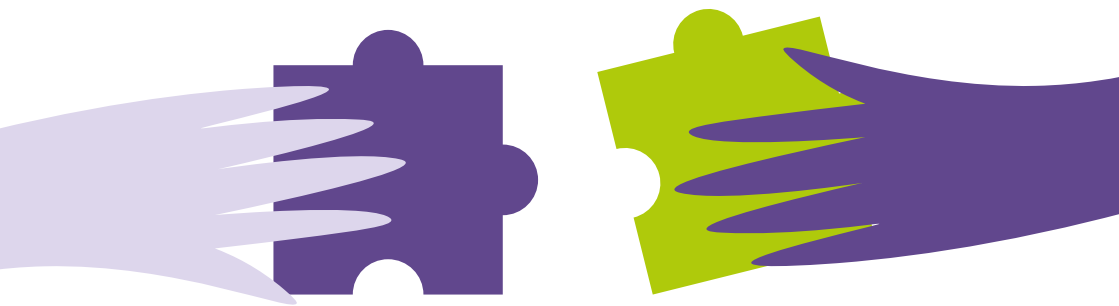
3. Key Findings and Observations

3.1. Roma Youth and the Civic Movement

Participation in public life is a key tool for strengthening the legal status of Roma youth, developing leadership skills, and enhancing social cohesion. However, only 21% of young Roma are actively involved in civic initiatives, while the rest face barriers such as insufficient legal awareness (55% of respondents), limited financial opportunities (70% report financial constraints), and societal discrimination (65% mention social prejudice). These barriers complicate their access to decision-making processes.

Integrating Roma youth into public life will not only improve their conditions but also strengthen social cohesion overall. At the same time, 62% of respondents note that youth voices are insufficiently considered in decision-making processes, and 36% believe that strategic documents and policies rarely reflect their needs.

The Roma civic movement in Ukraine is quite extensive and actively operates at the local, national, and international levels. Organizations work in various areas, including providing legal assistance, promoting education, developing media initiatives, and engaging in volunteer activities. Some of them participate in international activities or conduct advocacy work outside the country.



Issues Faced by Roma Youth in Ukraine



*(%) - respondents reporting these issues

The primary challenges faced by Roma youth in Ukraine include education, employment, access to healthcare, and ethnic profiling. These figures highlight the severity of the issues and underscore the need for a comprehensive approach to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities.

A significant portion of civil society organizations have youth departments, implement activities for young people, or include young individuals in their governance structures. Among them are the Roma Human Rights Center, Chirikli Roma Women's Fund, Lacho Drom, Roma Women's Union «Voice of Romni», and the Agency for the Advocacy of Roma Culture (ARCA).

Additionally, there are independent Roma youth organizations that focus specifically on youth as their main target audience. These include TENET - Center for Social Transformations, Terne Bersha, and the Kherson City Association of Young Roma (KYRS). Their activities are considered successful due to collaboration with other youth groups and their impact at both local and international levels.

The Scope of Activities of Roma Youth Organizations

The scope of activities undertaken by Roma youth activists is quite broad and generally aligns with the overall work of Ukraine's civic sector. They engage in various areas of activism, including research, monitoring, humanitarian aid, combating discrimination, non-formal education, and translation. These activists operate in different regions of Ukraine and abroad, focusing on assisting vulnerable groups within the Roma population, such as women, children, and youth.

Naturally, topics like support for women and children, cultural preservation, and combating discrimination are priorities, reflecting the specific challenges faced by the Roma community. It can be said that these priorities remain consistent with those that existed before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

— «I conduct research on various topics related to the Roma community, monitor war crimes, provide humanitarian aid... We mainly operate in the Odesa region, and our primary target group is vulnerable Roma populations.»

— «The main target group is women and children. Our research has been conducted in Odesa, the Odesa region, Uzhhorod, and Zakarpattia region.»

— «Our key priorities are working in the field of health, education, and human rights protection.»

— «My main focus is combating Roma discrimination and advocating for women's equality within the Roma community.»

— «Most of my work is related to informal education and developing the Roma youth movement.»

— «I started with translating children's and adolescent books and audio materials into the Roma language, and I continue to do this work.»

Paths to Civic Engagement

One of the most common ways Roma youth get involved in civic activities is through culture. 58% of respondents indicated that their first participation in civic initiatives was tied to cultural projects. As participants note, engagement often begins in childhood through cultural events involving family.

— «I often connect with my family through cultural activities. I got acquainted with public life and interaction from a young age.»

— «My activism began when I was 15 years old.»

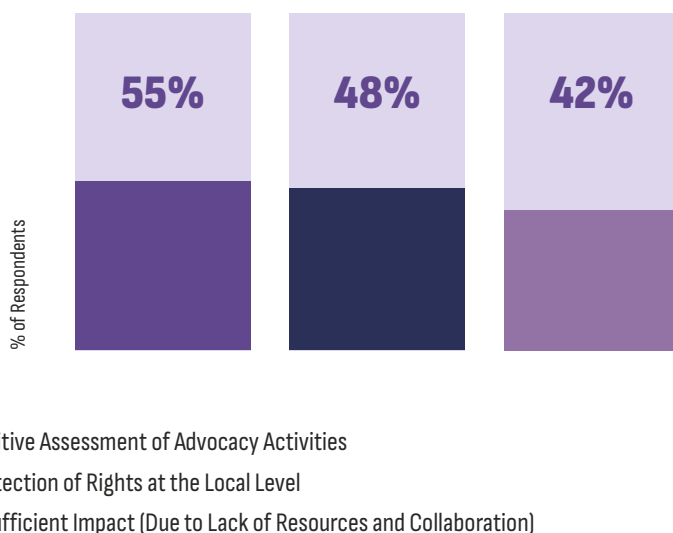
— «Why do I consider myself a Roma activist? Because I've been part of it my whole life. My father, sister, and grandfather were involved as well.»

Supporting the Roma Youth Movement

67% of youth organization representatives note positive results from international cooperation, and 50% have experience in advocacy campaigns.

At the national and local levels, Roma mediators, Roma civil society organizations, and some human rights organizations support the development of the Roma youth movement. There is also support from local and state authorities, such as the Committee on Information Policy and the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, as well as youth councils.

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Combating Discrimination Against Roma Youth



Public organizations play a key role in ensuring equal opportunities for Roma youth, but data indicate the existence of such barriers as limited access to resources and insufficient cooperation with state institutions. This underscores the importance of strengthening their institutional capacity to effectively combat discrimination and protect rights at the local level.

Financial and advocacy support comes from international organizations and funds, including the Council of Europe, European Youth Foundation, EVZ Foundation, Phiren Amenca, International Roma Youth Network ternYpe, Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma, European Roma Rights Centre, and the European Roma Grassroots Organization Network.

Respondents noted that several previously active support programs, such as the Roma Education Fund Scholarship Program and the Roma Program of the International Renaissance Foundation, are no longer functioning in Ukraine.

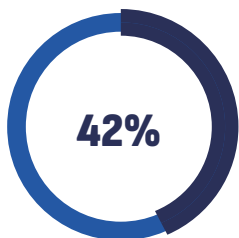
This creates additional challenges for Roma youth, as the initiative to support the community now primarily lies with civil society organizations, while support from state bodies remains limited.

— «Local and state authorities act more as partners... Roma civil society organizations involve state and local authorities as partners.»

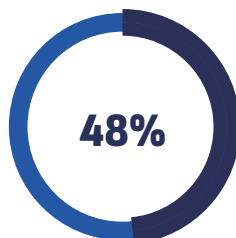
— «At the local level, this is our activity... This may also include local authorities... At the national level, Roma organizations... The Center for Civil Liberties.»

— «At the national level, civil society organizations help develop the youth movement... On the international level, support comes from institutions, specifically funds.»

The Role of Civil Society Organizations and International Partners



Projects promoting
intercultural dialogue



Acquiring new skills and
expanding influence

*[%] - respondents

Collaboration with international organizations plays a significant role in developing skills among Roma youth and promoting intercultural dialogue. Data show that such support not only contributes to acquiring new competencies but also broadens the impact of civil initiatives, particularly within projects aimed at fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between communities, which is key to the sustainable development of the Roma movement.

3.2. Achievements and Challenges



Achievements

The key achievements of Roma activists include their influence on the Roma community, helping others, particularly girls, creating mediator networks, authoring books, maintaining the activity of organizations under difficult circumstances, and personal achievements like obtaining higher education as a Roma woman. Activists take pride in sharing their experiences with new generations and earning respect from their mentees.

A particular point of pride is maintaining the activity of their organizations even during the war. 40% of activists reported successfully attracting additional resources to support their initiatives.

— «I think this has a certain impact on the community, on ours, on the Roma one. Establishing a mediator network at one time gave a good push to people who later started their own organizations.»

— «I wrote a novel about my grandmother, who faced genocide during World War II.»

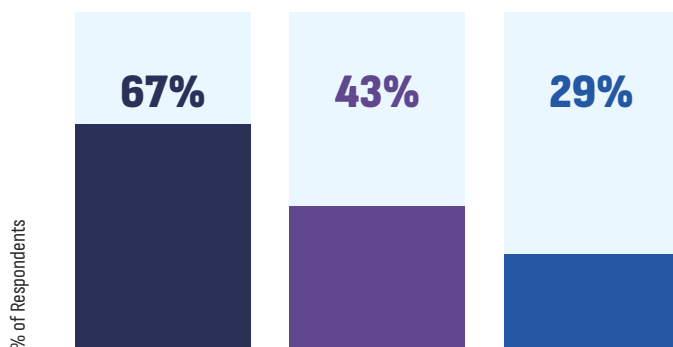


Challenges

Despite their active efforts, the Roma youth movement faces several challenges:

- Lack of resources (70% of organizations do not have stable funding);
- Discrimination affecting young activists, especially women (60% of women activists face cultural barriers);
- Social stereotypes hindering youth participation in civic activities (61% experience discrimination and stereotypes).

Financial Difficulties Faced by Roma Youth



- Financial challenges as the primary issue.
- The need for scholarships to reduce barriers.
- The need for mini-grants for youth projects.

Financial instability significantly affects Roma youth's access to education, employment, and participation in civic initiatives. Data indicate that implementing scholarships and mini-grants could substantially reduce these barriers and support the realization of youth projects, expanding opportunities for development.

Young activists often struggle to find support within society. «People perceive activists as selling air because their work is difficult to measure». In Ukraine, many view youth activism as political activity, money laundering, or unnecessary energy expenditure. Activists report frequent judgment from relatives, partners, and friends. Roma women activists, in particular, emphasize that in their culture, it is not customary for women to express their opinions openly³.

³ «Youth Leadership in Crisis» – A study on the current situation and needs of youth in Ukraine. 2024. NGO STAN, NGO Girls, Czech humanitarian organization «People in Need»

Barriers to the Participation of Roma Youth in Public Life



*(%) - respondents

- Lack of leadership skills
- Insufficient legal awareness
- Limited state support

The lack of leadership skills, legal awareness, and limited state support are the main barriers restricting the participation of Roma youth in public life and decision-making processes. Overcoming these challenges requires the implementation of educational programs and advocacy campaigns aimed at skill development, combating stereotypes, and supporting youth activism.

Existing initiatives, unfortunately, lack sufficient resources and do not reach all groups of young people of Roma origin. The Roma youth movement evidently requires further strengthening and development. The war has introduced additional challenges: many Roma activists have been forced to flee abroad, found themselves under occupation, or joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This has significantly weakened the movement but has not halted it. Nevertheless, 45% of respondents noted that the shared challenges caused by the war have fostered greater cohesion within the community.

3.3. Youth Policy

Participation and consideration of interests

A relevant direction of the Council of Europe's Youth Sector Strategy is the Rebuilding of Pluralistic Democracy.

The relevant Recommendations of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to member states regarding the participation of Roma youth include:



Ensuring meaningful, fair, and systematic participation, representation, and involvement of young Roma in all spheres of society and in decision-making processes and structures affecting their lives at local, national, and international levels;



Systematically and explicitly including the needs and priorities voiced by young Roma in all policies, standards, and programs that affect them at the local and national levels;



Evaluating relevant core and targeted policies, as well as democratic structures, to ensure they are redesigned to provide effective participation, representation, and inclusion of Roma youth.

In recent years, the participation of youth in decision-making processes has significantly improved. This also applies to Roma youth, although their position and interests are not always distinctly addressed within broader Roma-related issues and strategies or in general youth work.

Overall, the voice of Roma youth is considered in decision-making processes, but not always and not sufficiently. Often, youth interests are included in policies and strategic documents, but their implementation remains problematic. In part, the situation has worsened due to the war and the shift in government priorities.

— «Honestly, I think that before the war in Ukraine, the participation of Roma youth in socio-political processes in Ukraine was more active than it is now... Now, I can say that no, Roma youth are not being included in these processes.»

— «I think it's sufficient, but there are no decisions specifically addressing youth... youth issues are still not being highlighted separately.»

— «I believe the voice of Roma youth is not sufficiently considered... at the state level... or at the international level.»

— «Issues of Roma youth are included in various national programs... but they are not treated as exceptional... in practice, I would say no.»

— «All policies do not specifically cover Roma youth... there is no access to information.»

— «At the local level, authorities perceive youth as a whole... yet their needs differ slightly.»

Challenges for Roma Youth Participation

58%



41%







35%



60%



*(%) - respondents

-  Lack of leadership skills
-  Low legal awareness
-  Weak integration into political processes
-  Lack of stable funding for organizations

The most significant challenges for Roma youth in civic and political initiatives are the lack of stable funding for organizations and leadership skills. These limitations significantly reduce their ability to influence political processes and protect their rights, highlighting the need for investment in skill development and support for youth initiatives.

The lack of necessary skills is another reason for the insufficient influence of youth on decision-making. Roma youth lack communication and leadership skills, basic legal education, critical thinking, and an understanding of their rights. It is also important to develop skills for interacting with state and civic institutions so they can actively participate in decision-making processes. Unfortunately, even the available human potential is underutilized, partly due to existing stereotypes in society.

— «There is a lack of skills... communication and leadership skills are necessary... at least some basic legal education.»

— «Young people often do not even know their rights.»

— «Some do not even realize that they lack knowledge.»

— «Roma are also very talented and knowledgeable.»

Barriers to Roma Youth Participation in Civic Initiatives



The primary barriers to the participation of Roma youth in civic initiatives are the lack of leadership skills, insufficient legal awareness, and limited state support. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for their active engagement in public life and decision-making processes, underscoring the importance of investing in skill development and expanding state support.

The key needs of active Roma youth leaders include non-formal education, media support, safety, workspace, stable internal and external resources, support at various levels, and consolidation for joint actions.

— «As a Roma activist, I still lack knowledge in different areas... so I would say that non-formal education in various fields is very necessary for me.»

— «The biggest problem is funding... activists need funding, help, and support — both financial and media-related.»

— «First, I'd like to mention safety... a public space for activities as an activist... sometimes there are not enough internal resources in the team.»

— «There is a need for support... support at different levels... from the government, international institutions, and the community.»

The Role of Education and Skills in Strengthening the Roma Youth Movement

60%

Leadership and management training

50%

Educational programs on funding and advocacy

40%

Programs to preserve cultural identity

*(%) - respondents

Educational programs aimed at developing leadership, financial management, and advocacy skills are crucial for engaging Roma youth in activism and strengthening the youth movement.

Results show that initiatives that consider cultural and linguistic peculiarities are capable not only of overcoming barriers but also of providing practical tools for implementing youth projects and preserving cultural identity.

Respect for Rights and Non-Discrimination

Respect for rights and non-discrimination are fundamental to ensuring equal opportunities for Roma youth in Ukraine. Unfortunately, they continue to face violations of rights in education, healthcare, employment, housing, as well as freedom of movement and expression. According to the strategic guidelines of the Council of Europe, every young person has the right to a safe and inclusive society where access to all fundamental rights and freedoms is guaranteed. For Roma youth, this issue is particularly pressing, as structural anti-Roma racism and social prejudices hinder their ability to realize their potential.

Access to Education for Roma Youth

45%

38%

*(%) – respondents

- Lost the opportunity to attend school due to displacement or danger
- Limited access to informal education

Key factors limiting Roma youth's access to education include displacement, danger, and discrimination, which create significant obstacles to their professional development and social integration. Data highlights the urgent need for programs that address these challenges and ensure equal access to education, particularly amidst social, economic, and wartime difficulties.

Relevant strategic directions of the Council of Europe's youth sector – Access to rights and living together in peaceful and inclusive societies

Key recommendations of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to member states regarding Roma youth participation:

- combat all forms and manifestations of structural anti-Roma racism and antigypsyism and their impact on Roma youth participation;
- ensure full and effective access for Roma youth to all fundamental human rights and freedoms and their realization;
- guarantee free and non-discriminatory access to quality education, training, and employment opportunities for all young Roma;
- ensure that all policies, measures, and programs (...) respect the diversity of Roma communities, particularly addressing the intersectional discrimination faced by Roma girls, Roma women, Muslim Roma, and young Roma living in isolated and rural areas.

The ongoing violation of the rights of young Roma comes as no surprise. According to interview participants, the rights of Roma youth are being violated in the areas of education, employment, healthcare, housing, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and access to information. Additionally, issues such as ethnic profiling and insufficient attention to Roma voices remain significant challenges. These and other issues are consistently documented by civil society organizations.

- «In the areas of education and employment... it is very difficult to get a job in court... internally displaced people who have lost documents.»
- «Right to movement... freedom of speech... ethnic profiling.»
- «We still lack the right to education, health, housing, and employment.»
- «Roma voices are not being heard... Education rights are slightly violated.»
- «The right to access information is insufficiently ensured.»
- «Right to study... Perhaps, you don't need to attend school.»

Impact of Structural Racism and Discrimination on Roma Youth



*(%) - respondents

- Prejudiced attitudes in society
- Exclusion from decision-making processes
- Limited voice in Roma initiatives (girls)
- Gender barriers

Structural racism and gender discrimination create significant barriers for Roma youth, particularly for girls and women, restricting their participation in public life and Roma initiatives.

The data indicates a high level of prejudice, exclusion from decision-making processes, and the disregard of Roma girls' voices, underscoring the need for systemic changes to overcome gender and social barriers and prevent marginalization.

Examples of discrimination against young Roma include denial of access to employment and healthcare services, conflicts with Territorial Recruitment Centers (TRC), ethnic profiling, and gender discrimination. Efforts to reduce discrimination focus on improving communication with authorities and involving Roma in decision-making processes, which, as noted above, is not happening at an adequate level. However, these issues are often silenced and remain unresolved.

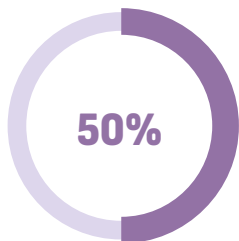
— «There are frequent cases of discrimination... refusal of employment, denial of access to healthcare services.»

— «For instance, there are clashes with TRC in various Roma communities... This is highly complex and poorly communicated publicly.»

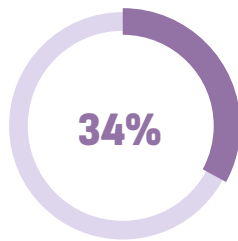
— «I am aware of cases of discrimination that occurred even after the full-scale war began.»

Roma youth have an awareness of the inaccessibility of certain rights, particularly among those involved in the activities of Roma organizations.

Understanding of Issues Among Roma Youth



Activists who understand how to defend their rights



Younger respondents who believe these issues do not concern them

*[%] - respondents

The level of rights awareness among Roma youth varies significantly: half of the activists understand how to defend their rights, while 34% of younger respondents believe these issues do not concern them. This highlights the importance of educational programs and initiatives aimed at raising awareness and involving youth in actively combating discrimination.

The younger generation, however, is less aware of these issues. Building solidarity within the Roma movement and forming coalitions are among the tools to address these challenges.

— «Communities more engaged in various activities gain this understanding.»

— «I think people rarely think about these issues and may not be aware of them.»

— «There is a percentage of Roma youth who have become accustomed to these conditions, but the majority understand that certain things are not normal.»

Sustainability of the Roma Youth Movement

The resilience of the Roma youth movement depends on the availability of resources, knowledge, and support, enabling initiatives to operate stably and effectively. Currently, many Roma youth organizations face limited access to funding, information, and learning opportunities. A lack of institutional support and experience hinders the development of these organizations, restricting their ability to drive social change. Supporting youth initiatives and organizations working with Roma youth is a critical component of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy, emphasizing capacity building, leadership development, and the preservation of cultural identity.

Key challenges for the Roma youth movement in Ukraine

Financial constraints

70%

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Lack of institutional support

58%

A horizontal bar chart with a dark purple bar representing 58% and a light purple bar representing the remaining 42%.

Limited access to resources

30%

A horizontal bar chart with a dark purple bar representing 30% and a light purple bar representing the remaining 70%.

Absence of specialized programs

45%

A horizontal bar chart with a dark purple bar representing 45% and a light purple bar representing the remaining 55%.

Low awareness of grant opportunities

40%

A horizontal bar chart with a dark purple bar representing 40% and a light purple bar representing the remaining 60%.

*[%] - respondents

Financial constraints and a lack of institutional support are the primary challenges for the development of Roma youth initiatives in Ukraine. Limited access to specialized educational programs and low awareness of international collaboration opportunities significantly hinder the realization of the potential of youth organizations and the resilience of the movement.

Relevant directions of the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy – Youth work

Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on Roma youth participation:

- support and strengthen the capacity of Roma youth organizations, groups, and initiatives, as well as organizations and youth centers focused on Roma youth, as spaces for civic engagement, youth work, and non-formal education/learning, while promoting their cultural identity, language, and history;
- encourage civil society, including major youth councils and organizations, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to facilitate the implementation and evaluation of these recommendations.

Roma youth initiatives lack adequate access to funding and training due to insufficient information and experience. The main challenge is funding, although non-formal education is available through various institutions and organizations.

— «Young organizations lack access due to insufficient information about funding opportunities and lack of experience.»

— «Access is the same for everyone, but there is no real access to information.»

— «Unfortunately, the institutional capacity of these organizations is significantly lower.»

To actively engage Roma youth in civic movements, the following are essential: informational and educational support, participation in formal and non-formal education, motivation support (including financial incentives), skill development, creation of information platforms, as well as initiatives and activities that bring youth together.

— «First of all, they need informational and educational support, both formal and non-formal education.»

— «I think real motivation is necessary, including financial incentives. For example, this could involve training along with the opportunity to receive grants.»

— «It could be motivation — showing them that they are valued.»

— «Primarily, certain skills are needed... attention should be given to non-formal education.»

— «More initiatives are needed to unite Roma, such as festivals.»

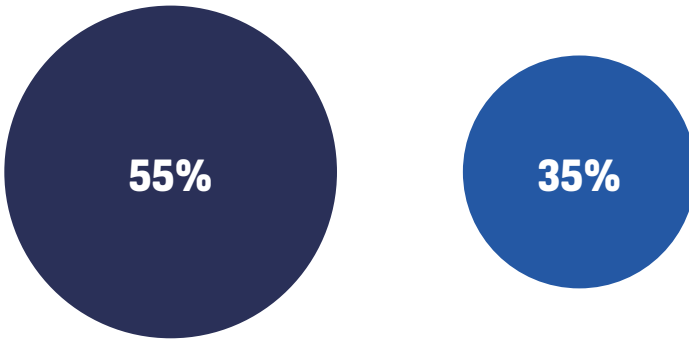
— «It would be very beneficial to have a platform where Roma youth could find the important information they need.»

— «They need education.»

— «There is a lack of knowledge... and to learn, financial resources are required.»

— «Roma youth are engaged through educational and training programs, but it is crucial to note that if it's a new organization without sufficient experience, it is much harder for them to secure financial support.»

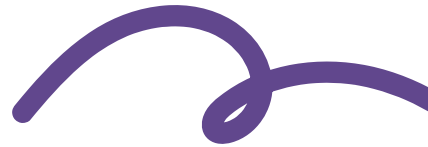
The Importance of Motivation and Support for Activists



*[%] - respondents

- Lack of motivation due to limited visibility
- Need for grant programs and financial incentives

The motivation of young Roma activists largely depends on public recognition of their work and access to financial resources. Introducing grant programs and financial incentives can attract more youth to activism, strengthening the resilience of the Roma movement in the long term.



3.4. The Impact of War on Roma Youth

Relevant Directions of the Youth Sector Strategy Council of Europe – Living Together in Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

The potential of young people, their activity, and leadership to prevent violence, transform conflicts, and build a culture of peace is strengthened through substantial financial support, network development, and capacity building, recognizing the diversity of youth and their organizational methods.

As in society as a whole, the war has had a negative impact on the education, mental health, and social connections of Roma youth. Many young Roma have been forced to leave their homes. Across the country, human rights have ceased to be a central focus, and Roma rights, in particular, have been deprioritized, remaining a key concern mainly for specialized NGOs and certain local communities, especially those hosting displaced Roma.

The Role of Psychological Support for Roma Youth



60%



25%



*(%) – respondents

-  Need for psychological assistance
-  Access to professional psychological support

The need for psychological assistance among Roma youth significantly exceeds their actual access to professional support. This underscores the importance of incorporating group sessions, psychosocial rehabilitation programs, and online consultations into support initiatives to bridge this gap.

It is clear that psychological support is crucial for individuals, while organizations require coordinated efforts for collaboration and the development of programs targeting Roma minorities at the local level.

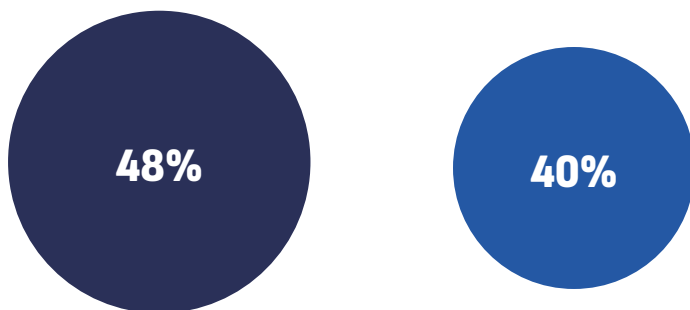
- «The war has had a very negative impact... children are not attending school, they have to start working earlier... This has affected children’s mental health, so psychological support is urgently needed.»
- «The war has united people significantly... but perhaps not in a very coordinated way.»
- «The war has had a particularly harmful impact on Roma... they are pushed to the background.»

Opportunities for Roma Youth Development During the War



The war, despite numerous challenges, has opened new opportunities for Roma youth. Participation in humanitarian projects has contributed to skill development, collaboration with international organizations has increased the visibility of the youth movement, and volunteer activities have become an important tool for integration into public life.

The Role of International Partners and Local Organizations



*[%] - respondents

- Positive assessment of integration projects
- Need for improved coordination

International and local organizations play a key role in supporting Roma youth during the war by providing humanitarian aid, educational projects, and advocacy. However, research findings indicate the need to improve coordination among organizations to enhance the effectiveness of this support.

At the same time, the current situation provides certain new opportunities to strengthen the capacity of Roma youth and their inclusion in social processes through participation in various projects and programs, the use of positive examples from European countries, and increasing the visibility of Roma community organizations.

— «It is possible to use the opportunity that many projects are allocated to Ukraine... to get involved with various organizations.»

— «We can use good examples and methodologies from European countries.»

— «The activities of Roma community organizations have become more visible.»

The Current State of Roma Youth During the War



*(%) - respondents

- Forced to leave their homes
- Lost access to education
- Increased discrimination

The war has significantly exacerbated the socio-economic problems of Roma youth, causing loss of housing, access to education, and an increase in discrimination.

These challenges not only restrict the realization of basic rights but also intensify social isolation and psycho-emotional stress, requiring urgent and comprehensive solutions.



3.5. Vision for the Future

Perspectives for Movement Development

Activists envision the Ukrainian Roma youth movement as a strong network with a voice, comprised of new, active individuals integrated into modern society. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to end the war, engage and train new youth, and ensure sustainable support for the movement.

- «I see the youth movement of Roma in Ukraine as a strong network with a voice... through engaging new youth and gaining new experiences.»
- «I hope that in five years, this will be a new active generation... The topic of modern Ukraine fits Roma into the social narrative.»
- «I would like the youth movement to remain genuinely youthful.»

Inclusiveness and Equal Opportunities


Inclusiveness is another key principle for the future movement. The Roma youth movement aims to unite representatives from various groups, including girls, youth from minorities, and those living in isolated or rural areas, ensuring equal opportunities for all. Collaboration with international partners plays a crucial role in the movement's development, promoting the exchange of experience, resource mobilization, and enhancing the influence of Roma youth at the national and international levels.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Education and Skill Development

Non-formal education is the main factor in engaging Roma youth in civic activities. All recommendations outlined in the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States on the Participation of Roma Youth are relevant:

- fund and facilitate Roma youth access to non-formal education, youth work, and mobility programs through affirmative actions and outreach activities, among others;
- support and fund non-formal education/training programs, including initiatives aimed at raising awareness and knowledge about structural racism, anti-Roma discrimination, history, identity, and Roma culture;
- create, fund, or support youth centers and cultural spaces, including those in or near Roma communities;
- establish and fund programs to support Roma youth in obtaining certifications as youth workers, mentors, and trainers under the «peer-to-peer» principle;
- ensure equal participation of Roma youth in mobility programs by providing information in the Romani language and conducting informational campaigns within Roma communities;
- support partnerships between Roma youth organizations and mainstream youth organizations or councils to engage Roma youth in non-formal education/training activities and spaces;
- promote intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding between young people of different ethnic backgrounds through youth events and initiatives within and across countries;



Collaborate with intergovernmental and international organizations to provide funding and resources for Roma youth organizations and groups to participate in international non-formal education/training and youth work programs.

Legal literacy and familiarity with key methods and forms of civic influence, advocacy, and monitoring, as well as skills for interaction with state authorities, should be an essential element. Communication and leadership skills among Roma youth also need to be developed.

These programs should be both specialized for Roma youth and include Roma youth within the general youth context. Addressing language barriers, using the national language and Romani, and encouraging Roma youth to learn English are important considerations.

Financial Support

Targeted financial support for Roma youth and their initiatives should continue to be a key priority. To strengthen the development of the Roma youth movement, international and national organizations should support programs focused on education and social integration, create motivational programs, engage new generations of Roma, support training and activities, and establish dedicated institutions for Roma-related issues. It is crucial to prevent the reduction or closure of specialized programs. Specifically, restoring or creating equivalents of the Roma Education Fund, which enabled many young Roma to obtain higher education, is advisable. This initiative inspired others and cannot be realized in modern conditions without targeted, stable financial support.

Both the Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030 and the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States on the Participation of Roma Youth aim to establish commitments among member states but do not directly address international organizations and funds. However, international funds ensure the financial stability of Roma youth organizations in Ukraine. Thus, the Council of Europe could focus on engaging member states to finance programs for Roma youth in Ukraine through special programs and embassy grants. Additionally, communication with international partners and funds to maintain and strengthen financial support for Roma youth in Ukraine and assume part of the responsibility for implementing these Recommendations and Strategy is necessary.

Participation in Decision-Making

The efforts of Roma organizations alone are insufficient. Support at the state level is required. For example, affirmative actions and quotas for Roma in existing public opinion mechanisms can be implemented. Youth often gain the necessary experience by participating in public organizations and attending training programs. Formal and non-formal education act as motivating factors, helping acquire essential skills, establish values, and build networks. Financial incentives, such as mini-grant and scholarship programs, can also serve as motivation and a way to learn.

Media support to promote their work and success stories is important for gradually changing societal stereotypes about Roma.

A separate need is safety — not only physical and mental safety related to war challenges but also the ability to express one's opinions without fear of hate speech or even physical threats. Unfortunately, the situation has not improved, particularly due to escalating internal societal tensions caused by war-induced psychological exhaustion.

Organizational Sustainability

Roma youth organizations are only just beginning to form and remain insufficient in number. Supporting these new organizations should be a priority. Their establishment is a significant breakthrough toward actual change. However, without funding, mentorship, and supervision, they cannot effectively fulfill their roles. The institutional capacity of Roma youth organizations should become a priority in youth policy regarding Roma.

It is essential to develop collaboration skills with humanitarian organizations, help build new partnerships, and master new roles and areas of activity. Roma activists can also serve as conduits of knowledge about Roma communities and their characteristics for humanitarian organizations, which often lack this information.

Support from human rights organizations is also vital. For example, support from the Center for Civil Liberties, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2022, mentioned during interviews, provides an opportunity to draw attention to Roma rights in Ukraine and elevate these issues to the highest levels of international advocacy.

5. Closing Remarks

What Does Roma Youth Aspire To?

Roma youth in Ukraine aspire to be active members of society, exercise their rights, preserve their cultural identity, and create favorable conditions for future generations. Among this group are those already active in the public sector, those who have had to pause their activities for various reasons, and those who could potentially join the civic movement. They all have different experiences, face unique challenges, and require individualized approaches to support and development.

What Do Youth Leaders Consider Essential?

Youth leaders at the forefront of the Roma movement identify limited access to education, insufficient legal awareness, lack of financial resources, and barriers to accessing non-formal education as the main obstacles to full integration and self-realization. It is also important to equip young Roma with leadership, effective communication, and interaction skills with state institutions to ensure successful participation in decision-making processes.



Quo Vadis?

This study aims not only to uncover these needs but also to lay the groundwork for strengthening the Roma youth movement in Ukraine and beyond. The success of Roma initiatives depends on collaboration with non-governmental organizations, engagement with international partners, and support at the state level. Interaction with other civic associations will help create a strong coalition of Roma youth organizations and leaders, which will become an invaluable resource for youth advocacy.

Given the challenges of war, the role of Roma youth in rebuilding Ukraine is particularly significant. Engaging young Roma displaced abroad is a critical task, as their knowledge, skills, and ideas can become a driving force for the development of both the community and the country. This study is designed not only to identify problems but also to open new perspectives for youth engagement and strengthen the Roma movement as a powerful resource for social cohesion and the renewal of Ukraine.

6. Appendices

Participant Profile

Gender



37 participants



23 participants

Age Composition



16 years

Youngest participant

35 years

Oldest participant

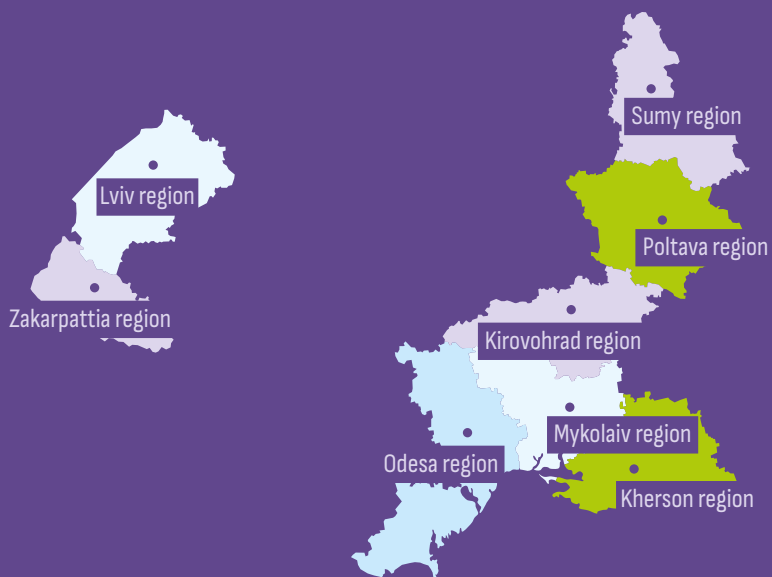
25 years

Average age

Residence Before the Full-Scale Invasion



Geographical Distribution



Current Place of Residence



Germany



Poland



Belgium



Italy



Austria

Place of Residence by Type of Settlement

31 participants

Large cities

21 participants

Small towns

8 participants

Villages/Small settlements

Marital Status



16 participants

Married and living together



37 participants

Unmarried/Single



4 participants

Divorced



2 participants

Single parents



1 participant

Partnered but unmarried

Employment



24 participants

Studying



12 participants

Temporarily unemployed



4 participants

On maternity leave



16 participants

Employed

- Private companies: 8 participants
- State/non-profit organizations: 8 participants



4 participants

Self-employed/Entrepreneurs

Education



15 participants

Higher education/Dual degrees/Doctoral degrees



8 participants

Incomplete higher education (at least 3 university years completed)



14 participants

Vocational secondary education (technical schools)



23 participants

General secondary/incomplete secondary education

Key Findings

1. Most participants live in large cities, both in Ukraine and abroad.
2. The majority of participants are under 30 years of age.
3. Most participants are engaged in education or are temporarily unemployed.
4. A significant portion holds vocational or higher education degrees.

7. About the Research Team

Research Team

This research was prepared by a team of young experts and activists united by a shared commitment to improving conditions for Roma youth in Ukraine. Thanks to their dedication, empathy, and professionalism, a comprehensive view of the current state of the Roma youth sector was obtained, and the primary needs and challenges faced by youth were deeply analyzed.

The team not only identifies problems but also explores practical solutions, offering effective recommendations to strengthen the Roma civic movement. Each member of the research team made a unique contribution, helping to create a thorough and well-founded study designed to serve as a resource for further youth activism development.

The researchers are part of the TENET Analytical Center, which brings together specialists from various fields working on resolving key social issues. Through a synergy of experience and knowledge, the team ensures a comprehensive approach to analyzing the challenges faced by Roma youth and proposes practical solutions to overcome them.

Partner Organizations

This research was conducted in partnership with:

- Kherson City Association of Young Roma (KYRS)
- International Public Organization of Roma «KETANE»
- NGO Terne Bersha





A WORLD WHERE ROMA HAVE AN EQUAL VOICE

The TENET Center for Social Transformations is a public organization dedicated to analytics, research, and civic initiatives that foster the growth of the Roma youth movement and its integration into the European community. The organization addresses key societal challenges, emphasizing minority rights protection, youth empowerment, and the promotion of social cohesion.

The TENET analytical center not only conducts research but also actively collaborates with government bodies, civic associations, and international partners to implement practical solutions. Thanks to its professional team of specialists and their deep understanding of social challenges, the organization successfully implements projects aimed at ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all population groups, especially vulnerable communities such as Roma youth.

For more information about the activities of the NGO «TENET»:
tenet-org.com.



For notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, similar to standard notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This document was prepared by the TENET Center for Social Transformations with financial support from the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe.