



ROMA and WAR

in Eastern Ukraine –

REFUGEES,
DISPLACED
PERSONS,
VICTIMS OF
VIOLENCE

Romani refugees from Donetsk in the Rostov Oblast.
Photo by ADC «Memorial»

HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

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Roma and War in Eastern Ukraine – refugees, displaced persons, victims of violence

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The Russian-Ukrainian Conflict and the Problem of Refugees

“On television they promise us the moon. But none of it is true. None of it. That’s why we don’t apply as refugees.”
(Mikhail M., Voronezh Oblast, Russian Federation)

Millions of people have suffered over the past year (spring 2014 – spring 2015) of combat operations in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine. During this undeclared war thousands of military personnel and civilians have lost their lives, tens of thousands of people have been wounded, and hundreds of thousands of refugees have fled the conflict zone. Several million people remain in the conflict zone, where they are forced to endure the cold; hunger; lack of a steady income, medical care, and essential items; and various forms of violence (shelling, raids, and the unlawful actions of unrecognized local authorities). According to data from the UNHCR from January 2015, over one million people had abandoned their homes, 600,000 people had been recognized by the Ukrainian government as internally displaced persons, and, according to the Russian Federal Migration Service, 500,000 Ukrainian citizens had applied for some form of legal status in Russia (almost 250,000 Ukrainian refugees in Russia have asked for international protection).¹

The situation of internally displaced persons in Ukraine has been thoroughly investigated in the abovementioned UNHCR report, as well as in a number of reports by OSCE observers and other international organizations.²

The problems faced by the Romani minority from the threat of war and violence in Eastern Ukraine have not been investigated as thoroughly. The January 2015 UNHCR report cites information received from NGOs to rate the Roma as one of the most vulnerable groups of displaced persons (almost 6,000 people). The report also notes that many Roma lack identity documents, which makes it difficult for them to be classified as internally displaced persons and receive assistance, and mentions “social discrimination” resulting in their involuntary displacement from communities where other IDPs reside to Roma settlements in Ukraine (p. 25 of the Report).³ This report uses data from the OSCE’s Situation Assessment Report: Roma in Ukraine and the Impact of the Current Crisis⁴, which was published on 15 August 2014. The chapter describing the situation of Romani IDPs is based on material collected by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights mission to Ukraine in June – July 2014 and information from Romani NGOs.

ADC Memorial experts relied primarily on their own observations and interviews to produce this report on the situation of Roma in the conflict zone and on Roma refugees in Ukraine and Russia.

In preparing this report, ADC Memorial experts travelled to all the districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that were accessible in late 2014, Kharkiv, Kyiv, and a number of settlements in South and Central Russia, where many former inhabitants of Romani settlements in Eastern Ukraine moved. ADC Memorial experts met with Roma from settlements in the

¹ <http://www.refworld.org.ru/docid/54eb03664.html>

² For example, the UNHCR Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 15 November 2014,

http://www.un.org.ua/images/stories/FINAL_OHCHR_seventh_report_Ukraine_20.11.14_before_launch.pdf

³ <http://www.refworld.org.ru/docid/54eb03664.html>

⁴ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/124494?download=true>

Budennovsk (Yevdokiivka) and Kirov districts of Donetsk and on the outskirts of Yenakiieve in the Bryansk, Rostov, Belgorod, Voronezh, Lipetsk, and Moscow Oblasts of Russia. They met with refugees from outside of Mariupol (Makedonovka settlement, Volodarsky District, Donetsk Oblast) in Rostov Oblast.

In Rostov, Belgorod, Voronezh, and Moscow Oblasts, experts also met with Romani migrants from areas that were not directly touched by the war (Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts), who nonetheless feared that the conflict could develop further and therefore decided to flee to Russia.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine, experts met with refugees from Sloviansk and other places. Witnesses to anti-Roma pogroms and other unlawful actions were interviewed in areas that had previously been controlled by separatists but were currently under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian government, notably, Sloviansk.

First-hand accounts provided to ADC Memorial experts by Ukrainians surveyed show that there was a catastrophic lack of government-provided funds to support internal migrants and no legal framework to guide officials from the very beginning of the mass resettlement within the country. It was only on 1 October 2014, more than six months after the start of the “anti-terror operations” that the Government of Ukraine adopted resolutions regulating the rights of internal migrants from areas under separatist control. These resolutions are Resolution No. 509 “On registration of internally displaced persons from the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and anti-terrorist operation area”⁵ and No. 505 “On providing monthly targeted financial support to internally displaced persons from the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and anti-terrorist operation area to cover livelihood, including housing and utilities.”⁶ On 7 November 2014, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a third resolution, Resolution No. 595, which combined the previous two and addressed not just procedures for calculating and disbursing pensions and social benefits, but financial support for all budget institutions operating in the area under separatist control (“Some issues of financing budget institutions, paying social benefits and providing financial support to individual enterprises and organizations in Donetsk and Luhansk regions”⁷).

Resolution No. 595 was the cause of some dispute among lawyers and human rights defenders, since with this document the Government of Ukraine is in fact absolving itself of its responsibility to provide social guarantees to residents in areas under separatist control. For example, this resolution stipulates that residents in these areas will not receive their pensions or benefits until they are registered in an area under Ukrainian control, which is impossible under Ukrainian law if a person is not living in the place where that person wants to register, or if identity documents have been lost. According to Ludmila Klochko, a staff member at the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, “In Donetsk, for example, pensioners no longer receive their pensions because the funds are no longer transferred to their bank cards. This is supposedly done to avoid financing the separatists. So many people from Donetsk and Luhansk have to travel all over in search of a registration, just in order to receive at least some money.”⁸ The law “On securing the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons,” which governs

⁵ <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/509-2014-%D0%BF>

⁶ <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/505-2014-%D0%BF>

⁷ <http://zakon2.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/595-2014-%D0%BF>

⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Lyudmila Klochko, a staff member at KHRPG, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

the status of internal migrants, was approved by the Rada on 20 October 2014.⁹ President Poroshenko signed it one month later, on November 19, but even he believes that this law contains many loopholes and will need to be amended.¹⁰ During this time, people fleeing the conflict zone did not have any official status, which severely limited their access to social services like receiving payments, medical assistance, etc.

According to statistics from the UNHRC, which are based, in turn, on information received from Romani NGOs in Ukraine, approximately 6,000 Roma have fled their previous places of residence in the conflict zone.

We welcome the fact that Ukrainian NGOs have made attempts to count the number of Romani migrants from the conflict zone, are concerned with the problems Roma face, and have been trying to understand and help them. Activists and human rights defenders deserve considerable praise for bringing the problems of the Roma to the attention of the government and society as a whole, thus forcing officials to respond to specific issues. Unfortunately, Russian society is not terribly active in helping refugees from Ukraine, and there appears to be no support at all for Romani refugees, even among Romani organizations in Russia.

It should be noted that Roma who remained at home in spite of the war and people who returned to cities in Eastern Ukraine after the fighting ended also endured a great deal. An example of this is the city of Sloviansk, where the Romani population suffered greatly under the rule of “Mayor” Ponomarev.

Overall, the situation for the Romani population remains complicated: According to Ukrainian experts, the traditional discrimination against this minority persists and stereotypes and biases remain widespread.

Olga Zhmurko, the director of the Roma program initiative at the International Renaissance Foundation explained that “The situation with the rights of Roma leaves much to be desired. Ukraine now has a Plenipotentiary on Ethnonational Policy. His actions so far on behalf of Roma are of a declarative nature and he has not opened any horizons for Romani communities. The Ministry of Culture has also done absolutely nothing to help. This ministry, like the analogous ministry in Russia, has only recently started working on the issues of national minorities. When the government tries to transfer some authority in this area to the Ministry of Social Development, which in theory should be working on these issues, the ministry always refuses, attributing this to the fact that they don’t have the money or the capabilities to manage this program.”¹¹

Research conducted in 2012 with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation, shows that every second Roma respondent had been subjected to threats (including based on race), arbitrary detention, document checks, and fingerprinting on more than one occasion. According to data from an analysis of court rulings involving Roma that was conducted as part of this monitoring, the ratio of criminal activity among the Roma population is 2.5 times lower than among representatives of other nationalities. In spite of this, a number of Ukrainian media outlets continue to use hate speech when referring to Roma.¹² Even the headlines that come up under the search “Roma in Ukraine” show that journalists want to create

⁹ <http://zakon4.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1706-18>

¹⁰ <http://krymsos.com/2014/11/20/president-ukrainy-podpisal-zakon-o-pereselentsah/>

¹¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Olga Zhmurko, director of the Roma program initiative at the International Renaissance Foundation. Kyiv, 15 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹² Extract from materials provided by the International Renaissance Foundation. For example, *Dotrimannya prav romskogo naseleniya v diyalnosti OVS Ukrainy*. Kharkiv, 2013.

a negative image of this ethnic group. Examples include: “Roma from the Anti-terrorist Operation Area Terrorizing Volunteers”¹³, “‘Refugee’ Roma from Donbass Set up Drug Trafficking Operation in Zaporizhia”¹⁴, “Roma Turn Darnitsa into Dump”¹⁵, and so forth. These kinds of publications and statements cast Roma in a negative and criminal light and make readers think that the resolution to drug trafficking or fraud depends directly on the fight against representatives of this ethnic group. All this has had the effect of aggravating their already disastrous situation.

Local residents told ADC Memorial experts about the problems Romani residents in Luhansk Oblast face. Elena Marchuk, an activist from Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast said: “Here they are frequently the victims of extortion for money or valuable items, usually committed by the police. The police know that many Roma don’t have documents, so they specially track Roma and watch their places of residence. Then they catch them, take them into the precinct, and demand money for their release.”¹⁶ Vladimir Berezin, a journalist from Kostiantynivka, confirmed this: “Here, if you’re a Roma, they catch you first, then beat you, and only then do they question you, because for the police, you’re always a potential drug dealer.”¹⁷

The situation of refugees from Ukraine in Russia and the problems of their legal status, their living conditions, and the treatment they receive from local authorities and the public have been researched, but to a lesser extent that the problem of IDPs in Ukraine.

The Russian mass media spreads the idea that Russia has created favorable conditions for refugees from the conflict zone, provides them with whatever aid they need, offers them temporary asylum, and generally treats them extremely well. Thus, migrants from Ukraine have a false impression that shatters once they find out how Federal Migration Service offices actually treat them. The procedures for obtaining refugee status or temporary asylum are complicated, and applicants are rarely able to find work in the regions they want. The policy that “Moscow is not made out of rubber” stands in direct opposition to human rights, including the right to seek asylum in the place where the refugee arrived, and there is no legal basis in Russian law for such misguided practices.

The Russian Federation is a signatory to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951 and the Protocol to it, pursuant to which it undertook obligations to receive and review applications of people applying for the corresponding status, without any restrictions.

Pursuant to articles 4 and 7 of the RF Federal Law “On Refugees,” an individual who wants to be recognized as a refugee must apply to a **border control agency** or local migration service office **at the location of arrival**. The appropriate agency must review this application and issue a certificate to this effect within five business days. At the end of the review, a decision is made to accept or deny acceptance of the refugee. The same procedures exist in relation to temporary asylum: pursuant to Article 12 of the RF Federal Law “On Refugees,” a decision on temporary asylum shall be made by the local FMS office at the place where the foreign national

¹³ http://ria-m.tv/news/17939/tsyigane_iz_zonyi_ato_terroriziruyut_volonterov.html

¹⁴ <http://silaslova.zp.ua/7325-v-zaporozhe-cygane-bezhency-iz-donbassa-naladili-narkotorgovlyu.html>

¹⁵ <http://thekievtimes.ua/kyiv/359277-cygane-prevrashhayut-darnicu-v-pomojku.html>

¹⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Elena Marchuk, a refugee from Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with the journalist Vladimir Berezin. Recorded in Dzerzhynsk after the city was liberated from pro-Russian fighters, 20 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

or stateless person filed the application for temporary asylum in Russia. Pursuant to paragraph 20 of the “Administrative Rules of the FMS for the Provision of Government Services to Review Applications for Refugee Status in the Russian Federation and Applications for Temporary Asylum in the Russian Federation,” “a decision on the application for temporary asylum shall be made by the local FMS agency no more than three months from the day on which said application was filed.”

In addition to the above laws that govern the situation of refugees, special Government Resolution No. 690 “On Granting Temporary Asylum in the Russian Federation to Citizens of Ukraine under Simplified Procedures” dated 22 July 2014 was adopted in accordance with the Federal Law “On Refugees” and “in connection with the complicated internal political situation in Ukraine and the increasing number of Ukrainian citizens arriving in the Russian Federation seeking asylum.” In this resolution, temporary asylum is defined as “the possibility of staying in the Russian Federation on a temporary basis for humanitarian reasons in connection with the current situation in Ukraine.” Resolution No. 690 sets temporary rules for granting temporary asylum to applicants and members of their families. Clause 3 of the Rules prescribes mandatory fingerprinting at the FMS office for the place of arrival and a mandatory medical exam within ten calendar days of arrival (the Resolution charges the Ministry of Health and Social Development with organizing and developing requirements for this exam). Pursuant to Clause 5 of these Rules, the decision on granting temporary asylum is made by the local FMS office at the place where the written application was filed no more than three working days after the filing (this time frame is what makes the procedure “simplified”; pursuant to RF Government Resolution No. 274 dated 09.04.2001 (as amended on 28.03.2008) “On Granting Temporary Asylum in the Russian Federation” and the abovementioned Administrative Rules of the FMS, this time frame is given as three months).

According to Clause 7 of the Rules, on the basis of a decision to grant temporary asylum, the local FMS office at the place where the applicant actually lives shall issue this person a certificate on the granting of temporary asylum within one business day after this person and his or her family members have presented a medical certificate providing evidence that the mandatory medical exam has been completed.

Special Government Resolution No. 691 “On the Relocation of Ukrainian Citizens and Stateless Persons Permanently Residing in Ukraine and Arriving in the Russian Federation in Large Groups under Emergency Procedures to Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation” was also adopted on 22 July 2014. It sets the total number of Ukrainian migrants that Russia must grant temporary asylum at 150,000 people for 2014 and also describes how they will be relocated throughout constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Moscow, Moscow Oblast, Saint Petersburg, Crimea, Sevastopol, Chechnya, and Rostov Oblast have a **zero quota**. In regions like Leningrad Oblast, Kursk Oblast, Voronezh Oblast, and also Belgorod and Bryansk oblasts, which border Ukraine, the quota is miniscule and is set at 0.01 percent, i.e. 15 people.

Clause 3 of this resolution reads: “Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation shall ensure that in 2014 they shall admit Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons whose numbers consist of no less than the amount set herein, but at a rate of no less than 20 percent of the set amount in the course of each month for each constituent entity.” This means that in each of the last five months of 2014 (the law took effect on 1 August 2014), constituent entities had to admit no less than 20 percent of the set quota. In the case of Bryansk Oblast, for example, this meant no less than three people per month in the period from August to December.

Resolution 691 causes difficulties for all migrants from the conflict zone. First of all, it shuts refugees out of the most economically-developed regions of the country and the border oblasts, where the number of people seeking temporary asylum is clearly more than zero or three people a month (although the wording “no less than” makes it seem as though there are not strict limits on the admittance of migrants). Second of all, significant assistance (including paying for trips to their new places of residence) was planned only within the confines of the quotas and only for people who left Ukraine “in Large Groups under Emergency Procedures.” In practice this has meant that this category only covers people who were taken out of Ukraine by forces from the Ministry of Emergency Situations or other security agencies.

The actual number of people who arrived in Russia from Ukraine because of the conflict turned out to be much higher than the numbers covered by the quotas. For example, according to official data from the FMS for Bryansk Oblast, over 25,000 Ukrainian citizens, including 4,500 children, arrived in Bryansk Oblast while there was a quota of 15 people in effect. This quota was later raised to 500 through the efforts of the governor at that time. As of 8 December 2014, 14,976 migrants from Ukraine had arrived in Bryansk Oblast and a total of 29 were being kept in temporary accommodation centers. The absolute majority was living with relatives and acquaintances. Four thousand five hundred and seventy-four people applied for temporary asylum, and favorable decisions were rendered in all their cases. Seventy-nine people turned down temporary asylum because they returned to Ukraine. Ninety-six people, including 35 children, applied for refugee status, out of which 22 people, including 8 children, received favorable decisions. In accordance with Resolution No. 691, a total of 150 people were sent to other regions (Tyumen, Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Krasnodar, etc.). The applicants underwent mandatory medical exams free of charge.¹⁸

Thus, as of 8 December 2014, out of the almost 26,000 Ukrainian citizens arriving in Bryansk Oblast, about 4,700 people were granted refugee status or temporary asylum, approximately 10,000 stayed in Russia on other grounds, including gaining legal status as migrant workers, and almost 12,000 people were forced to leave the oblast without receiving any assistance whatsoever (for example, only emergency medical treatment was provided, which caused mass outrage on the part of Ukrainian migrants, and a demonstration was even held in one of the oblast’s regional centers). Only the 150 people taken out of Ukraine by Ministry of Emergency Situations forces or Russian special forces received targeted assistance, including money for travel to other regions of Russia and for getting settled in these areas. It was specifically this category of migrants that was given priority, free medical treatment, and 5,000 rubles towards each required document.

According to reports from lawyers in the Migration and Law network, a number of Ukrainian citizens who fled to Russia were detained on the border with Bryansk Oblast on 25 February 2014 and placed in temporary detention facilities. It was only with the help of human rights defenders that they were able to have their interests upheld in court and leave for other regions of Russia. Experts predict that there will be more prosecutions (fines, deportation) of foreign citizens, including Ukrainian citizens, due to the stiffening of migration rules that took effect on 1 January 2015.¹⁹

Additionally, Resolution No. 691 gave rise to an illegal practice whereby FMS offices in regions that have zero or minimal quotas are refusing to accept applications for temporary

¹⁸ <http://ufms-bryansk.ru/2014/12/10/ukraina-aktualnye-voprosy/>

¹⁹ Information received from lawyers in the Migration and Law network, January – February 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

asylum and to issue decisions for applications previously submitted. At the same time, people who have applied for asylum report that they had to leave for other regions of Russia where the relocation quotas were higher, but they were not given written refusals, which made the process for appealing the decision more complicated.²⁰

Meanwhile, there is nothing in laws and regulations governing refugees and asylum seekers to indicate that applicants must move, against their wishes, to a constituent entity of the Russian Federation other than the one where they filed their application. The responsibility for reviewing and granting refugee status or temporary asylum lies with the local FMS office at the place where an individual applies for asylum and does not depend on relocation quotas.

Officials from the migration service cite the practice of Council of Europe countries, where refugees and asylum seekers may be sent to other regions. However, in Europe only people who have crossed the border illegally, are not able to get settled on their own, or do not have family connections or housing are treated in this way. Refugees are offered housing at the place where they are sent and given cash allowances, but the review procedure occurs at the place of application for asylum, so this argument does not stand up to criticism.

Over recent years migration rules in Russia have gradually become stricter. Migrants from visa-free countries, including Ukraine, can spend 90 out of a possible 180 days in Russia. People who have executed documents granting them the right to work (beginning in 2015, a license, and prior to this, either a work permit or a license) may legally stay in Russia for up to one year. Violation of this regime for staying in Russia is punishable by a fine and mandatory deportation. Subsequent entry into Russia is banned for a period of up to 10 years. At the law level, no exceptions are stipulated for people arriving from Ukraine. However, senior government officials have been making pronouncements that the observance of migration rules will be strictly monitored for Ukrainian citizens. For example, on 15 December 2014 RF Prime Minister D. Medvedev published an article in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* titled “Russia and Ukraine: Life under New Rules.” This article states that “We are going to be stricter about ensuring that terms of stay (90 days out of half a year) in our country are observed. It used to be enough to leave Russia and then reenter to be able to work the next three months without a problem. Now, however, our border guards will treat Ukrainian ‘travelers’ who do not have licenses to work in Russia with heightened attention.”²¹ The incompetence exhibited by the prime minister is simply astounding: the so-called “90-day rule” has only been in effect since the beginning of 2014 in relation to all migrants from visa-free countries. Nothing new has been done in this area, so what Medvedev was basically doing was calling for repressive policies against migrants from Ukraine.

On the other hand, there has been some softening of the migration regime for victims of the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine; however, this has not been widely advertised to people whose lives depend on it. For example, in late June 2014, the FMS published a special memorandum for Ukrainian citizens, which was also mentioned in the news.²² This memorandum stated that Ukrainian citizens would receive preferential treatment: during the “period of the internal Ukrainian crisis,” the “90-day rule” would cease to apply to them. The memorandum also stated that Ukrainian citizens would be able to extend their migration cards unhindered by simply applying to their local FMS office: “To extend the term of temporary stay, Ukrainian citizens must apply to the local FMS office for their place of location. They must have their passports and migration cards with them. FMS offices have been ordered to immediately

²⁰ This practice has been seen in Saint Petersburg. First-hand account provided by the attorney O.P. Tseytlina.

²¹ http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2014-12-15/1_medvedev.html

²² http://ru-kraina.ru/news/fms_reabilitirovala_ukraincev/2014-06-26-170

extend the stay of Ukrainian citizens for the period of the internal Ukrainian crisis. Extension shall be made by making the appropriate notations on the migration card.”²³

This memorandum, however, could not be found on the websites of most local FMS offices: it was only published in full on a separate page of the website of the Federal Migration Service Directorate for Saint Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast.²⁴ On the website of the FMS office for Rostov Oblast, a border region which anticipated a large number of refugees, the “memorandum for refugees from Ukraine” is just a long list of standard procedures that does not list any exceptions for Ukrainian citizens (website updated 8 June 2014).²⁵ On the website of the FMS office for Bryansk Oblast, the “memorandum for refugees from Ukraine” (at least before January 2015) was a list of addresses and telephone numbers of divisions responsible for receiving applicants.²⁶ It was only later that more current information on the extension of migration cards was published.²⁷

Another important simplification in the migration regime for Ukrainian citizens was declared in January 2015, when President Putin stated in a speech to students that it would be necessary to support all Ukrainian citizens of draft age who did not want to serve in the Ukrainian army.²⁸ Immediately following this speech, on January 28, the FMS published its decision that, in the period up until August 2015, the migration cards of all Ukrainian citizens asking for assistance from local FMS offices would be extended multiple times for a period of 90 days.²⁹ This measure, which was adopted “out of humanitarian considerations,” was a long time coming and should be applied, regardless of the draft, to people of any age and any gender.

The measures that simplify life for migrants from Ukraine (extension of the term of legal stay in Russia, which at least spares them of the need to cross the border and risk being deported) do not resolve all the problems for people suffering from the war. This primarily concerns the ability to work and provide for families, find adequate housing, and enroll children in school or kindergarten. Instead of granting refugee status or temporary asylum, the FMS, following the recommendations of the Russian government³⁰ advises migrants to participate in “programs to relocate fellow citizens,” which involves a complicated procedure and mandatory resettlement to specific RF regions (for example, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Kolyma, Kamchatka, and other remote regions of the Far East and Siberia). Still, there is an enormous burden on the Russian border oblasts, which are frequently economically depressed, highly subsidized regions (like Bryansk Oblast).

It must be acknowledged that the situation of Ukrainian migrants in Russia is complicated not only by red tape and contradictory policies, but also by the generally negative attitude local residents have towards them. There is no doubt that Roma refugees suffer from

²³ <http://www.ufms.spb.ru/desc/pamyatka-dlja-dind-1776.html>

²⁴ <http://www.ufms.spb.ru/desc/pamyatka-dlja-dind-1776.html>

²⁵ http://www.fms-rostov.ru/ne_5112966

²⁶ <http://ufms-bryansk.ru/2014/06/17/pamyatka-dlya-grazhdan-pribyvshix-iz-ukrainy-po-voprosam-voznikayushhim-v-sfere-migracii/> this link was active at least until mid-January 2015.

²⁷ <http://ufms-bryansk.ru/uploads/2011/05/1.pdf>

²⁸ <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/47519>

²⁹ http://www.fms.gov.ru/press/news/news_detail.php?ID=12181

³⁰ For example, RF Government Resolution No. 926 of 12.09.2014 recommends that the authorities in border regions (Bryansk, Kursk, Belgorod oblasts) or regions that are attractive to refugees (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Moscow and Leningrad oblasts), the Crimea, and Sevastopol steer Ukrainian citizens to other regions and that migrants be placed in temporary accommodation centers for no more than three days (linking this to the beginning of the cold season): <http://www.rg.ru/2014/09/15/ukraincy-site-dok.html>

twice as much discrimination and stigmatization because they are Ukrainian refugees and “Roma” (even RF citizens living in settlements are virtually excluded from life in their country: their rights are constantly violated and many of them lack the required documents, education, work, and adequate housing).³¹ We will look at this in greater detail in the chapter on the situation of Roma arriving in Russia from Eastern Ukraine, but other former residents of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts seeking refuge in Russia have come up against the unpleasant, nasty, and even antagonistic behavior of the local population.

During observations conducted in late 2014 by ADC Memorial experts, a large number of first-hand accounts were collected showing that residents of southern and central RF oblasts did not receive the migrants well. Unfortunately, experts spoke less frequently with people who were more welcoming, sympathetic, and open with these migrants. Although there were actions in solidarity and support of the migrants (especially at the beginning of the conflict, when the first refugees began to arrive), overall the readiness of residents to help their neighbors in need was much lower than among representatives of civil society in Ukraine, where people who were forced to abandon their homes, jobs, and native land were accepted by residents of areas outside the conflict zone, placed with families, and provided with assistance from volunteers of social movements.

First-hand accounts collected by ADC Memorial show that in the summer and fall people in Lipetsk Oblast shared the harvest with the new arrivals and gave them their own clothes, dishes, and even appliances. “We carried a lot. There were tons of tomatoes and apples. The owner of our store gave out everything – cups, spoons, mugs, pots, wash basins. As humanitarian aid.”³² A Saratov businessman provided a great deal of help to Roma migrants by bringing them essential items and food products and providing them with temporary housing.³³

Unfortunately, however, the large part of Russian society viewed the arrival of refugees as a terrible burden, even when Russian citizens did not personally spend a single kopeck on these victims of war. It was strange to hear an elderly woman from a forlorn mining town on the steppes of Rostov Oblast say that she was troubled by the arrival of her neighbors from Donetsk, one of whom “even brought two cows with him.” At the same time, she admitted that there were no farmers in her area and no place to buy milk (the only store in the village carried nothing other than bread and canned goods). Yes this refugee with his cows evoked only loathing in her: “I said to him: ‘Go fight! Defend your homeland!’ But he said that he wouldn’t go and that he didn’t have weapons. So if you don’t have weapons, pick up a pitchfork and go! That’s what they did during the revolution.”³⁴

The people in the southern regions of Russia are well aware that Russian citizens, “mercenaries,” and professional soldiers are fighting on the side of the rebels in Ukraine. So, the

³¹ The situation of the Roma in Russia is described in the following ADC Memorial reports: <http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/alternative-report-implementation-of-the-international-convention-on-the-elimination-of-all-forms-of-racial-discrimination-by-the-russian-federation-2013?lang=en>; <http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/problem-of-discrimination-and-violation-of-the-rights-of-roma-children-at-russian-schools-2011?lang=en>; <http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/forced-evictions-and-the-right-to-housing-of-roma-in-russia-2011?lang=en>; <http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/roma-on-the-crossroads-of-discrimination-2004?lang=en>

³² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Lipetsk resident V. Lipetsk, 27 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

³³ First-hand accounts provided by Roma migrants from Donetsk and recorded by ADC Memorial experts in Belgorod, Lipetsk, and Moscow regions. October – November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

³⁴ The words of a resident from the outskirts of Kamensk-Shakhtinsk, Rostov Oblast. 5 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

fact that residents of Eastern Ukraine are fleeing to Russia and “Putin has to fight” also arouses hatred and loathing in Russians. Experts heard many comments about how “cowardly” residents of Eastern Ukraine are, how they don’t want to fight themselves, how they come to Russia to “receive benefits,” and how only “our people” are fighting there. Here is a typical example of how residents of the border region of Belgorod view the situation: “They start to push for their rights: give us work, they say, while they don’t even lift a finger. They’re given housing here. And they’re taking our jobs.”³⁵

In discussion about the reasons for the arrival of these refugees, the understanding that the war was caused by Russian aggression exists side-by-side with a strong inferiority complex and hard feelings against Ukrainians, even those who chose Russia: “Why are they coming here? They’ve always said that we’re bad, that we’re moskals [a pejorative term for Russians used in Ukraine]. So why don’t you leave Donetsk for Kharkiv? Why don’t you go there? Everything is fine in Kyiv, and in Odessa too. Everything is being done specially so that they come to Russia. Russia is sending those fighters there. It wasn’t just like that that they annexed Crimea: they wanted to do it under the pretext of the referendum, i.e. people voted “yes,” so that means we can take it over.”³⁶

Even an awareness of the actual situation in border oblasts of Rostov, Belgorod, and Bryansk, where people can see with their own eyes the columns of Russian military equipment leaving for the border, the Russian fighters being treated in local hospitals, and the volunteers arriving from the front for leave, does not cure residents of their belief in myths and propaganda. One of the main myths that has aroused feelings of hatred and loathing for the migrants is that each person receives 800 rubles per day, which is more than a regular Russian worker can earn in a 12-hour workday. A clerk at a store in Shakhty, Rostov Oblast complained that “I earn 600 – 700 rubles a shift during the off season. I work from 8 in the morning until 10 at night. And the refugees receive benefits totaling more than I earn.”³⁷ A taxi driver from Belgorod echoed her words: “To be honest, I don’t really think that highly of refugees. They’re getting pretty brazen. You know, they receive an allowance in the amount of 800 rubles per person. And there are three or four people in their families. They sit around scarfing down suet, and I need to work 12 hours to earn money. And there’s also been an order that their children must attend schools and kindergartens. And we can’t even enroll in kindergartens – you have to register even before your child is born.”³⁸

The experts heard similar complaints about “privileges” for refugees everywhere, even though refugees do not directly receive 800 rubles a day. In actuality, money allocated from the federal budget for refugees in camps and other temporary accommodation centers created for them was spent on housing (usually tents or trailers), food, and staff, but the refugees themselves did not receive any money directly, and many of them were not even able to take advantage of the “benefits” of these temporary camps (no Ukrainian Roma received any benefits, housing, or food). Even people who were housed in temporary facilities and tent camps lost all these

³⁵ Conversation between a Belgorod resident and ADC Memorial experts. 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

³⁶ Conversation between a Belgorod resident and ADC Memorial experts. 25 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

³⁷ The words of a resident of Shakhty, Rostov Oblast recorded by ADC Memorial experts on 4 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

³⁸ Conversation between a Belgorod resident and ADC Memorial experts. 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

resources within a couple of months. They were thrown right out on the street if they weren't able to rent housing or find another place to live.³⁹

It is extremely difficult for refugees in Russia to settle down because of problems with their legal status, which frequently does not grant them the right to work in Russia, and also because employers are biased against them. According to a resident of Lipetsk, many refugees are not able to find jobs in their usual lines of work and are forced to take on jobs that do not correspond to their level of education or occupation, or are even forced to return home: "One worked in an orphanage. I think she had been the assistant principal of a school and then she had to work as an ordinary caregiver. The director of the orphanage said not to hire refugees anymore because of their insolent behavior. They don't take just any job. They were taken to a collective farm. The women were offered work as milkmaids and the men, as cowhands. There were even houses for them there. And they refused. 'I've worked as a miner my whole life.' they'd say, 'and now I'm supposed to go twist cow tails?' Many returned because of this kind of work."⁴⁰

Although they expressed discontent about expenses for refugees, people who spoke with ADC Memorial experts rarely complained about the expense of the war itself, even though they understood that the combat operations were a real drain on the budget: they spoke about endless lines of tanks and military equipment traveling night and day along the Rostov – Donetsk highway and knew very well that "volunteers" were being paid well for participating in the war. One resident of Rostov Oblast told the story of how his neighbor, an alcoholic, entered the war out of his own stupidity: his nephew returned from fighting, plied his uncle with alcohol, and took him off "to fight." This alcoholic liked this job: prior to this, he had not been able to find a regular job, "even though he is a strong man, two meters tall, he is always drunk and no one needs him, and there he says, 'I carry around a machine gun.' He received 60,000 rubles for 10 days, paid back his debts, and then went off to fight again,"⁴¹ this time deliberately. Other people admitted that a situation like this was possible, but they assumed that he would not have gone the first time without signing a contract: "It's possible that they took someone there in a drunken state, but that means they must have made some agreement with him when he was drunk, and then he slept it off there and understood what he had done. But mercenaries aren't taken there by force – that's a voluntary thing."⁴²

Experts obtained some interesting testimony from a well-informed person in Rostov-on-Don:

"Lots of people are going to fight in Donetsk. They pay soldiers 60,000 for ten days. That's good money. You can go to an enlistment office – there are these enlistment offices that are engaged in this, people know, they let you know where to go, then they send you off from there. You undergo training, they teach for you three days, and that's it. There are camps right there on the border, 70 km from the city. They are organized by the enlistment office. These aren't military camps – it's all illegal, how they teach you to hold a weapon. It's not even a requirement to have served in the army. They even took a

³⁹ The media reported widely on an instance when refugees from Ukraine were evicted from a temporary accommodation facility in Saint Petersburg: <http://krasnosel.com/component/content/article/1574--2014-> and in Angarsk (Irkutsk Oblast) <http://www.otr-online.ru/programmi/v-angarske-desyatki-38344.html>

⁴⁰ An interview recorded by ADC Memorial experts with Lipetsk resident V. Lipetsk, 27 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁴¹ The words of this resident of Bataysk, Rostov Oblast were recorded by ADC Memorial experts on 4 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁴² The words of this resident of Rostov-on-Don were recorded by ADC Memorial experts on 8 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

woman. She fought alone and came here recently with wounds. She recovered and then went off to fight again. She's the only female out of 100 people, they're waiting for her there. People also go from other regions, but they only pay money here. You can fill out all the documents here. It's all illegal – our troops aren't officially there. And the money that most mercenaries receive – that comes from the Russian authorities. After all, there is a chance of death. The weapons are Russian, the soldiers are ours, the mercenaries are from Russia. The *Vostok* battalion is the most nuclear, the most reckless. They're all Chechens. They just know how to fight, like it was in Chechnya, but our boys died there, they were untested in war. But now it's the other way around. Ukrainian kids, 18, 20 years old, are dying. What can they do against our fighters? Their bodies are carried away in truckloads.”⁴³

This same person also gave his opinion on the causes and price of this war: “V.V. Putin needs this territory, and he could care less about the people. As the saying goes, ‘You can't make an omelette without breaking an egg.’ We're up to our ears in land, but those guys – NATO and the others – need to be pushed back. Everything started with the Crimea, but it went easily there and there was no need to fight. But Donbass isn't an island. When the fighters return from Ukraine, they'll all become alcoholics right away.”⁴⁴

The war has caused many people in both Russia and Ukraine to lose ties with family members: “I have relatives from Luhansk who fled to Kharkiv. Now they have a grievance with us and we don't talk anymore. We don't need this war either.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

The Roma Population of Eastern Ukraine: Life in the Conflict Zone, Refugees, and People who Returned Home

Some Roma fled the conflict zones of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts for other regions of Ukraine. Other Roma stayed behind. Still others fled but, at the time of this writing, had already returned home to towns and villages retaken by the Ukrainian army. In October 2014, ADC Memorial experts spoke with Roma and social activists who helped these refugees in Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Zaporizhia. ADC Memorial staff then visited Sloviansk and Dzerzhynsk in Donetsk Oblast in late November 2014 to interview Roma returning home after these places were liberated from armed separatists.

The Situation for Roma in so called Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic

“As far as the conduct of the rebels is concerned...
They behaved like louts with the local population.
And they treated the Roma even worse.”

(Olga Rudenko, head of the NGO
Ecology and Social Protection, Dzerzhynsk, Donetsk Oblast)

The transition of power in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to the separatists was marked by the establishment of checkpoints on the borders of population centers that were intended to protect residents from “juntists” and “Banderites.”

Elena Marchuk, a refugee from Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast told human rights defenders that:

“The first problems began in February 2014, after Yanukovich was deposed. At that time miners stated that they ‘didn’t need Banderites’ in power. Other local residents gradually started joining them. They started setting up checkpoints in Sverdlovsk and Luhansk. At the entrance to the city, pro-Russian activists pitched a tent, surrounded it with tires, and hung up a Russian flag. They told local residents that ‘Banderites are coming to Donbas and that they were going to protect the city from them.’”⁴⁶

Olga Rudenko, the head of the NGO Ecology and Social Protection in Dzerzhynsk, Donetsk Oblast told ADC Memorial staff that:

“The DNR separatists entered Dzerzhynsk in May. The local authorities, particularly Mayor Sleptsov, spent a long time preparing the town for this event. The mayor was the first to speak openly about secession from Ukraine and a new independent republic. Imagine, we weren’t even allowed to hold presidential elections here. The separatists also had the support of the mayor’s former son-in-law, whose surname is Rybak. He is the owner of all the small businesses in the city: all the large and smaller stores are in his hands. He is also the owner of all non-municipal land. According to data we gathered in the course of monitoring we completed before the pro-Russian fighters advanced, only four of the 600 people working in his stores were properly registered as

⁴⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Elena Marchuk, a refugee from Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

workers. In other words, everything that was supposed to go to the treasury as taxes went right into his pocket. To make it more clear, the only sources of money for the city are the coal mine and the budget. Out of a population of 35,000, only 14,000 people work. The rest are retirees, the unemployed, minors, and people who are unable to work.

“As soon as the separatists seized the town, they put up checkpoints all around it for, as they put it, ‘protection from the junta troops.’ All the income from the coal mine was diverted to building these checkpoints. The mayor also set aside part of the budgetary funds. They turned the building of the Oblast Executive Committee into their headquarters. That’s also where they held captives and prisoners. The government spent a great deal of money from the budget on furniture, air conditioners, etc. for these headquarters.”⁴⁷

Roma activists interviewed spoke about the radical attitude of local residents in Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast:

“In early April, barricades went up near the railroad station. The locals celebrated, saying that ‘our people from Donetsk have come to protect us from the fascists.’”⁴⁸

When fighting started in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, all members of the population, including the Roma, suffered from artillery shelling. For example, the first shots fired in Sverdlovsk in late June 2014 hit Servitka Roma in Sharapkino and Stakhanov settlements. The Lunacharsky settlement, home to 20 Vlax and Moldavian Kalderash Roma families, was directly in the line of fire. In Lunacharsky, Roma live in small huts, which were seriously damaged or completely destroyed by the shelling. Residents fled their homes in a hurry and many were not able to take warm clothing, essential items, or even their documents with them. Elena Marchuk, who worked as a teacher in Sverdlovsk for many years and knows the Roma families, said that the Roma naturally saw the shelling as the main risk, but they also feared that “their children would be taken and forced to go fight.” Refugees stated that Russian military equipment and soldiers started passing through Sverdlovsk at night when the fighting started.⁴⁹

The fear of being killed by shelling was not the only reason the Roma had for fleeing the territories occupied by the separatists. No less of a risk was posed by disregard for the law, arbitrary treatment, and violence on the part of the pro-Russian fighters. The actions of these fighters were sanctioned by the governments of these unrecognized republics and began before the start of any large-scale fighting. Instances of arbitrary detention, theft, beatings, killings, and even pogroms against Roma have been documented:

“As far as the conduct of the fighters is concerned, they behaved quite brazenly. They took vehicles from whomever they wanted. They could go into any store and take

Примечание [O1]: Not sure about this. I found this reference - <http://gypsy-life.net/history14.htm>.

⁴⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Olga Rudenko, the head of the NGO Ecology and Social Protection. Recorded in Dzerzhynsk after the town was liberated from the pro-Russian fighters on 20 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁴⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A., a Roma activist. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 18 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁴⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Elena Marchuk, a refugee from Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

however much they wanted without paying. They behaved like louts with the local population. And they treated the Roma even worse.”⁵⁰

“There’s a food kiosk right in my courtyard. We were at home that day. We heard a racket on the street. My wife and I decided to go out and see what was going on. It turned out that it was the saleswoman in the kiosk screaming. The separatists had gone in and dragged out everything they possibly could. All the food products. I am absolutely convinced that they would have shot us if they had seen us at that moment.”⁵¹

“I had my first encounter with them when I was driving home. Here’s what happened. A Lada-110 passed me and then turned into a Roma courtyard. Three men in camouflage carrying automatic weapons got out and entered the house. A 2008 Toyota Land Cruiser was parked in the courtyard. First they introduced themselves and explained that they were soldiers for the Donetsk Peoples’ Republic and that they needed his car. The Rom refused. Then they beat him, took his keys, and drove off.”⁵²

Several dozen captives and prisoners locked up in the building of the municipal administration of Dzerzhynsk, Donetsk Oblast were the victims of the pro-Russian fighters’ tyranny. During their retreat, they set this building on fire. Many of the people in it perished and not all of the victims could be identified. In all likelihood, one of the victims was Yan Belous, who had been detained the day before. It took a great deal of effort for his relatives to get the Ukrainian authorities to open an investigation into his death. The investigation had not yet been completed at the time of this writing. Olga Rudenko spoke about this incident:

“Yan Belous died at the hands of the separatists. He was a Russian Roma. At least that’s what they call themselves here. He was a drinker, but he never really created any problems for anyone. On July 20, he went outside after curfew, which started at 21.00. He was drunk and asked someone for a cigarette. His wife was watching him from the window. She saw people with automatic weapons come up to him. They spoke for around five minutes, and then two cars pulled up. They pushed Yan into one of the cars and drove him off. His wife thought that she would go to the Oblast Executive Committee in the morning to look for him, but that night, at 03.00, the Ukrainian army started to storm the city. By 05.00, full-on fighting was raging across the city and the building of the Oblast Executive Committee had been set on fire. The fighters started to retreat by 13.00. By this time the building had burned to the ground. It was later discovered that some fighters were burned to death along with the dozens of imprisoned civilians. People saw a person on fire fall from a window. It seems likely that Yan also died there, because he was not found dead or alive after the storming. His wife filed a missing persons report with the State Security Service of Ukraine and with the police. Both she and Yan’s mother filed several reports. Over the next several days, people in uniform came to speak

⁵⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Olga Rudenko, the head of the NGO Ecology and Social Protection. Recorded in Dzerzhynsk after the town was liberated from the pro-Russian fighters on 20 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁵¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A., a Roma activist. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 18 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁵² Ibid.

with the two women. They introduced themselves as officials from the State Security Service, but they did not present any documents to confirm this. The officials did not give the two women any information or ever summon them anywhere. Then Yan's wife decided to go to the police to find out what was being done to find her husband, but officers were not able to find her report. Naturally, no investigation had ever been opened. When she went to see the supervisor, he shook a pile of papers at her and said, 'Do you know how many Russians have disappeared here? Why are you bothering us about your gypsy?' Still, Yan's wife and mother did get someone to pay attention to them. His mother gave a DNA sample which could be used to identify her son from among the people who were burned to death in the Oblast Executive Committee building on July 21. They were summoned once to identify body parts which corresponded to the descriptions they had given, but neither woman could be sure that the remains were Yan's."⁵³

Pogroms in Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast

“Doctors would not receive people who had been beaten at hospitals because they did not want any problems with the separatists. This went on for about a month-and-a-half until the separatists left. We were scared to leave the house at all during this time. God forbid one of them would catch sight of us.”
(The Rom P., a resident of Sloviansk)

The situation for Roma in Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast was particularly dramatic. It was there that in April 2014 pogroms of Romani homes, accompanied by violence, were carried out by representatives of the so-called “self-defense forces,” which were made up of armed formations under the command of Vyacheslav Ponomarev, “the people’s mayor” of Sloviansk.⁵⁴ People interviewed for this report attributed anti-Roma statements to Igor Girkin, the commander of pro-Russian fighters in Sloviansk.

According to M., a Romani resident of Sloviansk who fled to Kharkiv after the first pogrom, there were rumors as early as March 2014 that activists sympathizing with the separatists were asking officials from the municipal administration about the Roma’s sources of income:

“If administration officials said they did not know what a family’s source of income was, then military officers would visit that family and destroy everything in the house. They didn’t bother to ask or try to determine what work people were actually engaged in. They just came, broke glass, took all the money, and set the homes on fire.”⁵⁵

According to media reports, the first pogroms in Sloviansk took place in the area of the railway station and Cherekovka settlement, which was home to many Roma, on 19 April 2014,

⁵³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Olga Rudenko, the head of the NGO Ecology and Social Protection. Recorded in Dzerzhynsk after the town was liberated from the pro-Russian fighters on 20 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁵⁴ <http://gordonua.com/news/separatism/V-Donetskoy-oblasti-separatisty-prodolzhayut-zapugivat-i-grabit-cygan-19537.html>

⁵⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with the Romni M., who fled Sloviansk for Kharkiv and later returned home. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 17 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

less than one week after Vyacheslav Ponomarev, a crime boss and drug dealer, became the “people’s mayor” of Sloviansk. Armed rebels burst into Romani homes, led the residents out onto the street, and made them stand with their faces to the wall. They demanded money, gold, and other valuable items.⁵⁶ They destroyed property, set fire to the roofs of the houses, and beat the men. According to information obtained by Olga Zhmurko (International Renaissance Foundation), the fire department’s official conclusion was that these fires had been caused by faulty wiring. Roma who later sought medical treatment at medical institutions were turned away by doctors, who feared repressions from the separatists.⁵⁷

Thus it appears that the pogroms against Roma were initially connected with the redrawing of the criminal market and were aimed at removing competitors of “the people’s mayor.” However, all Roma residing in Sloviansk suffered from them. For his part, Vyacheslav Ponomarev stated in an interview that “attacks against Roma in Sloviansk as such did not occur. We’re cleaning the city of drugs.”⁵⁸

Rom P. from Sloviansk had the following explanation for these events:

“Slava Ponomarenko, who was our mayor at the time, is a former bandit. Everyone in the city knows him. In the 1990s, he was part of an organized crime group and even was a drug addict himself. Of course he knew firsthand about all the points. The best known ones were at the railway station and in Cherekovka. A Rom by the name of Pasha lived there. The whole city knew that he had been dealing drugs for a long time. That is exactly where the main events developed. Roma were led out of their homes. Their gold, money, all their valuables, were taken from them and then they were locked in their basements. That’s what happened with almost all the Roma, not just the ones near the railway station. The separatists drove by my home several times, but they didn’t touch me because I don’t really look like a Rom and they can’t tell which homes are Romani and which aren’t. Only once did a man with an automatic rifle come in. He was alone and wanted to search my house, but he didn’t. If there had been several of them, they would have definitely turned the house upside down and taken something.

“My friend and his entire family were victims in early May. They actually lived near the railway station. Here’s what happened. He received a call saying that his apartment had been robbed by pro-Russian fighters and that his wife and children had been taken out onto the street. He went there to find out what was going on. When he tried to take his children away from the rebels, they shot him in the leg. From then on, the rebels started driving Roma out of their apartments and houses and taking over their living spaces. They loaded everything of value that they could find into cars: gold, jewelry, and other expensive items. Many Roma had their cars stolen. Several people were beaten up in the city. Gold chains and rings were removed from them. I was told that doctors would not receive people who had been beaten at hospitals because they did not want any problems with the separatists. This went on for about a month-and-a-half

⁵⁶ <http://novosti.dn.ua/details/223201/>

⁵⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Olga Zhmurko, the director of the Roma program initiative at the International Renaissance Foundation. Kyiv, 15 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁵⁸ http://news.liga.net/news/politics/1445861-separatisty_po_svoemu_obyasnyayut_zachistku_Slovianska_ot_tsygan.htm

until the separatists left. We were scared to leave the house at all during this time. God forbid one of them would catch sight of us.”⁵⁹

Problems Leaving Areas Controlled by Separatists

“‘You aren’t allowed to leave the city.’
‘Just let us take out our children. They’re still little! What, don’t you have children?’
‘It’s not allowed! Our superior officer told us that we can’t allow Roma out of the city’”
(Conversation at a checkpoint near Sloviansk, as recounted by the Romni M., a resident of Sloviansk)

The pogroms kept the Romani population in the grip of fear: people were scared of being seen by the separatists and tried to find a way to leave the city safely. However, Roma were detained at DPR checkpoints and sent back to Sloviansk, explaining that there was an order to “not allow Roma to leave the city” (the fact that these checkpoints belonged to the separatists can be confirmed by testimony given by Roma that there were no Ukrainian flags flying there and the soldiers were not wearing decorations). The Romni refugee M. and her family were only able to leave Sloviansk on their third attempt:

“Large groups of soldiers started walking through our village at night in May. They were shouting loudly and scaring all the locals. People with weapons were constantly patrolling the hills. We tried to leave for Kharkiv as soon as this all started. We were prohibited from leaving twice. The first time we tried to leave through the checkpoint on Barvenkovo. We were stopped by soldiers and ordered back: ‘We are not letting Roma out of the city.’ I asked them at least to let the children through, but they said they had an order from their commander under which Roma were strictly prohibited from leaving. The second time I was only able to send out my grandson, because he is a redhead and does not look like a Rom. I put him on a bus with other people and then followed in a car with my relatives. We weren’t allowed through, but my grandson was able to leave because the separatists did not realize that he was a Rom. Other Romani children were taken off the bus, but he wasn’t. Also, some Ukrainian women covered for him when they understand that he was a Rom. We got through on the third time, on the other side of Sloviansk.”⁶⁰

According to the subjects interviewed, the separatists did not allow men without their families into areas controlled by the Ukrainian army because they suspected that these men would fight against them. They also did not let young women through because they “saw them as potential snipers.”⁶¹ Problems also arose for families with children when they were trying to pass through the checkpoints. These problems were resolved through bribes: witnesses assert that at

⁵⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with the Rom P. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 17 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁶⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with the Romni M., who fled Sloviansk for Kharkiv and later returned home. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 17 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁶¹ First-hand account provided by the Rom P. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 17 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

the Glubokaya Makatikha checkpoint the cost of the bribe was 1,000 hryvnia for men and 500 hryvnia for women.

Some people interviewed reported that soldiers from the Ukrainian army also did not let Roma through their checkpoints, citing an order from their commanders. There was evidence of this kind of interference at the checkpoint in Barvenkovo (to the west of Sloviansk) and on the way out of Kramatorsk. The Roma say they were able to pass through the Ukrainian checkpoints with the help of bribes:

“On May 8, my wife, children, and I decided to leave Sloviansk for Novomoskovsk, where migrants were being received. We were detained at the third Ukrainian checkpoint in a row outside of Barvenkovo. This was a checkpoint of the district police, at least that’s how they introduced themselves. The soldier who stopped us told us the turn around and go back because his superior ordered him not to let Roma through. Before this we passed through all the DPR and Ukrainian checkpoints without any problems. I tried to persuade him to let us through and showed him that my wife and children were with me, but he didn’t care. My wife was very scared and stated crying. So did the children. I wasn’t even able to calm them down. We returned to the previous Ukrainian checkpoint, which was in Cherkassk. They were surprised to see us return. I told them what had happened. Then one of the soldiers called his superior, who checked our documents again and said that he would call the other checkpoint and tell them to let us through. To be honest, my wife was in tears. She was practically on her knees begging him for help. As we were approaching the checkpoint in Barvenkovo, about 15 people surrounded our car. I got out and said that their superior had given us permission to pass and that they should have received a call about this, but one of them replied that they had never received a call. They surrounded me and started pushing me, calling me names, then one of them asked where my child was. I opened the back door and showed him my son and daughter. Then he asked, ‘So, are we going to just keep standing here like this?’ I couldn’t understand what he meant, but then I finally figured out that they would not let us through for free. I only had about 200 hryvnia with me and I gave them all to him. My son’s nose started bleeding because he was so nervous, and my daughter started feeling nauseous.”⁶²

The Roma of Sloviansk were extremely shaken by a tragedy that occurred in May 2014, when a young Lovari Rom named Bunchur Cherepovsky was killed as he tried to pass through a separatist checkpoint (presumably in Bylbasovka settlement to the west of Sloviansk). According to people interviewed, he died from a beating. His sister G., a single mother, was able to flee Sloviansk for Kyiv immediately after the separatists came to power, but she returned home in late October. She said:

“As soon as people in black masks with guns started walking around the city, I understood that I had to leave. They demolished the TV tower during those first days. Then they burned two jeeps that belonged to the *Pravyi sektor* [a right-wing group]. I left just in time, but my brother, Bunchur, they killed him. They detained him at a checkpoint

⁶² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A., a Romani activist. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 18 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

and beat him to death. At least that's what I was told. Now I don't know if I should stay here and leave again."⁶³

Refugee Life in Places of Involuntary Resettlement

“To the question of where to go and what to do to receive food for the children who had not eaten for two days , a social services staff member raised her voice and said: ‘What don't you understand? We will give the list to the mayor. And that's it! Do you understand?’”
(Olga Rudenko, the head of the NGO Ecology and Social Protection.
Dzerzhynsk, Donetsk Oblast)

Most Roma did not settle permanently in the large cities of Ukraine like Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhia. After spending as little as several days in these cities, the Roma would move on to stay with relatives in safe regions, or they would return home if their areas had been liberated from the separatists (and even if this was not the case, especially if they had been unable to receive long-term assistance and settle in a safe area). In these cities, they would spend a period of time in tent cities for refugees, which were set up by forces from the Ministry of Emergency Situations and volunteers. Later they would leave for other regions of Ukraine. The subjects noted that the possibility of returning home became real after the Minsk Protocol was signed in 2014.

According to Alexandra Nazarova, a staff member at a refugee resource center, “the only people who came to Kyiv were people who agreed in advance with their relatives or the very few people who used the city as a transfer point.” She believes that the Roma who decided to return to their previous places of residence that were still under the control of separatists did so because they did not want to be registered as refugees, since this status might have been dangerous for them as the separatists could have accused them of being pro-Ukrainian and attacked them.⁶⁴

The situation with migrants is changing quickly, so it is quite difficult to draw a general statistical picture of this situation. According to data from NGOs, nearly 1,000 Roma refugees in Zaporizhia and almost 900 Roma refugees in Kharkiv and Kharkiv Oblast received assistance in the summer of 2014.⁶⁵

The authorities in Ukrainian regions that refugees fled to en masse from conflict zones were not entirely prepared for the situation. In the midst of an economic crisis and a war, the government could not provide sufficient funding for resettling migrants. Local governments had also never had any experience with this type of situation. The result was that Roma frequently did not receive any assistance from state agencies.

For example, after the separatists retreated from Dzerzhynsk, Donetsk Oblast, the Shcherbaks, a Romani family from Kramatorska, arrived there. This family consisted of 13 people, including two elderly people and several school-age and younger children, one of whom was disabled. According to Olga Rudenko, the head of the NGO Ecology and Social Protection,

⁶³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with G. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 17 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁶⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Alexandra Nazarova. Kyiv, 15 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁶⁵ Data from the organization Chyachimo (Kharkiv) was obtained by ADC Memorial experts from the activist N. Burlutsky (Kharkiv, 16 October 2014), data from a Roma grassroots initiative (Zaporizhia) was obtained from the Romani activist A.P. (Zaporizhia, 19 October 2014).

the only thing the authorities in Dzerzhynsk did for this family was add their names to a list of people needing assistance:

“Initially this Romani family was received by the Family and Youth Service. They were kept there for several hours while each person was entered into a register for migrant citizens. Then they were told that they could go. Unclear about what had just happened, S. Shcherbak asked for help finding a place to stay or receiving humanitarian aid. To this staff members responded that the family had been added to the list that would be given to the mayor and that they could not help the family with anything else. When he asked again where they were supposed to go, what they should do next, and where they could get food for their children, who had not eaten for two days, the staff member raised her voice and said: ‘What don’t you understand? We will give the list to the mayor. And that’s it! Do you understand?’ So the family left with nothing. And that’s all that the authorities did for the migrants. They added them to a list. When they tried to get benefits for their children, they were told that they needed to go to Kramatorsk for some required documents, but they didn’t have enough money to travel there. Officials at the public assistance office told the family that it wasn’t their problem. The family spent several days wandering around the city. They picked apricots somewhere and sold them at the market, but they were quickly chased away because they were selling the apricots for less than they should have. Then some Baptists provided the family with shelter in their church, but the family did not live there long because they could not find a way to make a living. They ended up leaving for Russia.”⁶⁶

At the same time, residents of Ukraine displayed great solidarity with the refugees and readiness to help them. While local authorities mostly collected information on internal migrants, volunteers, activists from NGOs, and church representatives (mainly Baptists and Protestants) provided most of the actual aid.

In Kharkiv and Zaporizhia, which became “transfer points” for many Roma, migrant assistance groups are particularly active. They work with local authorities and humanitarian organizations, and also recruit volunteers. Volunteers who wanted specifically to help the Roma joined such initiatives as *Stantsiya Kharkiv* [Kharkiv Station]. Nothing like this had ever been seen before.⁶⁷ A network of mediators between Roma communities and government institutions also became involved in helping Romani refugees. This network was created in Ukraine during the implementation of a special program of the Council of Europe. A volunteer at a Roma grassroots initiative explained:

“The Roma fund Chirikili operates in Zaporizhia. We have so-called mediators who set up connections between different institutions, medical and otherwise, and Roma. It was June – July when the first Roma migrants arrived and it was these mediators who took on most of the load. Rations, clothing, etc. – all of this was their responsibility. For example, they helped single mothers find housing quickly. Here we placed most of them

⁶⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Olga Rudenko, the head of the NGO Ecology and Social Protection. Recorded in Dzerzhynsk after the town was liberated from the pro-Russian fighters on 20 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁶⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Yevgeniya Levinshteyn, an activist with *Stantsiya Kharkiv*. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

in dormitories. The Red Cross was also very helpful. When the first Roma, including Tavrichane, Servitka and Lovari, started arriving from the anti-terrorist operation area, the Red Cross immediately launched programs to resettle them and they cooperated very closely with volunteers. They worked quickly as a team. The volunteers had information about available housing. They immediately set about making inquiries about which housing had running water and which didn't, which housing was free, etc. The Red Cross took over from there.”⁶⁸

However, human rights defenders helping migrants from the conflict zone observed that in some cases there was not enough coordination between Romani activists and other organizations and institutions involved in the aid process: “Several times we only received information about migrants a week or two after they had entered one of the city's districts and set up camp in a park or forest. Someone would come in and tell us that several families had been living in tents somewhere for two weeks and that they were in dire straits because they had nowhere to move and no one to help them. We asked: ‘Why didn't you mention this earlier? How we can we help them if you remain silent?’ The answer we got was: ‘No one is going to help them anyway, so that's why we didn't say anything.’”⁶⁹

In the absence of any real aid from the state, the funds collected by volunteers and ordinary citizens were insufficient to provide migrants with even the most essential items on a regular basis. At many humanitarian offices, a person could only receive assistance one time. According to N., a volunteer at *Stantsiya Kharkiv*: “There wasn't enough money, so you could say that the volunteers acquired all the humanitarian aid at their own expense. Things became particularly complicated in July, when the second wave rushed in. Kharkiv was closed to migrants in September because it ran out of free spaces. By this time even the Red Cross had run out of money to provide humanitarian aid.”⁷⁰

By the end of the summer, resettlement was becoming a problem in other cities as well, and not just for Roma, but for all migrants: “...other regions in Ukraine didn't have any more free spaces for migrants from Donbass. We were told that there wasn't any more free housing in Poltava, Zaporizhia, or Lviv oblasts. We are looking for people who wouldn't mind providing a room. We were able to move almost 60 migrants into a dormitory in the village of Donskoy, Donetsk Oblast.”⁷¹

Thus, Romani migrants registered with government institutions and NGOs are in the same difficult situation as other refugees: they have at times been placed in quarters that have not been adapted for living and they have lacked sufficient food and humanitarian aid. However, there were cases where living conditions improved. Here is the story of some Romani refugees from Sloviansk who ended up in Kharkiv:

⁶⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A.P., a volunteer with a Roma grassroots initiative. Zaporizhia, 19 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁶⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with M. Butkevich of the UNHCR office. Kyiv, 19 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁷⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with N., a volunteer with *Stantsiya Kharkiv*. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁷¹ Words of Oksana Yatsenko, head of a media relations group at a migrant transfer point: <http://www.ostro.org/donetsk/society/news/452429/>

“When we arrived in Kharkiv, my children and I immediately registered with *Stantsiya Kharkiv*. We were placed in a building belonging to one of the clubs, but it was very cold and there was no water. It was impossible to live there with children. The locals tried to scare us by saying we would be killed if we stayed there too long. But nothing like that happened. Everyone treated us kindly. The only problems were the cold and the lack of water. There actually wasn’t even any water nearby. At first we were given 100 hryvnia per family, some food, and that’s it, that was the end of the humanitarian aid. But volunteers from *Stantsiya* fed us regularly and even gave us money for medicine from their own pockets. After the club, we were housed in an orphanage in Derhachi. Everything was very nice there. The children were especially happy. They were allowed to play soccer and swim in the river.”⁷²

There were also cases, however, when money ran out and the situation became more acute for the migrants. The Rom A., a refugee from Sloviansk, spoke about a situation like this:

“When we arrived in Novomoskovsk, we immediately applied for migrant status. We were sent to the village of Orlovshchina, where migrants were being housed in a sanatorium. At that time there were practically no spaces in Novomoskovsk. Two other families came with us, for a total of 14 people. Initially we each received a piece of soap and sheets as humanitarian aid. We didn’t refuse and we didn’t ask for anything more, because we knew the situation was complicated. Everything was very nice in the sanatorium: we were fed to the full and the rooms were comfortable enough. But then, two weeks later, we were abruptly thrown out and moved to barracks. That’s when the real nightmare began. It was impossible to live there. The barracks had not been cleaned up, there were no showers or toilets, and rats ran along the floor all night. They stopped feeding us and giving us money. We didn’t receive any payments whatsoever. It was simply terrible. I was on edge this whole time because I was suffering for my children. It didn’t really matter for us, but it’s just dangerous for children to live in these conditions. We had our two 17-year-old girls and two boys, one 14 and the other four. This is probably what caused my breakdown and I was taken to the hospital with preinfarction angina. Now I still need to take pills and go to Novomoskovsk for checkups.”⁷³

According to a survey conducted by Chachimo, a Romani NGO, and volunteers from *Stantsiya Kharkiv*, 67% of Roma surveyed had to spend the night on the street, in the railway station, or in tents in forest areas during their first few days in Kharkiv, and they did not receive any humanitarian aid during this time. For example, one Romani family with many children from Sloviansk was camped in a forest area near Proletarskaya metro station. Their youngest child was two months old at the time. Another family consisting of 19 people (10 children and 9 adults) lived under the open sky for four days in a park near the Kharkiv Tractor Factory without any money to support themselves. Roma migrants could also frequently be found in the railway station in Kharkiv, where they would spend several days at a time in the waiting room.⁷⁴

⁷² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Romani refugee M. Kharkiv, 18 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁷³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A., a Romani activist. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 18 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁷⁴ The survey results were received from N. Burlutsky, head of Chachimo. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014.

Some Roma interviewed by ADC Memorial experts found that there was no money available for them. G., a single mother with three children, fled Sloviansk for Kyiv, where she and her children had to live at the railway station for three months because there was nowhere to move them. When she applied for benefits for her children at a temporary assistance office, she was not received because there was “no money.”⁷⁵ Ukrainian human rights defenders were able to determine that no provisions had been made of offer migrants these kinds of benefits.

All the refugees from the conflict zone have had problems receiving their pensions and allowances. Transferring pensions and allowances to new places of residence takes up a great deal of time, and if the refugees had accounts at PrivatBank, then they weren’t able to access their money at all. N., the mother of three children who fled Luhansk for Merefa, which is outside of Kharkiv, encountered this problem: “By law I am entitled to 2,800 hryvnia a month, but social services said that I would have to pay 1,300 hryvnia to transfer the funds from Luhansk because I am a client of PrivatBank, which does not now operate in the anti-terrorist operation area. In other words, they promised only 1,500 hryvnia, but I wasn’t even able to receive that.”⁷⁶ Maxim Butkevich, a representative of the UNHCR, explained that “depositors of PrivatBank who are IDPs from the occupied territories of the Crimea or from the zone of anti-terrorists operation faced unexpected problems trying to withdraw money from their accounts, even they show documents proving their IDP status in other regions of Ukraine. This practice of refusal in money is common. Banks don’t inform people about legal ways the IDPs can use to withdraw their money.”⁷⁷

Issues Unique to Roma that Make their Situation more Difficult than the Situation of Other Refugees

“Roma come to us all the time. They really drive us crazy.”
(from a conversation with a *Stantsiya Kharkiv* volunteer. Kharkiv)

In addition to the circumstances mentioned above, the situation of Romani migrants is complicated for a number of other reasons. **First of all, their documents are either not in order or missing completely** (a typical problem for Roma in Eastern Europe). This has made it difficult for Roma to leave areas held by separatists and to receive humanitarian aid in the places where they have resettled. According to Yevgenia Levinshteyn, an activist from *Stantsiya Kharkiv*, almost 80% of Roma who have come to this group for help from May to July did not have passports and 45% did not have any identifying documents whatsoever. “They cannot leave the conflict zone without passports, since the numerous checkpoints have strict procedures for checking documents. If they are somehow able to flee to safe regions, then they are not able to receive assistance for the same reason. People don’t want to hire them here and they are frequently denied medical assistance.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Romani refugee G. after her return home. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 17 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁷⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with N., a Romani refugee from Luhansk. Merefa settlement outside of Kharkiv, 18 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁷⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with M. Burkevich of the UNHCR office. Kyiv, 19 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁷⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Yevgeniya Levinshteyn, an activist with *Stantsiya Kharkiv*. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

Second of all, most Roma have little education or are illiterate and cannot determine on their own what kind of assistance they may obtain and where they can obtain it. Without the goodwill of the authorities and sufficient resources from NGOs, Romani migrants are in a more vulnerable position than other refugees.⁷⁹

Third of all, Roma often encounter xenophobia on the part of the general population, officials, and staff and volunteers at refugee organizations. Roma from the conflict zone who are sorely in need of housing encounter problems when they are placed in camps for internal migrants, and also when they try to collect humanitarian aid in Kharkiv (according to testimony given by Roma and volunteers that was recorded by ADC Memorial experts) and Zhytomyr and Cherkaska oblasts (based on information received from Olga Zhmurko of the International Renaissance Foundation). So, for example, according to N., an activist from *Stantsiya Kharkiv*, there were several instances when Slavic families were received in special tents at the railway station where refugees could pick up food and essential items, but Romani families were denied assistance just because they were Romani. Families with many children that applied to social services for assistance were denied allowances for their children or placed on a waiting list where they had to wait three to six months for payments.⁸⁰

The Romani refugee N., the mother of three children who fled Luhansk for Merefa, which is outside of Kharkiv, encountered difficulties receiving public assistance. Workers in Kharkiv refused to give her a boxed lunch several times because of her nationality: “I went to the tent by the August 23 metro station to pick up milk and things for the children a few times, but they said there was nothing left, even though I could see that Ukrainians and Russians were carrying away grits and other items.”⁸¹

In a conversation with ADC Memorial experts, a volunteer from an NGO who was manning a migrant assistance point at the railway station said: “Roma come to us all the time. They really drive us crazy. They don’t beat around the bush. When it’s their turn, they start to choose what they should take. They always have a problem with one item or another, even though other people take what is given to them.” When asked where the Roma were at that time, A. smirked and said: “Well, they’re usually over there, hanging out around the benches, but I don’t see them now. They probably went off to rob someone.”⁸²

According to information received from Olga Zhmurko (International Renaissance Foundation), several instances were recorded where only Romani families were denied assistance in Zolotonosha, Cherkaska Oblast. Even when there were available spots in temporary housing and food and warm clothing to be distributed, staff members responsible for resettlement at humanitarian services refused to receive clients when they learned at the last minute that the clients were Roma. At the same time, Crimean Tatars, for example, never encountered any problems. There were also cases where Roma were denied medical treatment because they did not have documents.⁸³

⁷⁹ According to the NGO Chachimo, 46% of adult Roma arriving in Kharkiv from the conflict zone have no education and only 8% have an elementary education.

⁸⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with N., a volunteer with *Stantsiya Kharkiv*. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁸¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with N., a Romani refugee from Luhansk. Merefa settlement outside of Kharkiv, 18 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁸² Field study materials, Kharkiv, 18 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁸³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Olga Zhmurko, director of the Roma program initiative at the International Renaissance Foundation. Kyiv, 15 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

In early June, the Ukrainian media reported that Valery Burkin, a deputy in the Nikolayev City Council, refused to house Roma who had fled Kramatorsk at a recreation center he owned because of their nationality and that he demanded payment from them for the three days they spent there.⁸⁴ This information was later refuted when it was reported that the local authorities and even Burkin himself were taking active roles in assisting refugees.⁸⁵

Staff members at NGOs list **one other reason that makes it difficult for Romani migrants to receive assistance. That is the distrust Roma** have for other people resulting from the traumatic experiences they had in the conflict zone and the fear they had of dying from shelling or at the hands of armed bandits. For example, Romani refugees who lived through the pogroms in Sloviansk refused to speak with the press or human rights defenders in Kharkiv because they feared that the attention would lead to an attack by nationalists or other aggressors. Yevgeniya Levinshteyn, an activist from the NGO *Stantsiya Kharkiv*, which provides assistance without charge to migrants from Eastern Ukraine, reported that none of the Roma with whom she personally worked wanted to separate themselves from the entire group of migrants and tell anyone that they were Roma. “The women were simply afraid to say anything. The men would sometimes let it slip that the separatists forced them out of their homes, beat them, and forced them to dig trenches.”⁸⁶

Thus, Romani refugees from Donetsk, Luhansk, Kramatorska, Sloviansk, and other cities were sometimes deprived of their ability to gain legal status in other regions of Ukraine and realize basic rights guaranteed to internal migrants due a lack of identity documents, a low level of education, the closed nature of Romani communities, insufficient efforts on the part of government agencies, and the failure of various organizations to coordinate their activities.

The Life of Roma after their Return Home

“I was told several times to
take my children and flee from here, since they would
soon return and kill us.”
(The romni M., Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast)

Roma who temporarily left the conflict zone and later returned to places that were still under the control of the separatists report that pro-Russian fighters continue to exhibit lawless and violent behavior. For example, Romani residents of Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast, who fled this area in June 2014, were forced to return to their ruined homes despite the difficult conditions (these Roma had not been able to receive assistance or find work in other regions of Ukraine due to their lack of documents, among other things, and their relatives were not able to support them for long). They report that armed LPR separatists are terrorizing the Romani population of Sverdlovsk by barging into homes, organizing searches, and taking valuable items.⁸⁷

Many Roma who returned to Sloviansk after its liberation found their homes destroyed or badly damaged: the windows had been blown out by explosions and the walls showed marks of the shelling. For example, the house of the Rom A. stood next to a checkpoint manned by

⁸⁴ <https://news.pn/ru/public/108048>

⁸⁵ <http://www.0512.com.ua/news/572483>; <http://www.rp.mk.ua/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/051.pdf>

⁸⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Yevgeniya Levinshteyn, an activist with *Stantsiya Kharkiv*. Kharkiv, 16 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁸⁷ Telephone interview with residents of Sverdlovsk, Luhansk Oblast. 19 February 2015.

separatists, which was under constant fire from the air. Most of the shells, however, fell on neighboring homes and other structures.

“It turned out that while we were living in Novomoskovsk, DPR fighters had lived in our house. When we arrived, we found the place in terrible condition. It was a mess inside: dirt, shells and syringes on the floor, holes in the roof. Not one radiator was left on the first or second floors. They had all been torn off the walls. I don’t know what they did with them, sold them probably. We fixed it up a bit. My wife went to the Municipal Executive Council to ask for help, but they refused. I’m renting it out now because I’m frankly scared to live there. A military base and the Karachunovskaya TV tower, which was destroyed, are right next door. There’s shooting there now, day and night.”⁸⁸

The Romni M., who returned to Sloviansk with her family in late August, found that his house had been ransacked and that there was evidence of a fire. She and other women told experts that “partisans” were operating in the city at night because they could hear shots and explosions. M. reported that after she returned home she was told several times by some “serious people” that Roma should leave Sloviansk as quickly as possible and take their children with them, since “they’ll be back soon and then will definitely kill everyone. We feel sorry for your children.”⁸⁹ These people were most likely referring to the fact that the separatists might return.

That said, Roma have also been the victims of violence and blackmail committed under the guise of pro-Ukrainian rhetoric:

“About three weeks ago, our friend, a Rom, went out for groceries. As he was walking around the market, he bumped into the same people three times. He bought everything he needed and went home. Along the way, he was cut off by a car. The same four people he had seen at the market got out of it. They were all wearing camouflage pants and tracksuit tops. They dragged him out of his car and asked him why he was there and not defending his country. This question was followed by slurs and a beating. They threatened to take him to the municipal police department. From there, he would be sent to the front unless he paid them 2,000 hryvnia. He called his wife, who called me. We collected 1,000 hryvnia from his family and friends, but that wasn’t enough for them to release him.”⁹⁰

Roma who return to Sloviansk fear attacks by Ukrainian soldiers, who, in their opinion, blame the Roma for the fact that many of the city’s residents participated in the referendum and voted to join Russia.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A., a Romani activist, after he returned home. Sloviansk, 18 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁸⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with the Romni M., who fled Sloviansk for Kharkiv and later returned home. Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast, 17 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁹⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A., a Romani activist after he returned home. Sloviansk, 18 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁹¹ From interviews conducted with Roma who returned to Sloviansk after involuntary resettlement. 18 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

Thus, an atmosphere of xenophobia and violence continues to reign in Sloviansk. The Roma who have returned home believe there may be a chance that they will have to flee to other regions again.

The Fate of Kotlyar Roma Migrants from Settlements in Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odessa Oblasts

“In the store I say: ‘I am a refugee.’ And the clerk says: ‘What do you mean, a refugee? You’re a gypsy! Now the people who live near me – they’re refugees, they receive assistance. But gypsies just aren’t refugees.’” (Yegor M., Stary Oskol)

“The situation in Donetsk is critical. There’s no longer a Donetsk *tabor*, everyone has left for their relatives.” (Sh.O., Stary Oskol)

“We left everything in Ukraine – our homes, our land, but life is worth more than anything.” (Marfa M., a refugee from outside of Mariupol, Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast)

In interviews conducted in October – December 2014 by human rights defenders with Kotlyar Roma from settlements in the Budennovsk (Yevdokiivka) and Kirov districts of Donetsk, these Roma described how all of the 25 – 30 families in these settlements left them to join crowded settlements of their relatives in Russia, mainly in the period from April to August 2014. These field studies were carried out in RF border oblasts (the settlement of Bolshoye Polpino (Bryansk); Bataysk (Rostov Oblast); the settlement of Ozerki (Stary Oskol, Belgorod Oblast)) and in areas far-removed from the war zone where Roma have ended up after several moves (the village of Pasechki (Lipetsk); Yegoryevsk (Moscow Oblast); and the settlement of Naugolnoye (Sergiyev-Posad District, Moscow Oblast)). Additionally, the Roma settlement of Makedonovka pod Mariupol, whose residents fled to Russia, was also in the war zone. Residents of this area were interviewed in Bataysk and Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast.

Roma who rushed to flee Ukraine left behind their homes and property and suffered great material losses. For example, the settlement in Donetsk was fairly successful, at least the migrants interviewed for this report appeared to be living comfortably. Many had large homes equipped with gas and water lines and heating systems. Then they had to abandon their appliances and furniture or sell everything for next to nothing.

Most people interviewed did not return to Ukraine. Some Roma who did travel to Donetsk for their belongings in August 2014 reported that their train was late getting into Donetsk because of shelling.⁹² Romani homes suffered from shelling and looting, which their owners learned of from neighbors who stayed behind in Donetsk and also from videos uploaded to the internet.⁹³ The victims recounted:

“...We didn’t wait around, we just picked up and left. What was there to wait for? For them to come and kill us? Our homes had just been bombed. We left our keys with the neighbor and took her phone number. We called, she said that our windows were broken, that they stole the heating system, the doors, the refrigerators. They stole

Примечание [02]: The videos listed in the footnote have been removed from YouTube.

⁹² Testimony given by Izaura M. and Iolanta M. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁹³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afW4b7oGseg>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6eRFZKEv5E>; the links were active at least in January, 2015.

everything that could be sold, the hardware, everything. Her father's [pointing to her niece] home was flattened. A bomb fell on the house next door. Even the glass shattered from the impact."⁹⁴

"...The house that my grandson built on the side was new. It had gas, water, light, a radiator system, everything. When they went the second time, he removed the radiators, removed 2 or 3 floorboards and put the radiators under the floor. But he made one mistake: they thought that everything would end soon and that we would go home, so he didn't pour the water out of them. So I don't know, it's about to get cold and these radiators, the furnace, everything will burst. It's terrible."⁹⁵

"...People who left after us [in May 2014] said that helicopters were already flying over houses, that pro-Russian fighters were arriving. They set up a Katyusha rocket launcher and started firing at the Ukrainians. They expected a counterattack, so they quickly retreated. They're just covering a point, what difference does it make who lives there – Russians or Roma? They also left in time, abandoned their houses. The pro-Russian fighters were living in their homes."⁹⁶

"...We left in March, March 8. There was fighting going on not far from us, in Konstantinovsky District. That started after New Year's. And it started in Konstantinovka, Kramatorsk back in December. We literally dropped everything and left, but our relatives stayed. I called them: 'What should we do? We want to come back.' We hadn't started building yet at that time. We were living in the garage of our relatives. They said: 'No, no, no! We're getting ready to leave ourselves. Things are getting very serious. Right in our very settlement. There are tanks and everything.' Budenny District. Right in front of our very house was a paper mill, a factory. There was a large square, you could see the tanks, the armored vehicles standing there, right in front of our home. A shell fell – here's our house, here's my son's house, and the shell fell on the next street. Andrey's home had a lot of damage and our windows flew out from the wave of the explosion. We didn't suffer so much from the bombs as we did from the looters. They carried everything out of the house, they stole everything."⁹⁷

Kotlyar Roma from settlements further away from the conflict zone also moved to Russia. Human rights defenders visited Kotlyar migrants from Odessa Oblast in Belgorod Oblast (Shishino, Korochansky District). Romani families from the settlement of Novonikolayevka (Verkhnedneprovsky District, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast) moved to live with relatives in Rostov Oblast (Mokry Batay, Kagalnitsky District); Voronezh Oblast (Yamnoe and Novozhivotnoye settlements, Ramonsky District); and Moscow Oblast. They explained that fears that the war would reach their settlement were what caused them to leave:

⁹⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Pkhabay M., who fled Donetsk on 8 March 2014. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁹⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Kombiri M., a refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁹⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Maxim M., who fled Donetsk on 8 March 2014. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁹⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., who fled Donetsk on 8 March 2014. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

“There was no fighting in Dnipropetrovsk, but we were frightened. We left early; we decided not to wait for the chaos to come. It would come anyway – Donetsk is only 200 – 250 kilometers from Dnipropetrovsk, just a hop, skip, and a jump away. You can’t tell me the war wouldn’t come. Of course it would. Why wait? So that’s how everyone left.”⁹⁸

Kotlyars are a specific group of Roma. They govern themselves, live in crowded communities (unlike many other Roma groups), and speak the Kalderash dialect of the Romani language. After the so-called “decree on nomadism” was adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR in 1956 and Roma’s nomadic way of life was criminalized, crowded Kotlyar settlements (called *tabory* by the Roma themselves and by their neighbors) started to emerge. Later these settlements expanded to include new homes for new families, and other relatives migrating from other *tabory* joined the settlement. But sometimes for various reasons the *tabory* would split up and all the residents would pull up their stakes to form new settlements or join existing ones. There are now Kotlyar Roma *tabory* in Russia (over 100), Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Lithuania, as well as more recent settlements in Belarus and Latvia. Kotlyar men traditionally worked with metal and sold metal wares. They have more recently started collecting and reselling scrap metal.

“The men came up with the idea of buying scrap metal from grandmothers and grandfathers and selling it for a little more so that something was left over to feed their families.”⁹⁹

Kotlyar Roma maintained a close connection with relatives living in other regions, even after the fall of the Soviet Union and the appearance of new state borders. But the problems residents in these crowded settlements throughout former Soviet countries face are similar and include improperly executed identity documents, housing that does not conform to modern standards, a low level of education, and poverty.

According to Kotlyar Roma from Donetsk, their settlements appeared in this area almost 25 years ago when families from *tabory* in Nizhny Novgorod (then Gorky) and Bryansk moved there. They were drawn to Donetsk because of its status as an industrial center where they would have more success producing and selling their wares. Unlike “classical” *tabory*, which consist of several streets populated exclusively by Roma, or can even be separate settlements or villages, the Kotlyar in Donetsk lived among members of the majority (“a Roma home is a Russian home”). Nevertheless, their traditions, language, architecture, lifestyle, and form of self-government ties the Donetsk Kotlyar and other Kotlyars in Ukraine to their fellow Kotlyar living near Saratov, Bryansk, Ekaterinburg, and other Russian cities.

“I was born in Ekaterinburg, which was Sverdlovsk at the time. I’ve lived in Ukraine for 25 years. My oldest son was born in Nizhny Novgorod (Gorky). The two younger ones are Ukrainians. [And why did you decide to move to Ukraine specifically?] Well, it was the Soviet Union! You see, it was 1987, it was the Soviet Union, Donetsk

⁹⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with M., a migrant from Novonikolayevka, Verkhnedneprovsky District, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Recorded at the Novozhivotinnoye settlement, Ramonsky District, Voronezh Oblast on 27 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

⁹⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Pkhabay M., a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

was a mining town. When we arrived here we felt like we had somehow ended up abroad. You could buy meat, sausage, everything, with 10 Soviet rubles. All the stores had everything – just dig in! The supply of food was very good, just like in Moscow. Other regions didn't have anything like this. Moscow was well-supplied, Saint Petersburg too. We traveled all over Russia and there was nothing to eat. But when we got to Donetsk we were astounded by how much of everything there was. We started opening up cooperatives – and this was in Gorbachev's time. Our work was in metal. We fenced in territories, those 50 m³ Rozhnov towers for the kolkhozes that held fuel, water, whatever you wanted. And there were factories there."¹⁰⁰

In conversations with experts, Roma migrants regularly compared their previous life in Ukraine to the current situation of refugees in Russia. It is no wonder that these refugees idealized their life and living conditions in Donetsk (possibility of receiving pensions and benefits, prosperity), even though they also experienced problems typical for crowded Romani settlements, like incomplete school education. But the Roma surveyed did not complain about being discriminated against in Ukraine.

“Everything was good for us in Ukraine, life was good. It was simpler, both with the authorities and with documents. I can't say that Ukraine is a terrible country. No, it's just that the leaders aren't great. Our homes were rich. I'm telling you, they treat people with respect if they're Roma. There's nothing like that there, I mean, that someone wouldn't treat you the right way. But in Storozhevke [Saratov Oblast, where the refugees initially moved] I was told directly: 'No one will even give you a piece of bread here.' It's easier for our brothers in Ukraine to survive.”¹⁰¹

Migrants in seemingly trouble-free Moscow Oblast also noted a dramatic deterioration in their lives:

“Everything was good for us at home. We lived, we had everything. We received our pensions and benefits for our children, our husbands were working. We lived like regular people. And now they've turned us into homeless people. If someone gives us a rag, we rejoice. And we used to live well.”¹⁰²

Even poor young people are nostalgic for their lives in Ukraine:

“I had my documents. I went where I wanted. I received benefits for my children, I paid for all my utilities, and I still had some money left over to buy them something else. Well, at least from paycheck to paycheck.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁰¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁰² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Gygyda M., an elderly woman and refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁰³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Pkhabay M., a refugee from Donetsk and the young mother of two children. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

Even Roma who are Russian citizens living in Ukraine believed they had settled down nicely:

“My daughter-in-law has a Russian passport and she had a residence permit for Ukraine, but no one harassed her because of her Russian passport. She didn’t have any problems at all.”¹⁰⁴

The situation for Roma migrants in Russia is extremely difficult. They may have problems with documents and may experience risks associated with illegal status (detention, expulsion). It is impossible for them to obtain material, social, or medical assistance, pensions, or other benefits, and their living conditions are terrible because they left their previous homes without any belongings and had to abandon their valuable property or sell it for almost nothing.

Problems Crossing the Border

“We don’t understand these policies.
We don’t understand why Putin needs Donetsk and Luhansk!”
(M., a refugee from outside Mariupol,
Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast)

The Roma left their places of residence at different times. For example, some families left Donetsk in March, while others left later, in late May, before there was any combat in the immediate area:

“We could hear military planes flying over us, helicopters. We couldn’t see them, but we heard them. We didn’t wait for them to attack, we decided to leave.”¹⁰⁵

The Roma left without hardly any belongings because it was impossible to carry a lot of baggage on trains and buses, and even cars were packed with large families and many children. The belongings they did manage to take with them were checked carefully on both sides of the border because of suspicions that the Roma were bringing weapons through.

“We got through pretty much without any problems. That was possible at the time we crossed. Well, I mean, they checked us very carefully, with dogs, they dragged out all our things, everything that we had gathered for the children. They checked us on the Ukrainian side and on the Russian side. They seemed to understand that we were refugees, that we were fleeing, we said that right away. They didn’t make a fuss about our documents. They just checked that we weren’t bringing in anything bad like weapons or something like that. I mean, they might have thought that we were Banderites [this term refers to members of pro-Western parties in Ukraine] and were entering Russia to do something, to commit an act of terrorism. And we explained to them that we were

¹⁰⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Nikolay M., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁰⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., who fled Donetsk in late May 2014. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

refugees, that we were fleeing to save ourselves. That we were civilians, that we were running from all that.”¹⁰⁶

According to the Roma, the Russian border guards treated them with discrimination when inspecting their cars and belongings:

“We entered on May 28. We were in cars carrying pillows and blankets. I sent part of our group by train. There were 11 people in my car, with children, 6 small children. And at Matveyev Kurgan, it just seemed like suddenly they would not to let us in on principle and that was that. It was specifically the Russians. I said to them: What, is this racial discrimination? They even looked for contraband in my bread! I had 4 or 5 pillows in my trunk. I threw them right onto the road – here, tear those up and see what I’m carrying. They let us through without any problems on the Ukrainian side.”¹⁰⁷

Residents of Makedonovki abandoned their homes in late August 2014 when fighting was already underway in the suburbs of Mariupol. Roman M. reported that in order to leave the area he had to follow a circuitous route towards Kharkov, since the shorter route was blocked by Ukrainian soldiers. They had to wait five hours at the border crossing because of the large number of refugees.¹⁰⁸

Crossing the border was particularly harrowing for Marfa M. and her family of 7 children and 7 adults. They had to flee Makedonovki unexpectedly. “We were told that Mariupol was going to be bombed in two hours and that the war was coming from there.” Marfa’s family took a shuttle van to Melitopol, and then boarded a train and, later, a ferry. But when they were crossing the border, they had a problem because they did not have a birth certificate for their four-month-old son Ibrahim. They only had a certificate from the maternity hospital. Ukrainian soldiers refused to let the baby through without the correct documents and it seemed to the family that the border guards were proposing that they leave the baby and enter Russia without him, then return for him later. The parents immediately understood that the infant would be “released to the authorities,” so Rishche, Ibrahim’s father, was forced to return to Mariupol, where he was able to have a birth certificate issued. It was with sadness that he described Mariupol as “a dead city, which was once very alive.” Meanwhile, the remaining family members crossed the border before Rishche returned and were able to take Ibrahim with them. They claim that National Guard soldiers agreed to let them through, that soldiers for the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) also let them through and that in the end they were allowed to enter “as refugees.” Rishche himself had trouble with Ukrainian soldiers because of his Russian passport, which he had never changed, even after 15 years in Ukraine. Rishche reported that the Ukrainians initially treated him with hostility: “Ukrainians despise Russians, but when they heard that I am a Rom, they calmed down.” It was a long time before Rishche was allowed through the Ukrainian border post, and he was fined for “travelling illegally” (he did not have a Russian migration card, which was impossible for him to obtain because the computer at the

¹⁰⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Pkhabay M., who fled Donetsk on 8 March 2014. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁰⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁰⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Roman M., a refugee from outside Mariupol. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

Russian border point was not working. As if that weren't enough, Rishche experienced real terror when Ukrainian soldiers would not let him through the "Mariupol outpost" and threatened to "take him to the airport," where, according to the Roma interviewed, a Ukrainian military base was located from which "there was no return." Rishche's family, especially Marfa, panicked when Rishche told them that the soldiers wanted to send him to this base. But after a shift change, the soldiers changed their minds. While Rishche was waiting for a chance to pass through, he was overcome with sympathy for the Ukrainian soldiers. He bought them some gingerbread and a bottle of water because "the soldiers were only 18 or 20 years old. They were hungry. Their helmets were too big for their heads. They were little, these soldiers. Some people buy vodka for them because it is cold to spend the entire night on guard."¹⁰⁹

The refugees were informed that they could not take more than 30 kg of baggage with them. This was based on the suspicion that the Roma were looters and were taking stolen items out of the country.

"We left everything at home, our furniture, everything. We didn't even take pillows and blankets because we would be accused of looting. We only took things for the children and now we don't even have anything to cover ourselves with."¹¹⁰

"We left before May 9. We were not able to take anything with us. We only took the television, and the customs officials still made us pay for it. The head said: 'Only 30 kg per person,' but how are you supposed to take the rest? We were leaving forever, or at least for a very long time."¹¹¹

According to witnesses, some cars were not allowed to cross the border because of outstanding car loans (although apparently this was also connected with the fact that only the owner of a car may enter Russia in that car if the car is registered in another country).

"There were outstanding loans from Private Bank on two of the cars, so these cars were turned back, they were not allowed through. This was at the Matveyev Kurgan checkpoint. The cars then went to another checkpoint, literally 20 km away, and they were let through."¹¹²

Some Roma found that Russian border guards did not properly execute the documents for their entry into Russia:

"The Russians didn't even stamp my son's immigration card. And when I was trying to deal with things in Rostov, when I was trying to apply for assistance, I looked and saw that my son's documents were missing that stamp. I called customs and said:

¹⁰⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Marfa M. and her son, Rishche, refugees from Makedonovka, outside of Mariupol. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014, ADC Memorial archives.

¹¹⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with a young woman named N., a refugee from Makedonovka, outside of Mariupol. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014, ADC Memorial archives.

¹¹¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Svetlana M., a refugee from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹¹² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

‘You let us in illegally, what am I supposed to do?’ They said I should come to them. That’s 125 km there and 125 km back. Who is going to pay for my gas? But I had to go. Then I called their main office, put some pressure on them, so that they were waiting for me and stamped my documents. And they didn’t even write out migration cards for the children. It was only later that the children were added to their mother’s card.”¹¹³

Treatment of Refugees in Russia

“You’re with Crimea and we’re without homes. All this is because of your Crimea.”
(V.M., Lipetsk)

Kotlyar Roma from Ukraine are more closely aligned with Russia. This is because of their place of birth (members of the older generations were born there) and their family ties with Russian *tabory*. It is also because they regularly travelled to Russia to work and because they lived in Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine, where they watched Russian television and remained under Russia’s influence. When the subjects interviewed revealed any political position, it was usually pro-Russian. In particular, they did not welcome Maidan, they supported pro-Russian demonstrations held in Donetsk, they voted in a referendum for joining Russia, and they did not even consider the possibility of being mobilized to join the Ukrainian army and fight the separatists. This only served to deepen their disappointment with the treatment of Roma by the authorities and the population in general.

Below are a number of witness accounts of this disappointment that were expressed in discussions between Roma refugees and ADC Memorial experts:

“...We thought that the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Luhansk People’s Republic would join Russia just like Crimea. We weren’t against this at first. We even went to the referendums. So it hurts. When we ended up having to come here, everyone turned away from us when it came down to race.”¹¹⁴

“...We suffer for the same Crimea that is with Russia. Everything is going well for them, but we were isolated because of this Crimea. Luhansk and Donetsk were also screaming: Russia, Russia! So they bomb Luhansk and Donetsk for that. We also came out onto the squares. Everything was quiet, we went back and forth, nothing happened. There were demonstrations, there were demonstrations every day.”¹¹⁵

“...Russia said that the Crimea was taken without a shot, and we shouted ‘Russia, Russia!’ at the referendum, but it turned out that Donetsk and Luhansk were marginal.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., a refugee Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹¹⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with K.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

The Roma who initially migrated from Donetsk to Saratov Oblast, where their relatives lived in the Storozhevka settlement, were traumatized by the authorities' indifference to refugees and their problems and especially by the negative feelings "simple people" had towards Roma in everyday situations, including in the service sphere, where assistance must be offered to anyone without bias.

"...To tell you the truth, I feel wronged here. Not just by the government, but by the people. They saw a Rom – that means he must be destroyed, he must be killed. Here Roma are discriminated against because of their race. One day I was at the hairdresser. I was waiting in line. Two Romani women walked in. One was a bride getting ready for her wedding. The other was her friend. They were just finishing up with the friend, then the two women paid and left. After that, the head hairdresser said: 'That second gypsy was standing by the radiator. She stuck her hand behind it – go see what's there.' What could she possibly have put there or taken from there? But I didn't say anything. I was already in my white cape. You wouldn't guess from my appearance that I'm Roma. And the hairdresser was saying 'How sick I am of these gypsies. What a repugnant people. She would have been better off having a bath than coming to the hairdresser for a haircut.' What she meant was that the woman was dark-skinned. Then I said, 'Do you know her, that young woman, that bride? Are we really going to speak that way? Why do you have such an opinion of people? Why did you insult her? Why were you talking about her like that? I am also a Roma by nationality. What, do you discriminate against Roma?' She said: 'I'm sorry.' I said, 'I don't need your apologies. But I feel ashamed that you are insulting my race.' They despise Roma in Saratov."¹¹⁷

Treatment of Roma Refugees by Russian Government Authorities

"In Saratov, we went around to see different bureaucrats. We saw how they treat people and didn't even bother going. We're closer to Moscow here, but the treatment is even worse." (Kombiri M., Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast)

Roma migrants have been treated poorly by the Russian authorities. People interviewed said they were openly told that they would be denied assistance. According to the Roma, this kind of refusal, which came from officials in Saratov and Moscow oblasts, was motivated by the fact that they did not apply for refugee status or temporary asylum, so regional quotas on migrants were not applicable to them and they could not be sent to a different region.

"When refugees pass through customs, they are registered as refugees. But our Roma didn't do that. They just crossed the border, got their migration cards, and that's it. In other words, they didn't say anywhere that they were refugees. That's why they are viewed the way they are. You're Roma, not refugees. You have a place to stay. Your people will find you and that's it. Here is the question they have. On television they

¹¹⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

promise us the moon. But none of it is true. None of it. That's why we don't apply as refugees. We simply apply as citizens to cross the border into Russia.”¹¹⁸

Local authorities have started to use Government Resolution No. 691, which sets the rules for relocating refugees throughout regions of Russia, as an excuse for not taking any action: without formal grounds for receiving migrants, they have stopped taking any measures at all. It's important to note that the migrants surveyed view the very principle of “quotas” that may send refugees from Ukraine to distant regions of Russia with skepticism. These migrants are accustomed to living in a community. They do not want to be separated from their families and neighbors, to divide up large families, or to travel to places that do not have Roma settlements. There is also another reason why Roma do not apply for refugee status or temporary asylum:

“First we went to the local administration of Tatishchevo, Storozhevka District, Saratov Oblast. They said, no one can help you with anything here. There were 30 of us living in one house, which wasn't even fully built. It was OK as long as it was warm, but there was no heat in the house. And we didn't receive any assistance from the authorities. They even told us directly that ‘No one here will even give you a crumb of bread, no one will do anything for you. What makes you think that we have to help you?’ I went all the way up to the administration of Saratov Oblast, to the deputy governor. ‘There's no fund for you. That's because you are disorganized refugees. You did not leave in an organized manner and you weren't sent here.’ In other words, we didn't write down refugee status or temporary asylum. But if we had done that we would have immediately been taken to a camp. We would have waited for a bus, boarded that bus, and then – straight off to Vorkuta! Wouldn't that have been great?”¹¹⁹

Employees at the local Red Cross used this same lack of regional quotas on refugees and migrants to explain their reasons for denying assistance to Roma, although it would seem that a charitable organization should not have these kinds of restrictions.

“We went there for help, to some organization, the Red Cross, but they didn't offer us any assistance. They said, we're not going to give you any assistance or do anything for you because you don't have an order for Yegoryevsk. They said, go back to Moscow. They said, go anywhere, just not here. You, they said, are not refugees.”¹²⁰

The authorities have contrived other pretexts to justify their failure to act. In particular, they have reproached Roma for not taking up arms on the side of the separatists. So these refugees, who were already in an extremely vulnerable position, were also forced to respond to these types of accusations. The elderly leader of a *tabor* in Donetsk, who was accustomed to assuming responsibility for the well-being of other members of the Roma community, bitterly

¹¹⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Mikhail M. Yamnoye settlement, Ramonsky District, Voronezh Oblast, 27 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹¹⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹²⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Gygyda M., an elderly woman and refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

recounted the following conversation he had with the head of the local administration in Saratov Oblast:

“You know, we went to the village council in Saratov, my son-in-law went, and the chairman of the council, the head of it, said: ‘Why did you come here? Why didn’t you pick up a gun and go fight?’ But who would take care of the children? Who would save them? Or should we have left our adult children in the middle of a war? And fight for which side? For what? Those Poroshenko’s, those oligarchs, Kolomoysky, they’re fighting for money, that’s what they’re fighting for. And what do we have to fight for? Death and nothing more?”¹²¹

A typical response that Roma received to requests to at least help their children was: “I have my own children.” This shows that officials are not able to separate their personal interests from the public good and are convinced that their main function is to preserve what is “theirs” from the encroachment of newcomers.

“An official in the administration said: ‘I have children and I don’t have any money.’ And I said to him: ‘I’m not asking you for money, I’m asking the Russian government. We came to Russia because we were fleeing war. We voted for Russia in the referendum.’ We went to the health department to ask for insurance policies and to get insulin and they told us: ‘We don’t have money in Russia, we have our own children.’”¹²²

Thus, the Russian authorities have managed to abandon their obligation to help the Roma. Many Roma gratefully recall the Saratov businessman who provided refugees with temporary housing, food products, and other essential items. But the authorities reproached this man for supporting refugees and tried to place their responsibilities onto him:

“A businessman in Saratov helped up – he gave us food, diapers, other items, a place to stay. When we went to the FMS for our documents, they told him: ‘You’re housing them, so you look after them!’”¹²³

Without any government or charitable aid, Roma migrants have had to depend only on themselves and their relatives in crowded Kotlyar Roma settlements in Russia. The difficulties related to the overall situation of migrants were only compounded by the extremely poor conditions of life in a *tabor*, where the absolute majority of homes are not up to code and there are no sewer systems, water or gas pipes, or safe and legal connections to electricity. Limited resources of relatives and the total absence of government support led to the further impoverishment of the migrants and forced them to continue in their wanderings. For example, families who first tried to settle outside of Rostov had to move to Saratov Oblast and then to Belgorod and Moscow oblasts, where they were finally able to find a place to settle with their relatives. And once migrants have had a negative experience working with officials in one

¹²¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Kombirii M., a refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

region, they say that they find it a senseless waste of time and energy to ask for help in another region.

Roma and the FMS: Legal Dead Ends

“We’re not saying ‘give us money.’ We don’t need those 900 rubles per person. We don’t need that money, those diapers, any of that stuff. We need help with documents. Give us a registration document for three months, until the war there quiets down, until things calm down at the border. Then we can do something for ourselves.”

(Pkhabay M., Lipetsk)

One of the main problems for Roma migrants is obtaining documents that make it legal for them to stay in Russia. As shown above, it is difficult to receive government assistance even if the applicant is requesting refugee status or temporary asylum, has been received by FMS offices, and is following the proper procedures. In the case of Roma migrants, their situation is complicated by the biased attitude of the local population and government officials; a low level of education, which makes it hard for Roma to understand migration rules on their own; and the fact that no additional measures are taken to distribute information aimed at uneducated people. As a result, most of the Roma migrants interviewed did not try to initiate the procedure for receiving refugee status or temporary asylum, which would give them the right to remain in Russia for more than 90 days.

The Roma themselves give several explanations for their failure to apply for refugee status or temporary asylum. First of all, they say that border authorities never informed them of this possibility. According to the subjects, special refugee camps where migrants could receive advice and be sent to Russian regions (known by the Roma as “tents”) had not been created at the time when they crossed the border. Second of all, the migrants did not expect the conflict to grow into an actual war, so they hoped that they would be able to return home quickly.

“We should have indicated ‘temporary asylum,’ but we made a mistake out of ignorance, and the customs officials didn’t let us know. Why didn’t we stop at a refugee camp? But there was no camp like that when we left on May 28. We thought we’d be gone a week or two, maybe a month. We didn’t think it would work out like this.”¹²⁴

Some migrants regretted that they did not apply for refugee status right away, even though they understand that this would have eliminated the possibility of traveling to Ukraine. Some people hoped to sell the property that they left in Donetsk, so they did not want to receive this status, even though they were in Russia as illegal migrants.

“We didn’t bother applying for any status because then our passports would have been confiscated. And we want to go back, at least to sell our houses.”¹²⁵

To a great extent the Roma’s failure to apply for status can be explained by their lack of understanding of migration law (for example, they do not understand the difference between

¹²⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹²⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Yegor M., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

refugee status and the status of an individual seeking temporary asylum), incorrect information they have received (for example, that they would not be able to enter Ukraine if they received Russian citizenship), the fact that they do not know what kinds of rights refugees have, etc. The elderly “baron” of a *tabor* in Donetsk, whose house was damaged by shelling, understood the situation in this way:

“We wanted to receive temporary status so we could get a health insurance policy. But they say that if I become a Russian citizen, I won’t be able to enter Ukraine for three years. And even if things settle down there and I need to sell my home, I can’t leave it like that, it’s all makeshift. And that house that was bombed, I need to repair it. Give it a year or two, I’ll repair it. But since I’m applying for these documents, I won’t be allowed back.”¹²⁶

Roma who would have liked to apply for refugee status or temporary asylum were not able to do this on their own because of their ignorance and poverty, and the FMS did not offer them any assistance. For example, Sveta M., a refugee from Donetsk, asserts that she and her family members applied for status in Bataysk but were not able to handle the complicated procedure: “We had to go here and there, go into Rostov, and we had no money for this.”¹²⁷

Expired Migrant Cards: The Result of Failure to Apply for Status

“They said: ‘What kind of refugees are you? You came for a visit.’ I’d like to see them go on a visit like this! I wouldn’t wish this on my worst enemy”

(Kombiri M., Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast)

Since Roma migrants did not apply for refugee status or temporary asylum, the FMS, the police, and other agencies viewed them as “common” migrants” from visa-free countries in the same position as labor migrants from former Soviet countries. In order to have the right to work legally in Russia, they must be registered at their place of stay and have a permit or license for work.¹²⁸ If migrants do not have these documents, they must leave Russia at the end of 90 days and may only reenter Russia after another 90-day period, which they must spend outside of Russia.

Thus, Roma migrants have found themselves trapped in a legal dead end. They did not apply for temporary asylum or refugee status, so they have no legal grounds for an extended stay in Russia. They also cannot return to Ukraine for the 90-day period and then reenter Russia

¹²⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Kombirii M., a refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹²⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Svetlana M., a refugee from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹²⁸ The existing licensing system for migrant workers from visa-free countries was changed as of the beginning of 2015. Now a migrant worker can work for both individuals and legal entities after filling out the paperwork for the license and making monthly payments on it (which vary depending on region). The worker can also remain in Russia for up to one year and then extend the license without leaving Russia. Prior to this change, migrant workers holding licenses could only work for individuals. In order to work for legal entities, workers needed a work permit for up to one year (or three years for Tajik nationals). In order to extend a license or permit, they had to leave Russia and go through the process of obtaining all the necessary documents again.

because of the fighting there, but this is the only way they can acquire new migration cards. Many of them have only expired migration cards.

Roma migrants truly do want to live in Russia without violating migration rules. However, they often find themselves in complicated situations because of a lack of information, low education level, difficulty understanding migration and other rules on their own, and the absence of any counseling from RF state agencies. For example:

Santa M. left Dnipropetrovsk Oblast for Podmoskovye, where she gave birth to a little girl and was issued a medical certificate at the maternity hospital. She tried to obtain a birth certificate for the child, but she was not able to figure out how to do this and officials at the appropriate agencies assured her that the birth certificate had to be issued in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the term of her migration card expired and in October 2014 she tried to leave for Ukraine with her husband, eldest child, and grandmother Luludi Bratyanovna. Naturally, the Russian border guards did not let them through because the medical certificate of birth was the only document that the infant had and it could not be used to cross the border. The family was forced to return to Russia. Because they had spent so much money on this pointless trip, they were only able to travel as far as a settlement outside Voronezh, where they had relatives living. Their migration cards had expired.¹²⁹

Roma migrants are under enormous pressure and fear being stopped for document checks, detained by the police, and deported. Women frequently try to limit their movements and stay within the confines of the Romani settlement:

“We all have expired migration cards and need to go back across the border, but what if we get shot at? Have you seen what’s going on there? And I’m going to lose my entire family because of these three months! My card expired on March 8. So if I go right now to the market to buy something for my child, I’ll be detained by the police. What will I say to them? That I’m a refugee and can’t get through customs? He won’t understand that and he’ll put me behind bars. How will my children manage? How? So where can I go? I don’t go anywhere. I sit at home. If they see a Rom, they’ll pick me up right away, since they don’t love us. And they’re very strict about documents here in Russia. They’ll deport us, send us back, but what if there’s a war there again? We’ll stay like this for five years.”¹³⁰

Some men were able to obtain licenses, but they were not able to pay for them in time, so the licenses expired after a certain period. The women became “illegals” at the end of their first three months in Russia. They did not obtain licenses because they take care of the home and, naturally, their children did not either because, since they do not have the right to work under the law, they cannot obtain licenses. One Romani refugee who tried to obtain legal status as a migrant worker, said:

¹²⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Luludi Bratyanovna M. and other members of her family, who are migrants from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Yamnoye settlement, Ramonsky District, Voronezh Oblast, 27 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹³⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Pkhabay M., a refugee from Donetsk and the young mother of two children. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

“We work here, we pay taxes. I had a license, my son had a license for construction, we each paid 1200 every month. Well, of course the women and children don’t have licenses. But I’ll say something about that license again. We earned some money on the side and made our payments. It’s winter now, there’s no work, and we’re not making payments on that license. Those payments are past due. We just ran out of money. We have tons of debts. We’re now illegal, too, along with the women and children.”¹³¹

Documents for cars with Ukrainian registrations also expire within three months of entry and are not cheap to renew. The young men S.M. and R.M. reported that they were fined for expired customs documents for automobiles (8,000 rubles) and for driving with Ukrainian licenses (15,000 rubles) and that their cars were towed.¹³² Sabano M. reported that he was fined 15,000 rubles in Rostov for an expired automobile registration.¹³³

It cannot be said that the Romani population from Donetsk avoids migration control agencies, but most Roma lack the ability to handle the migration process on their own. Many subjects just cannot understand what status it is that they need to apply for. But from what we heard from subjects like members of V.M.’s large family living on the outskirts of Lipetsk, it does appear that they have started procedures to apply for temporary residence permits as opposed to refugee status or temporary asylum because registration at place of residence is required for this.

It was specifically due to difficulties obtaining registration at place of residence that the procedure the migrants had started stalled, even though they submitted their applications and photographs to the FMS and were fingerprinted. The problem is that in Russian *tabory*—and the settlement on the outskirts of Lipetsk is typical in this respect—only several houses out of dozens are properly registered. This causes a tremendous problem with temporary registration at place of residence: there is no one to obtain it from because there is no house register listing tenants.¹³⁴ According to members of V.M.’s family, their relatives had a house register, but the owner is still listed as V.M.’s deceased father-in-law and the younger family members did not officially inherit the property or change the registration to their names. The subjects noted differences in the organization of the Lipetsk *tabor* and their settlements in Donetsk, where, according to them, their houses were registered according to the rules:

“You see, here people live specifically in a *tabor*. There we lived in a Russian settlement, but every two or three houses were Romani. Here there are 70 or 100 houses, but only five or six families have the right documents for them. We asked the FMS for

¹³¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹³² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with S.M. and R.M., refugees from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹³³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sabano M. Naugolnoye settlement, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹³⁴ The situation with the Roma’s access to adequate housing and issues with crowded Romani settlements are examined in the report “Forced Evictions and the Right to Housing of Roma in Russia.” FIDH and ADC Memorial, 2008; updated in 2011. <http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/forced-evictions-and-the-right-to-housing-of-roma-in-russia-2011?lang=en>

help, but they told us that we had to register with the people that we came to here. But whom to register with? The house was not legally registered under the rules. So we're stuck. We left our fingerprints, ours and our children's, copies of all our documents, we wrote statements, but in the end they told us: you are not registered, not registered and that's it. But there's nowhere to register here. We would be glad to register. Can you really tell me that the FMS doesn't understand what happened? That there's a war, that people were fleeing a war. People were fleeing a war and now they're being marginalized. Who are they supposed to register with? All our papers that were good for three months have expired. What are we supposed to do? It felt like we were accepted well here, but the FMS really gave us the runaround."¹³⁵

Even Roma who have all the correct documents and want to go through the official procedures for obtaining legal status run up against insurmountable obstacles. When they see the contradiction between rhetoric on state television and their own hardships, Roma begin to suspect that local authorities are discriminating against them.

"We applied to the FMS for benefits for our children, for some kind of assistance. And they asked for the house registers. And since there are no house registers, since everyone here lives a nomadic life, no one has documents for their house. We need to show registers in order to register, so that we can show we refugees have someone to stay with for the time being until our documents are processed. But our documents haven't been updated. We asked them to give us some kind of housing, just temporarily, until we work things out, but they said: 'No, first we need a house register, we need a person, an owner with a house register, who can add you to it. And then we will know that you are here and we can come up with some solution.' So we haven't been given anything, even though we expected some sort of assistance. And on television that say that Russians will be helped, but when we get here they give us nothing. Can this really be because of our race? That we're not receiving help because we're Roma? We got here like regular people. As they entered, so did we. How are we worse?"¹³⁶

Roma who moved to Moscow Oblast reported that the FMS required them to find not only homeowners who would agree to register them, but also a "sponsor," who would guarantee the guest's good behavior.¹³⁷ The subjects were not able to clarify which kind of status required this.

Roma from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast who moved to Rostov Oblast reported that they were not able to register their children because their children were of Ukrainian origin: "Russia has closed its borders to Ukrainians."¹³⁸

Differing Attitudes of the FMS to Refugees in Russian Regions

¹³⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹³⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Pkhabay M., a refugee from Donetsk and the young mother of two children. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹³⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Dochi L., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye settlement, Moscow Oblast. 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹³⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Zemfira M. from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Mokry Batay, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

“There is a need for competent people. These issues need to be resolved at the federal level, not the local level.”

(V.M., Lipetsk)

Roma appear to be treated differently by the FMS depending on the region they are in. For example, in some regions the migration cards of some subjects who entered Russia in March 2014 expired after three months. In other regions, the validity of these cards was immediately extended for a longer period. For example, the migration cards of people who entered Russia for the first time on 28 May 2014 were valid until 15 January 2015. Some Roma were only allowed to remain in Russia legally from 27 June 2014 until 24 March 2015, while other residents of the very same settlements were issued registrations that were valid for only three months and were not extended due to lack of living quarters (even though all the residents of this settlement were registered in the same home). The reasons for this vast difference in treatment are unknown.

Romani migrants who sometimes feared leaving their homes because of expired documents had no idea that, as described in the Memorandum for Citizens of Ukraine¹³⁹, they had the legal opportunity to extend their migration cards without traveling back to the conflict zone beginning in the summer of 2014. Since no information was or is distributed to the Roma about new rules that would simplify their lives in Russia, the Roma migrants that Memorial staff spoke with knew nothing about the “directive” instructing FMS agencies to extend their period of stay in Russia without restriction, and they continue to live in constant fear of reprisals by the police and the FMS. It appears that regional branches of the FMS also know nothing about this, and if they do, then they apply it arbitrarily, if at all. This is proven by actual instances of repression of migrants from the conflict zone for violating the terms of their stay in Russia. Thus it can be concluded that Roma from the conflict zone are most frequently viewed by the FMS as common “visa-free” migrants (“you’re not refugees, you’re guests”) and must therefore meet the corresponding requirement of spending only 90 out of a possible 180 days in Russia.

Three Romani migrants living in the Naugolnoye settlement, Moscow Oblast, were prosecuted for administrative violations under Article 18.8(3) of the RF Code of Administrative Offences (violation of the residency regulations for foreign nationals in Russia). Surprisingly, in this case the court took consideration for the threat these migrants’ lives and health would come under if they were deported to Ukraine and only fined the “offenders,” even though the law stipulates mandatory expulsion. The September 2014 ruling issued by the Municipal Court of Sergiyev Posad, Moscow Oblast in the case of Ukrainian citizen L., a Rom from Donetsk, reads as follows: “In addition to punishment in the form of an administrative fine, penalties in Article 18.8(3) of the RF Code of Administrative Offences also stipulate punishment in the form of administrative expulsion from Russia. However, citizen L. is permanently registered in Donetsk, Ukraine, where, as the public knows, combat operations are currently underway. Pursuant to articles 2 and 15 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; with consideration for the fact, established by international law, that the life and health of a person prevail over the interests of a state; and considering that there is no information in this case pointing to the fact that Russia’s public interest should prevail over citizen L.’s right to personal security, the court hereby sets a punishment in the form of an

¹³⁹ <http://www.ufms.spb.ru/desc/pamjatka-dlja-dind-1776.html>

administrative fine without administrative expulsion.” Two Roms paid fines in the amount of 5,000 rubles, but Galina B., who was also prosecuted, did not have the funds to pay this fine.¹⁴⁰

Assistance obtaining legal status in Russia is also needed for Roma whose identity documents were not properly executed in Ukraine or who didn’t have any documents at all. This problem is typical for Roma from former Soviet countries in times of peace, but has been aggravated by the current conflict. If refugees do not have a legal status in Russia, they lose any chance of receiving the assistance they so desperately need. Here are some typical examples.

Sveta M.’s sons are refugees from Donetsk and Russian citizens. All of their wives are Ukrainian citizens. They registered their marriages when they arrived in Bataysk, but the wives had difficulties obtaining Russian citizenship under simplified procedures.¹⁴¹

Sixteen-year-old M., a refugee from outside of Mariupol does not have a Ukrainian passport. His mother is a citizen of Russia. Attempts to apply for Russian citizenship for M. in Kamensk-Shakhtinsky did not have any results (“the court refuses”).¹⁴²

Ch., a young woman from outside of Mariupol who migrated to Kamensk-Shakhtinsky lost all her documents. She cannot obtain legal status in Russia.¹⁴³

Romani migrants understand that there are needs for changes in migration rules and system-wide assistance in gaining legal status in Russia.

“There is a need for competent people. These issues need to be resolved at the federal level, not the local level. These local authorities don’t help us at all. I was born in Russia. I have a right to my home country at any time. They surrounded us with their borders.”¹⁴⁴

Instead of assistance, Romani refugees have only seen inhuman and demeaning monitoring from government agencies. For example, in the fall of 2014, all the adult migrants from Yegoryevsk and the Naugolnoye settlement in Moscow Oblast were taken in for registering, fingerprinting, and photographing. The subjects maintained that these police officers were taking “preventive measures” by warning the Roma of their liability for what they believe

¹⁴⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Galina B., L. and M., who were fined under a court ruling for violating migration rules. Naugolnoye settlement, Sergiyev-Posad District, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁴¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sveta M., a refugee from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁴² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with M., a refugee from outside Mariupol, and members of his family. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁴³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Ch., a refugee from outside Mariupol, and members of her family. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁴⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

to be crimes typically committed by Roma (fortunetelling, begging). People complained of the biased attitude exhibited towards them:

“So the police sent us there with all our children, they took our fingerprints, they recorded our names in a register, they took pictures of the adults, of the children sleeping. But I understand why they did this: they think that we are going to go steal. But we’re not! We’re not like that, we’re family people. If we were thieves, we would have been put in jail a long time ago. They have to understand that they are the authorities.”¹⁴⁵

Roma interviewed in Podmoskovye reported that local police officers regularly visit their settlement. During these visits, they humiliate the migrants with their suspicions, even though they state that they are prepared to come protect the migrants from anyone who might want to harm them:

[In mid-October 2014] “the police came to the settlement, loaded all the adults into buses and took them to be photographed and fingerprinted. They come every week to see who’s around and they say: “Dealing drugs is not allowed, stealing is not allowed.” What drugs?! Just look at us. They tell us not to go fortunetelling. We don’t. Then they left their numbers: ‘If someone tries to harm you, call us. We’ll come.’”¹⁴⁶

The subjects interviewed reported that people had been detained for violating the terms of their stay in Russia. The police would threaten them with deportation and placement in a special institution for the temporary detention of foreign nationals:

“If only the traffic officers and the police officers could say: ‘Oh, there’s a war going on there? Well, God bless you!’ But instead they pick people up every day. Once we were seeing someone off on a bus and, bam!, just like that, we were arrested! ‘Now we’re going to summon you, now we’re going to send you off there, to some prison for two or three months.’ These people just don’t understand us.”¹⁴⁷

The Difficult Living Conditions for Roma Migrants in Russia

“There’s no war here, but we’re being ruined anyway.”
(Kombirii M., Yegoryevsk)

Some migrants who joined their relatives in their crowded places of residence have been able to purchase parcels of land and build permanent homes. Others rent housing from neighbors, and some live in trailers or makeshift sheds. For example, two homes have been built on parcels in Naugolnoye settlement, Moscow Oblast that, according to the Roma, are owned by them. One family is living in a construction trailer, and another home has been made temporarily available

¹⁴⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Louiza L., a refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁴⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Rubina M., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye settlement, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁴⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

by a neighbor who lives in an apartment in the winter. Still another home was built on someone else's land (the price the owner was asking was too high for the Roma). The owner filed a complaint about illegal construction, but the local administration permitted the Roma to live in the house until summer, as long as house did not have a foundation.¹⁴⁸ According to the Roma, local residents usually do not want to rent them housing because of their nationality. For example, Marfa M. wanted to rent two small houses on the outskirts of Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, but she was only able to find one house for her large family because "Russians don't want to rent to us."¹⁴⁹

Most of the subjects interviewed live in very tight conditions, sometimes in industrial structures that have been adapted for people or in hastily-built makeshift sheds. These dwellings are cold, but heating with gas or electricity is quite costly and also creates a fire hazard. Many refugees suffer illnesses because of the cold, closeness, and stress caused by these difficult conditions. Here are some typical examples of complaints about these unsuitable living conditions:

"...I rented this apartment. They wanted to make a garage or shed out of it, I don't know. We closed up the garage door, washed everything, people helped us buy linoleum. We bought a couch and a TV from ads. Now we're hammering together boards so that we don't have to sleep on the floor. Then we can make up the beds and sleep."¹⁵⁰

"...I start crying whenever I think of my bed. I sleep like a homeless person here. Fifteen children in the home. We all live together, we fight here, we argue here. There's nothing that we don't do here. The children and elderly people are sick."¹⁵¹

"...We went to Donetsk in August to pick up our pillows, blankets, dishes, because we don't have anything here. We went quickly around all the houses and then fled straight back. I'm having a very hard time here. The house is small, we don't have anything, the children raise a din all day long. I think I'll soon develop a mental illness. I sent two of my children to their grandmother in Voronezh. Our house in Donetsk had two stories."¹⁵²

Dana Mikhay lives with three young children in a small makeshift shed with thin walls and a meager roof constructed out of whatever materials were at hand. The shed was heated by a homemade potbelly stove. There was no electricity. She appealed to the

¹⁴⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Roma migrants in Naugolnoye settlement, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁴⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Marfa M., a refugee from outside of Mariupol. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014, ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Sh.O., a refugee from Donetsk. Stary Oskol, 26 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Gygyda M., an elderly woman and refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Izaura M., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye settlement, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

town administration for help with getting construction materials several times, but she was turned down. It is not possible to survive the winter in these conditions.¹⁵³

Refugees who fled Donetsk for Bataysk, Rostov Oblast built a flimsy structure with several entrances resembling a barracks from the materials that they had at hand (“from scraps”). From one to several families live in each section. Cardboard is laid out on the earthen floors and there are no stoves. Instead, the structure is heated by gas from a cylinder (one cylinder lasts only several days) or electric heaters. Both children and adults sleep directly on the floor. People are living in extreme poverty. One family with five members – Tereza, her disabled husband Drago, and their three children are crammed into one small room that has no furniture, and they all sleep on the floor.¹⁵⁴

In Mokry Batay, migrants from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast built two makeshift sheds. They are very poor and complain of a lack of food, clothing, and essential items. “The three of us sleep under one blanket.”¹⁵⁵

Migrants who were not able to buy land have found themselves in conditions typical of Russian *tabory*: overcrowding, congestion, and lack of basic conveniences. There these migrants built houses—some permanent, some flimsy and temporary. From the viewpoint of Russian law, this constitutes illegal construction and is not regarded in a positive light by Russian neighbors. There is also the risk of demolition and eviction. There is no way to set up safe and legal connections to electrical, gas, and water-supply systems in these houses:

“So we just up and started building here. We made sure the neighbors weren’t against it, and so on. There’s nowhere to build in the center of the *tabor*, there’s not even a place to put a toilet. It’s become like a skid row. You know, one of our neighbor’s wrote to the public prosecutor that we really had a nerve to build this house. So an officer came here and said, ‘They’ll make a decision—either tear it down or fine you.’ Well, a fine is OK, but a demolition is not. Then we went and had a little talk. They said: ‘Well, you know, we didn’t know that you came from Ukraine. We thought you were local.’ Let’s say they tear down my house. That will be a catastrophe. The house has to be legalized. But how can we arrange for this? The problem here is with land. I mean, this isn’t Mars, it’s not another planet. Here’s the situation: We fled a war. What’s anyone to do, Roma or Russian? There has to be some way to make this all legal. It’s not like we fled a good life.”¹⁵⁶

It is very hard for Romani men, who are the main breadwinners in the family, to work in these new conditions. The traditional occupations of Kotlyar Roma—metalworking, reselling

¹⁵³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Dana Mikhay, a refugee from Donetsk. Bolshoye Polpino, Bryansk Oblast, 13 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Tereza and Drago M., refugees from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with migrants from Novonikolayevka settlement, Verkhnedneprovsk District, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Mokry Batay, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with V.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

metal, and collecting and selling scrap metal—are not very profitable in these new locations. Men cannot officially accept a job because they do not have legal status, registrations, or work permits or licenses. For the most part they make do with occasional earnings from performing light repairs and building dachas and houses in the private sector:

“I have been a welder, 3rd class since I was 12. There was enough work for us in Ukraine, but we don’t have any connections here. We’re still just passing the time. Maybe we can build dachas in the summer.”¹⁵⁷

Families where the men cannot work are in very tough situations. For example, Tereza, Drago, and their three children (4-year-old Lana, 9-year-old Vladimir, and 12-year-old Aleksey), migrants from outside Mariupol, have barely any money to live on because Drago is disabled. He has had trouble with coordination and speech since he had to have an operation for a head injury he received in an accident. Tereza tries to send the older children to school, but she does not have enough money to buy clothes or school supplies for them.¹⁵⁸

In rare cases Roma migrants are able to take advantage of charitable assistance. For example, in Saratov Oblast they were helped by an unknown businessman, who provided them with temporary housing, mattresses, clothing, and food products (this information was obtained in Belgorod and Moscow oblasts). Roma who arrived in Bolshoye Polpino, Bryansk Oblast, in May 2014 said that in the six months they had been in Russia, they received humanitarian aid in the form of clothing, diapers, and grits and other food products five times.¹⁵⁹ There were, however, far more reports about scant assistance or the absence of any assistance whatsoever. According to Nina Tomovna Bryukhova and her husband Lila Stepanovich Bryukhov, they applied for social assistance from state agencies in Bryansk on multiple occasions, but never received any response.¹⁶⁰ Refugees from Donetsk who joined a Romani settlement in Baltaysk, Rostov Oblast, reported that a Greek woman helped them twice, but that they never received any other assistance after that.¹⁶¹ Rishche M.’s family, which fled the settlement of Makedonovka outside of Mariupol for Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, did not receive benefits or other assistance as refugees because they were not registered in a “dangerous” area, even though the worst fighting took place there in early 2015.¹⁶²

It must be emphasized that the absolute majority of Romani migrants live in extreme poverty and need assistance to obtain food products, essential items, clothing, firewood, and coal. Romani migrants who did buy land parcels and build homes were forced to borrow money. The owners of “squatter developments” on the boundaries of existing *tabory* or on empty land just beyond their boundaries also had to borrow money.

¹⁵⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Rishche M., a refugee from the Makedonovka settlement outside of Mariupol. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014, ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Tereza and Drago M., refugees from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁵⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Dana M., a refugee from Donetsk. Bolshoye Polpino, Bryansk Oblast, 13 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with N.T. Bryukhova and L.S. Bryukhov, refugees from Donetsk. Bolshoye Polpino, Bryansk Oblast, 13 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Tereza and Drago M., refugees from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Rishche M., a refugee from the Makedonovka settlement outside of Mariupol. Kamensk-Shakhtinsky, Rostov Oblast, 5 October 2014, ADC Memorial archives.

Problems Receiving Pensions and Benefits and Repaying Loans

“...we don’t have any complaints about the Ukrainians. We used to live very well with them. Now we have this cursed war, people have nowhere to live and they have to wander around.”

Roman M., a refugee from Makedonovka settlement outside Mariupol.

Most Romani women with children interviewed for this report indicated that they had not been able to receive any benefits for their children using cards and passbooks issued by Ukrainian banks. Some women, however, stated that they noticed a significant reduction in the size of available amounts, probably due to commissions and other reasons. Expired child allowance cards issued by Ukrainian banks cannot be renewed in Russia. Here are some typical complaints from these women:

“In Ukraine I received allowances for my children on my card. Now that there’s a war going on, I hardly ever receive this money. The commission eats it all up. In Ukraine I received 4,000 – 5,000 hryvnia for the baby and a child. Now it comes to about 2,000. I need to buy diapers, food, something to eat. And diapers alone cost 200 rubles.”¹⁶³

Ryabina received allowances for her three children in the amount of 2,300 – 2,800 hryvnia using her Oschadbank passbook at the post office or the bank, but she was told that “we can’t take money from Donetsk; there’s no contact with the southeastern part of the country,” and that the money couldn’t be transferred to her.¹⁶⁴

Dana M. regularly received allowances for her three young children in Donetsk, but she cannot receive them in Ukraine. According to her, she was denied financial assistance.¹⁶⁵

Lovarka, the 21-year-old mother of three small children, cannot receive child allowances transferred to a bank card issued in Ukraine. She only has 6,000 hryvnia remaining in her account, but “an ATM ate” her card in Russia. When she asked bank employees for help, they told her: “Go to Donetsk to get a new one.”¹⁶⁶

Elderly Roma are not able to receive their pensions. For example, Nina Nikolaevna Radun cannot withdraw her pension from her Oschadbank passbook.¹⁶⁷ Gygyda M. did not have time to receive her bank card in Donetsk, so she cannot receive the pension funds that are transferred there. She appealed to the pension fund in Podmoskovye for help, but was told that

¹⁶³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Pkhabay M., a refugee from Donetsk and the mother of two small children. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Ryabina M., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶⁵ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Dana M., a refugee from Donetsk. Bolshoye Polpino, Bryansk Oblast, 13 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Lovarka B., a refugee from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with N.N. Radun., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

they could not help her because migrants do not have residence permits for Russia.¹⁶⁸ Zemfira M., 64, who left Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, received a pension of 1,000 hryvnia in Ukraine, but for some reason in Russia she only receives 400 rubles on her bank card.¹⁶⁹

Tamara Chervontseva Levun does not receive disability benefits because her card from Raiffeisen Avar is no longer valid (she previously received 1,000 hryvnia, which is the equivalent of 2,500 rubles.).¹⁷⁰

The Roma interviewed also complained that it was impossible for them to repay loans taken out at Ukrainian banks in Russia.

Problems Receiving Medical Treatment

“In March, in April it was already nightmare, we heard shelling and were scared. Lovarka was pregnant – but how to be healthy? She gave birth ahead of time, now the baby is in poor health”.

(Sveta, refugee from Donetsk. Bataysk of Rostov Oblast)

The migrants interviewed stated that they do receive emergency medical treatment, including in obstetrics. For example, Malvina M. recently gave birth, and she was issued a birth certificate. Kristina M., who was at risk for a miscarriage, was frequently taken by paramedics to a hospital where she was able to stay for several days without paying.¹⁷¹

People who need regular medical treatments are also in a difficult situation due to their lack of health insurance. For example, Kombiri and Gygyda M., an elderly couple, are both diabetics and are not able to receive the insulin that they need on a regular basis.¹⁷²

Disabled children are in critical need of assistance. The infant Roman B. was born one month early in Donetsk in the spring of 2014. His mother Lovarka believes his early arrival was caused by the stressful situation she was living in during the last months of her pregnancy (“there was shelling in April and May and I was pregnant and scared”). On April 8 the family took their newborn and fled Donetsk. The move was very hard on the baby and in Russia he was diagnosed with a brain hemorrhage. He was treated for 10 days in Bataysk, but doctors were not able to cure his illness. He was having seizures and spent another two weeks in a hospital in Anapa. As a result of his treatment, he developed an allergy and required special food. The milk mixture that he needed, called NAN, costs 750 rubles per jar and lasts for three days. Meanwhile, this family is living in extreme poverty.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Gygyda M., an elderly woman and refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁶⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Zemfira M. from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Mokry Batay, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷⁰ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with T.Ch. Levun., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Malvina M. and Kristina M., refugees from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷² Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Gygyda M., an elderly woman and refugee from Donetsk. Yegoryevsk, Moscow Oblast, 3 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷³ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Lovarka B., a refugee from Donetsk. Bataysk, Rostov Oblast, 6 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

Sometimes Roma have had to put off operations they need due to the move and financial losses. Zhanna M., who currently lives in Lipetsk and is the mother of three children, reported that her four-year-old daughter Rubina, who has congenital cataracts, needs an operation to implant a lens in one of her eyes (the other eye was operated on in Odessa), but her parents are not able to travel with her to Tambov, which is where these types of operations are done (for a fee, since there is no mandatory health insurance policy).¹⁷⁴

Violation of the Right of Children to Education

“It’s boring without school. We left all our books there, we don’t have anything here. I’m even forgetting how to read and write.”
A., a Romani girl who should be in 2nd grade.
Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast.

It is difficult for children from crowded Romani settlements to receive an education for various reasons.¹⁷⁵ These difficulties also apply to “native” Roma residents who are Russian citizens, but access to education is even more limited for the children of migrants. Parents, who are not traditionally terribly motivated to send their children to school, are occupied with construction and finding means for subsistence in their new places of residence.

Out of all the “local” children in Naugolnoye, only four people attend School No. 7. The explanation given by the parents is that “the school is far away.” Children from the families of migrants do not go to school. Two girls who completed 1st grade in Ukraine told human rights defenders that their parents were not able to send them to school: “It’s boring without school. We left all our books there, we don’t have anything here. I’m even forgetting how to read and write”; “I only have one jumper, I don’t have any clothes.” Their parents stated that they plan on sending the girls to school next year: “We need to settle down here, and also, we don’t have anything – no uniforms, no clothes for school, no book bags, no notebooks.”¹⁷⁶ Meanwhile, local school authorities showed no initiative. The Roma said that in approximately mid-October, the children of migrants in Naugolnoye were registered by police officers: “They registered the children, said, just wait, the papers from the school will arrive, but nothing has come. No one from the school has ever come here.”¹⁷⁷ The local kindergarten offered to take the children of the Roma from Donetsk, but the Roma did not take advantage of this opportunity: “Where can I send them? They can’t manage without me, they’re still little, and it’s not our custom to send children to kindergarten.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Zhanna M., the mother of several children and a refugee from Donetsk. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷⁵ For an analysis of the education of Romani children, see: Problem of discrimination and violation of the rights of Roma children at Russian schools. A human rights report of ADC Memorial. 2009 – 2011/
<http://adcmemorial.org/www/publications/problem-of-discrimination-and-violation-of-the-rights-of-roma-children-at-russian-schools-2011?lang=en>

¹⁷⁶ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with A.M., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷⁷ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Malvina M., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁷⁸ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with Cheremushka M., a refugee from Donetsk. Naugolnoye, Moscow Oblast, 2 November 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

In Lipetsk, education for local *tabor* children is organized better than in other regions of Russia. There, children are taken to and from school on special buses and are accompanied by their teachers. The administration helps parents apply for discounts and benefits. However, children of migrants still do not attend school despite the school's best intentions. "Refugees came to us, the parents came. We offered to take their children, even without documents, but then they never came back."¹⁷⁹

In Yamnoe settlement, Voronezh Oblast, the children of migrants attend separate "Romani" classes along with other "local" Romani students. Their parents noted that in Ukraine their children attended mixed classes, so in this sense there has been a deterioration in their learning environment and the quality of their education.¹⁸⁰ Parents complain that the school bus only runs in the morning and that children have to return home on foot, which makes for a very long walk.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with I.V. Shulgina, a teacher at School No. 2 in Lipetsk, where she has taught Roma children from the Lipetsk *tabor* for many years. Lipetsk, 28 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

¹⁸⁰ The segregation of Romani children in schools is a widespread practice throughout Russia. As a result, Romani children receive a poor education that generally does not permit them to advance to high school.

¹⁸¹ Interview conducted by ADC Memorial experts with M.M., a migrant from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. Yamnoe, Ramonsky District, Voronezh Oblast, 27 October 2014. ADC Memorial archives.

Conclusion

Roma are the victims of the military conflict and are in very difficult situations both in Ukraine and in Russia. Many of them have tried to leave the conflict zone and flee the war. In addition to the hardships they experience as refugees, they also face xenophobia and biases that plague society in both Russia and Ukraine. The governments of these countries are not taking sufficient measures to deal with the problems that refugees and internal migrants face. There are virtually no public initiatives in Russia aimed at migrants, and Ukraine does not have sufficient resources to deal with this issue.

Many refugees return home, but life in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts is still fraught with danger and violence and is unsettled and difficult in material terms. Additionally, Roma from Eastern Ukraine suffer from biased treatment and the perpetual suspicion of treachery. For example, those who have returned to Sloviansk are accused of being pro-Russian, while those who oppose the Ukrainian government suspect them of supporting anti-Russian forces.

It is difficult even for the Roma to understand who is persecuting them and for what reason. In conversations with subjects, ADC Memorial experts frequently saw for themselves that Roma refugees could not answer the question of which group was challenging them: the “rebels,” representatives of the Ukrainian army, or other forces. The only thing that was clear was that these people were armed.

During the conflict between the Serbs of Kosovo and the Kosovars in the 1990s, the group that suffered most was probably the Roma: even though they did not take anyone’s side in the political dispute, they were considered the agents of Serbia. As a result of the violence and pogroms against them, many Roma died and the rest were forced to flee. At the time, human rights organizations called on all the countries where Roma refugees from Kosovo sought asylum to give this persecuted people the chance to live in safety and with legal status.

ADC Memorial calls upon all sides somehow implicated in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, including the international community, to pay special attention to the situation of Roma, to prevent violence and discrimination against this vulnerable group, and to assist refugees in attaining legal status and those who have returned home in settling back into their lives.

ADC Memorial welcomes the efforts that civil society in Ukraine has shown to assist Romani refugees, including the initiatives of Roma NGOs, and calls upon the government of Ukraine to implement planned special measures to integrate Roma (Strategy to Protect and Integrate the Roma National Minority into Ukrainian Society for the Period up until 2020) and develop these measures with account for recent events in Ukraine, with special attention paid to Roma migrants.

ADC Memorial calls upon the Russian government to provide all possible assistance to Roma from Eastern Ukraine in Russia: to avoid prosecuting them for violating migration rules, to extend their terms of legal stay in Russia and the corresponding documents (migration cards and registration) without impediment, to create and implement simplified procedures for receiving temporary residence permits and Russian citizenship for those who want it, and to ensure that Roma are informed of the existing possibilities for obtaining legal status in Russia. Urgent assistance is also needed to assist Roma who do not have the necessary documents with completing the paperwork to receive these documents. Roma who have suffered from the conflict must be provided with material and social assistance and access to regular medical care. The children of Romani migrants must be enrolled in schools.

ADC Memorial expresses deep concern for the situation of Roma in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. These people are the victims of violence, pogroms, theft, and other illegal actions that have taken place with the approval of or with the connivance of the unrecognized governments of these regions. ADC Memorial calls upon anyone who has influence over the "rebels" to help end the violence directed against the Roma population.

International organizations like the OSCE, the UN, the European Union, and the Council of Europe must devote special attention to the problems faced by representatives of ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups in Eastern Ukraine. Regular monitoring of the situation of Roma in this region is needed to develop an action plan to overcome discrimination against refugees of Roma origin and residents of Roma communities in Donbass to create conditions to ease their integration and ensure access to rights and protection from violence. Special attention must be paid to children's issues. All children must be able to receive an education and medical treatment, and there must be support for sick individuals, disabled people, and mothers with many children.

ADC Memorial calls upon international organizations to track observance of the rights of Roma in both Russia and Ukraine, protect them from discrimination, and assist governments in developing and implementing action plans for their integration into society.