

Ceslav Panico  
The People's Advocate Office  
Avocatul Poporului  
Municipiul Chişinău  
str. Calea Ieşilor 11/3  
MD 2069  
Republic of Moldova

Brussels, 23 April 2026

**Complaint regarding the violation of the right to education of Romani children from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova**

I.

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)<sup>1</sup> is a Roma-led organisation whose vision is for Romani women and men to overcome antigypsyism and its legacy, to achieve dignity, equality, and full respect for their human rights, and to use their experience to contribute to a more just and sustainable world.

The ERRC hereby files this

**c o m p l a i n t**

because we believe that the right to access to education of Romani refugee children in the Republic of Moldova is being violated and that they face discrimination in accessing education.

The complaint is based on the facts and arguments below.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.errc.org](http://www.errc.org)

## II.

### **Romani refugees from Ukraine in Moldova**

As of January 2026, there were almost 150.000 refugees from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova. About 47% of them were children.<sup>2</sup> About 90.000 Ukrainians were beneficiaries of temporary protection.<sup>3</sup> Many of those are of Roma origin.

However, there is no official data on the numbers of Roma from Ukraine currently living in Moldova. Moldova does not collect disaggregated data on the ethnicity of refugees from Ukraine. As a result, there are only estimates of numbers usually made by NGOs or international organisations. According to the mapping of the situation of Romani refugees in Moldova carried out by the Roma Task Force in June and July 2023, more than 1,500 Romani refugees from Ukraine were identified in Moldova. Approximately one-third of them lived in the Transnistria Region.<sup>4</sup> However, the real numbers could be much higher among others due to increased rates of mobility amongst some Romani refugees.

In theory, Romani refugees have access to the same rights as other refugees who found themselves in Moldova. However, reality does not always correspond to the theory as it brings many barriers which prevent Romani refugees from effectively exercising their rights. According to Roma NGOs and activists, Romani refugees are in more vulnerable situation compared to non- Roma Ukrainians and their integration remains slow.<sup>5</sup> Romani refugees experience multiple marginalization: as refugees as well as Roma. Moreover, poverty also leads to even more vulnerable position.

According to the ERRC report from 2024, Romani refugees in Moldova faced a lot of general problems such as limited access to information, missing or outdated identity documents or negative attitudes of the society. When it comes to the

---

<sup>2</sup> Reliefweb: Ukraine Situation - Moldova: 2026 Programme Summary for Moldova, 30 January 2026, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/moldova/ukraine-situation-moldova-2026-programme-summary-moldova>

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR: Population trends – Moldova, available here:

<https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/248?sv=54&geo=10784>

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://data.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/103795>

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Budulai Mişcoi: the community mediator helping Roma youth find jobs and opportunities, In: EU Neighbour East, 20 February 2026, available at:

<https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/stories/budulai-miscoi-the-community-mediator-helping-roma-youth-find-jobs-and-opportunities/>

human rights situation, Romani refugees faced problems accessing adequate housing, education and healthcare.<sup>6</sup>

### **Access of Romani refugee children to education in Moldova**

Even though, formally, access to education for refugee children from Ukraine exists in Moldova, in reality the enrolment rates remain low. According to the UNICEF and the Moldovan Ministry of Education, as of November 2025, 21.500 refugee children (about 87%) remained outside the Moldovan formal education system (either studying online or outside any education whatsoever), widening existing educational disparities.<sup>7</sup> In spite of the efforts to increase enrolment in Moldovan schools, the numbers have risen only slightly.

According to the report issued by the ERRC in 2024<sup>8</sup>, Romani children from Ukraine face practical and structural difficulties in accessing education. There are no data on the number of enrolled Romani children in Moldovan schools or participating in online education. However, there are challenges faced by those who wish to pursue either in-person education as well as by those who prefer online education. It is important to note that Roma refugee children have multiple characteristics at once: ethnicity (Roma), refugee status, possibly language barrier and often also poverty which makes them vulnerable to (intersectional) discrimination.

The main reason preventing Romani children from in-person education in Moldovan schools, according to several activists working with Romani refugees who were interviewed by the ERRC, was the language barrier. There are only a few Ukrainian schools in Moldova. Even though, there are more Russian schools there, Romani parents often do not want to send their children there due to political reasons. Moreover, Roma from Zakarpattia often speak Hungarian rather than Ukrainian.

---

<sup>6</sup> ERRC: Temporary Protection; The ongoing Struggle of Romani Refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia, 2024, available at: [https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload\\_en/file/5601\\_file1\\_temporary-protection-the-ongoing-struggle-of-romani-refugees-from-ukraine.pdf](https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/5601_file1_temporary-protection-the-ongoing-struggle-of-romani-refugees-from-ukraine.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR: Ukraine Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan - Moldova Chapter (2025 - 2026), available here: <https://moldova.un.org/sites/default/files/2026-01/Moldova%20Chapter%20Revised%20Ukraine%20Situation%202025%202026%20RRP.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> ERRC: Temporary Protection; The ongoing Struggle of Romani Refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, and Slovakia, 2024, available at: [https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload\\_en/file/5601\\_file1\\_temporary-protection-the-ongoing-struggle-of-romani-refugees-from-ukraine.pdf](https://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/5601_file1_temporary-protection-the-ongoing-struggle-of-romani-refugees-from-ukraine.pdf)

Furthermore, many Romani refugee children require specialized assistance in accessing education. Some Romani refugee adults are illiterate, which makes the enrolment process more difficult. Some of the Roma refugee children never went to school and would need catch up education first. Some of the children had attended schools but their school attendance was interrupted and they have not been to school ever since the war started. Moreover, there is often a natural fear from parents resulting from past discrimination that their children might face discrimination and bullying if sent to schools which can discourage them from enrolling their children. All of the above-mentioned issues can create barriers to in-person education.

Lack of information also limits the access of Romani refugees to education. They often have to rely on oral communication due to limited literacy and digital access. There have been cases of refusal to enrol Romani children. The ERRC has submitted a complaint after a Moldovan school refused to enrol Romani children who had fled Ukraine. The Equality Council of Moldova found that this refusal constituted direct discrimination, determining that the children were treated less favourably than others. The Council concluded that the discrimination was based on their status as Ukrainian refugees, rather than their Romani ethnicity. The case highlighted how administrative barriers, such as strict documentation requirements, can disproportionately exclude vulnerable groups from accessing education.<sup>9</sup>

For those refugee children who attend Ukrainian online education, there are two main obstacles of a technical nature – absence or shortage of devices and problems with access to internet.

As a result of the abovementioned deficiencies, many Romani refugee children find themselves out of any education system. This creates a parallel educational reality that disproportionately affects this vulnerable group and creates space for further exclusion, especially for Romani children who face compounded barriers (poverty, discrimination, documentation gaps, mobility/housing insecurity). The longer the war in Ukraine lasts, the bigger the gap and exclusion will become.

The ERRC noted that the Ministry of Education and Research, in partnership with UNICEF Moldova, launched a pilot project establishing educational mediators to facilitate the integration of Roma children into schools. The first specialists were

---

<sup>9</sup> ERRC: Moldova: Equality Council rules that refusal to enrol Romani refugees in school was direct discrimination, 02 April 2025, available here: <https://www.errc.org/news/moldova-equality-council-rules-that-refusal-to-enrol-romani-refugees-in-school-was-direct-discrimination>

expected to begin their work in Otaci and Soroca.<sup>10</sup> Even though, this step is not aimed specifically at Romani refugees from Ukraine and might be considered as a positive development, its scope in terms of area and number of children, seems to be limited and not sufficiently ambitious to have a significant impact on Romani communities.

### **Lack of disaggregated data and monitoring**

A further concern relates to the absence of reliable data regarding the participation of Romani refugee children in education.

Moldovan authorities do not collect disaggregated data based on ethnicity, which makes it difficult to assess the scale of exclusion affecting Romani children. While data protection concerns are legitimate, the absence of any monitoring mechanisms or proxy indicators prevents authorities from evaluating whether vulnerable groups are effectively accessing education.

Consequently, the educational situation of Romani refugee children remains largely invisible in official statistics, limiting the ability of public institutions to adopt targeted and effective measures.

The ERRC notes that according to the decision of the European Committee of Social Rights in the case of the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) v. Czech Republic (Complaint No. 190/2020), the lack of data and statistics on ethnicity and the lack of alternative means to map the extent of the discrimination risk may amount to indirect discrimination.<sup>11</sup> The Republic of Moldova clearly fails in fulfilling its obligation to collect disaggregated ethnic data.

### **III.**

The right to education is a nationally and internationally recognized human right. It provides a key pathway to all aspects of life – health, employment, freedom of expression – but also a way out of the vicious circle of poverty and marginalization.

Article 35 of the **Constitution of the Republic of Moldova** guarantees the right to education. It affirms that the State ensures the **right to education** and access to instruction (including language-related protections).

---

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF: Educational Mediator for the Integration of Roma Children, available here: <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/en/stories/educational-mediator-integration-roma-children>

<sup>11</sup> <https://hudoc.esc.coe.int/eng/?i=cc-190-2020-dmerits-en>

Under **Act No. 121/2012 on Ensuring Equality**, discrimination is prohibited in all areas of life, including education.

The legal framework establishes that:

- discrimination includes **any distinction or exclusion** limiting equal rights
- equality must be ensured in access to public services, including education

**The Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Act No. 152/2014)** provides:

- equal access to education for all persons
- state responsibility to ensure inclusive education

The right to education is also protected on international level e.g. by the European Convention of Human Rights, UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights etc. These instruments also guarantee that this right should be provided on equal basis for everyone notwithstanding their nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion and other characteristics.

According to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), in many states in Europe, Romani children face difficulties in accessing quality education (see *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic* [GC], 2007, § 205). As a result of their turbulent history and constant uprooting the Roma have become a specific type of disadvantaged and vulnerable minority. They therefore require special protection and this protection extends to the sphere of education (*ibid.*, § 182).

The ECtHR has addressed the issue of the prohibition of discrimination (Article 14 of the Convention) on numerous occasions. It has stated that discrimination is the treatment of persons in relevantly similar situations differently, without an objective and reasonable justification (e.g. *Willis v. the United Kingdom*, 2002, § 48). However, Article 14 of the Convention does not prohibit a Member State from treating groups differently in order to redress “de facto inequalities” between them; in certain circumstances, the failure to attempt to redress the inequality through differential treatment may in itself give rise to a violation of Article 14 (see, for example, *Thlimmenos v. Greece* [GC], 2000, § 44). The ECtHR has also held that a general policy or measure which has a disproportionately adverse impact on a particular group of the population may be considered discriminatory, notwithstanding that it is not specifically targeted at that group (e.g. *Hugh Jordan v. the United Kingdom*, 2001, § 154) and that discrimination which is potentially contrary to the Convention may not be the result of legislative action but may arise from a factual situation (e.g. *Zarb Adami v. Malta*, 2006, § 76).

Based on the information available from the sources above and also from the NGOs working in the field in Moldova with Romani refugees from Ukraine, we believe that Romani refugee children are in disadvantaged situation compared to Moldovan population as well as non-Roma Ukrainian refugees in relation to access to education. Most of the Romani refugee children do not have access to any education whatsoever.

It is important to emphasize that right to education is not only a *right* — it's a key to long-term stability, employment, and integration. When Roma refugee children are left out of schooling, the effects are intergenerational: reduced future opportunities, continued social exclusion, and perpetuated poverty.

Unfortunately, due to failure of the state to collect and process data disaggregated on the basis of ethnicity, it is impossible to monitor and analyse the exact situation and any progress in this field and to adopt targeted measures to address the situation of Roma refugee children from Ukraine.

#### IV.

According to international human rights law, the Republic of Moldova has the duty to respect, protect and ensure the right to education to children staying on its territory. The state is also responsible for remedying past discrimination if there is a history of discrimination when it comes to right to education.<sup>12</sup>

The Moldovan Government is not only responsible for providing formal access to education, but also for ensuring that Roma refugee children can genuinely benefit from it. The facts and evidence described above suggest that there are systemic issues which mean that the right to education of Romani refugee children from Ukraine in Moldova is not effectively ensured.

Thus, the ERRC asks your institution to investigate and identify human rights violations and discrimination of Romani refugee children from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova regarding their access to education. We also ask you to provide recommendations to Moldovan authorities for legal and policy changes which could be adopted to improve the situation.

In particular, we believe that the Moldovan authorities should:

---

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Horváth and Kiss v Hungary, ECtHR judgment, 2013

- ensure effective enrollment of all refugee children in Moldovan schools;
- establish monitoring mechanisms for participation of Romani children from Ukraine in education including collection of disaggregated ethnic data in conformity with human rights standards;
- implement targeted outreach and information campaigns;
- strengthen the role of Romani school mediators;
- prevent school segregation;
- provide language and integration support programmes;
- enhance cooperation with Roma civil society organisations;
- strengthen services for Roma refugee youth as a distinct priority group across education, employment, and protection systems to ensure their meaningful inclusion and long-term opportunities;
- provide material support for vulnerable families.

We will be looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

-----  
European Roma Rights Centre  
Dorde Jovanovic, President