Country Report: Roma in Romania
August 2021

The Roma, or Romani people, are one of the largest ethnic minorities in Romania. They originally came from India and first arrived in Europe during the Middle Ages. Over the centuries, the Roma have faced persecution and discrimination across Europe. Between the 1300s and 1848, the Roma were enslaved in Romania. During WWII, approximately 500,000 Roma throughout Europe were killed in the Holocaust. Among those killed were 25,000 Roma deported from Romania.

Romanians commonly believe that Roma are "dirty" or "criminal." Due to systematic discrimination against them, many Roma are impoverished. The Roma face continuing marginalization, as well as mob violence in sporadic deadly attacks by Romanian citizens and police. Government officials seldom prosecute perpetrators.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Roma in Romania have faced increased discrimination and dehumanization. According to the Health and Human Rights Journal and Open Society Foundations, the spread of COVID-19 in schools and communities has been blamed on the Roma population. Roma are banned from entering certain cities like Ponorâta. Romanian social media propagate the lie that Roma are responsible for spreading the virus. Romani people have been subjected to harsher COVID restrictions that do not apply to other Romanian citizens.

Pandemic quarantine restrictions have complicated life for many Roma. Social distancing and proper hygiene are difficult in overcrowded Roma communities that lack private household water supplies. The Open Society Foundations report that food shortages have caused many Roma to break quarantine, subjecting them to harassment by police. They are often denied access to healthcare facilities.

Romanian social media uses hate speech to promote the racist belief that Roma are immune from disease yet are disease carriers. Simultaneously, lists of Roma people infected by COVID are published online. The intention is to blame the COVID outbreak in Romania on Romani people.

The discrimination Roma have faced in Romania during the pandemic has pushed many to seek safety in the United States. In 2021, 2,217 Roma refugees have been detained at the U.S.-Mexico border after flying from Paris to Mexico, where Mexican visas are not required for Romanian tourists.

Genocide Watch recognizes the marginalization and harassment of the Roma in Romania as **Stage 3: Discrimination** and **Stage 4: Dehumanization.**

Genocide Watch recommends:
- The government of Romania repeal its discriminatory measures against the Roma in its effort to tackle COVID-19.
- The government of Romania provide training to community health workers and law enforcement on combatting discrimination and prohibit racial profiling.
- The E.U. provide more financial support and healthcare assistance to Roma communities to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Romanian government follow recommendations in reports by Roma-focused organizations to increase inclusion of the Roma in Romanian society and politics.