

FAST FACTS

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Development Programme



At Risk: Roma and the Displaced in Southeast Europe

There are many dimensions of vulnerability. Vulnerable groups face different types of threats and have generally insufficient resources to cope with these threats. Roma and the displaced (IDPs and refugees) are among the most vulnerable in Southeast Europe.

Vulnerability of the Roma

Estimates indicate that some eight million Roma live in Europe, 70 per cent in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Roma are not the 'largest ethnic group' in Europe but they are one of the 'largest ethnic groups residing outside of nation-state borders', as Roma do not have a nation-state of their own.



photo by Andrej Ban

Poverty

In all countries of the region Roma are among the poorest. **44 per cent of Roma households live in poverty, and of these 15 per cent live in extreme poverty.** Roma fall into deeper poverty than other

populations, and income inequalities are more pronounced among the Roma than among the majority populations. Poor Roma households spend more on food and the least on education, making it difficult for young Roma to better their circumstances.

Education

Two out of three Roma do not complete primary school, and two out of five do not attend primary school, compared to 1 out of 20 in majority communities. Roma children spend, on average, less than half the time that children from majority households spend in the educational system. One in four of Roma surveyed are illiterate. Roma women are shown to be particularly vulnerable, three quarters do not complete primary education and **32 per cent of Roma women are illiterate.**

Unemployment

Measured unemployment rates in the region are significantly higher for Roma than for majority communities—in some countries, twice as high. Roma tend to be concentrated in low-skilled, low-quality forms of employment. Discrimination often prevents Roma from finding adequate employment - unemployment rates among non-Roma with similar skill levels are lower than for Roma. **Employment rates for Roma women are below 20 per cent.**

Health and housing

Some **8 per cent of Roma reported that they had been denied medical services because they lacked proper documents.** Only 3 per cent of majority respondents reported the same. Roma children are particularly at risk, with **15 per cent of children up to age 14 not receiving vaccinations.** Substandard housing is another determinant of vulnerability: **some 25 per cent of Roma households live in dilapidated houses or shacks.** Access to basic facilities is even worse: 61 per cent of Roma households reported the absence of indoor toilets, and similar numbers live without a bathroom or proper sewerage.

Vulnerability of the displaced

The 1990s was one of the most tumultuous periods in recent Balkans history, with the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation followed by a decade of violence and ethnic strife. This resulted in the displacement of millions: the conflicts in Croatia and BiH sent some 530,000 refugees to Serbia, and during 1999-2000, they were joined by another 200,000-250,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo; 50,000 more fled to Montenegro. Some 70,600 moved back to Croatia (primarily from Serbia and from BiH). In BiH alone around one million people are classified as 'returnees' - some former internally displaced, some former refugees.



photo by Andrej Ban

Poverty

Unlike the challenges facing Roma, displaced persons were not necessarily vulnerable before their displacement - most had property, homes, jobs. Displacement brings a double blow: in addition to becoming refugees or IDPs, the displaced lose their middle-class status and find themselves among the most excluded in society.

Poverty rates among the displaced are higher than those of majority respondents, with **one in five displaced persons living in poverty** (compared with fewer than one in seven for majority respondents). The displaced in Serbia are particularly vulnerable, with **two fifths of internally displaced persons living in poverty and more than one in six living in extreme poverty**. Data indicate that IDPs are generally more vulnerable to poverty than refugees. Some displaced, IDPs in particular, are Roma and are doubly vulnerable, with a poverty rate of 49 per cent compared to 17 per cent of non-Roma displaced.

Education and Employment

The survey data show that differences in education levels between displaced and majority respondents are

generally insignificant. However, while education *per se* is not a major problem for the displaced, levels of education do affect employment chances. **Displaced men are 15 per cent less likely to obtain secondary education than men from majority communities, while displaced women are 27 per cent less likely to obtain secondary education than displaced men.** Unemployment rates are far higher among displaced than among majority respondents, in many cases more than twice as high. Employment for the displaced is often concentrated in the informal sector, involving irregular or poorly paid work.

Health and security

The displaced surveyed rate their health status as being worse now than one year ago. The displaced are more likely to suffer from neuroses and disorders related to the psychological trauma of displacement. The most common threat reported by both displaced and majority households is 'lack of sufficient incomes'. But while large proportions of displaced households view hunger, poor sanitation, and inadequate housing as the greatest threats to their households, majority respondents are more concerned with such issues as crime and corruption.

Housing

38 per cent of displaced households still live in collective centres or in dilapidated houses and shacks. Dwellings are overcrowded and lack basic infrastructure - while majority households enjoy an average of 27 square metres per household member, displaced persons have 17 square metres. Almost one-quarter of all displaced households live without access to an indoor toilet; similar proportions live without access to a bathroom or proper sewerage.

For more information, please visit:

www.undp.org/europeandcis/vulnerability

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