

## ***Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups in Eastern Europe***

### **Introduction**

Every year the world celebrates the International Romani Day, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, the World Refugee Day and many other awareness days or periods. The civil society, journalists, activists, and some politicians are often proposing policy recommendations on these days, but in Eastern Europe the follow-up on such recommendations is often non-existent and the situation of the vulnerable groups is not improving.

Eastern Europe has always had economic difficulties and is a region of predominantly developing countries. Due to COVID and the Russian war on Ukraine, Eastern Europe has been struck by a loss of jobs and rising cost of living, while Ukraine has been plunged into a war. This led to an increase of discrimination against vulnerable groups. Those who have found themselves in a vulnerable position before are in a worse position today.

Basic rights are being denied in many countries in Eastern Europe, especially the human right to ask for asylum or the right to public representation. Politicians in Eastern Europe are spreading hate speech, disinformation, and/or populist portrayals of the vulnerable communities. Hate offences often go unprosecuted by the legal systems in the countries.

Vulnerable groups in every Eastern European country face significant difficulties with employment, housing, education, healthcare, and relations with society. Prevailing stereotypes and a lack of rights and empowerment are calling for solutions to this issue.

Young Greens fight against every form of racism and exclusion, and stand strongly for a self-determined, decent life with full access to social, political, cultural, and economic rights.

We need to ensure effective political actions for the vulnerable groups in Eastern Europe and decisive steps must be taken to tackle discrimination of vulnerable groups, understood as hostility, prejudice, or racism directed at the LGBTQIA+ community, persons with disabilities, Roma community, internally displaced people, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and country-specific vulnerable groups.

## **LGBTQIA+ community**

The LGBTQIA+ community in Eastern Europe is experiencing a high level of oppression and social exclusion. Although some of the countries have set better laws in place to protect the community, these laws are not good enough or not enforced enough to prevent violence against the community. We need to focus on actions which will improve their situation and we must continue supporting their fight for their rights. Furthermore, the community faces discrimination when seeking jobs or access to healthcare, housing, or education, and this needs to be addressed.

## **The Roma community**

We must oppose the negative prejudice that exists about the Roma community. Furthermore, the community is suffering from social exclusion and is often target of hate speech and populist portrayals. Many Roma people are forced to deal with very poor housing conditions, segregated housing and discrimination when seeking housing or employment. Furthermore, many Roma people face difficulties in getting higher education. These problems need to be addressed with actions focused on improving their situation.

We also consider acknowledging the diversity of the Roma community crucial in the fight for improvement of their situation.

## **Persons with disabilities**

We need to do more to enable easier access to social protection and accessible social housing to persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the public transportation in Eastern Europe is not accessible, especially in rural areas. This needs to be addressed. Sign language is still not in use in public administrations in many of the countries despite the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities being ratified. We need to pressure the governments into holding up to their promises given to persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities also have few options in Eastern Europe when it comes to social interaction, and we need to push the governments to provide more opportunities to them.

## **Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers**

Refugees and asylum seekers are experiencing pushbacks and violence on country borders. This needs to be addressed with actions aimed to prevent this from happening. Furthermore, refugees are being evicted from refugee camps, which are already very unsafe and not being properly maintained. Internally displaced people, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers often do not receive social benefits or social housing and are socially excluded. They also experience discrimination, especially when it comes to access to healthcare or employment. Furthermore, corruption in Eastern Europe makes their situation even more difficult. We need to do more to improve the situation of internally displaced people, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as well as ensure access to asylum and social services.

## **Internally displaced people**

Extreme weather events, such as abnormally heavy rainfall, prolonged droughts, desertification, environmental degradation, wildfires or sea-level rise and cyclones are causing over 20 million displacements each year worldwide. Their increased frequency is directly linked to climate change and South-Eastern Europe is at the forefront of this struggle in Europe.

Furthermore Russian war on Ukraine and deadly earthquakes in Turkey and Syria inflicted devastating casualties and caused many to flee their homes. We need to ensure the safety of all internally displaced people by ensuring them access to health, employment, housing, education and social services, as well as ensure that additional funds are made available to those in need.

## **Country-specific vulnerable groups**

We fully recognize that Eastern Europe is a large region with many country-specific vulnerable groups. It is recognized that we need to improve the situation of all vulnerable groups in a country regardless of their situation in other countries.

## What are the challenges?

While these problems are not new, they are very much neglected in Eastern Europe. Discrimination often goes under the radar and is present in the countries. Furthermore, economic hardship that came after COVID and the Russian war on Ukraine, as well as environmental disasters, made the situation of vulnerable groups even more difficult.

We as Young Greens want to force the governments to act and solve these issues, as well as keep them in the focus of the public, especially now when they are being forgotten due to deepened economic hardship.

## How to improve the situation?

We, as Young Greens, want to stress the importance of the topic of inclusion of vulnerable groups in Eastern Europe. Discrimination, abuse of basic human rights, and the deteriorating standard of living of vulnerable groups in Eastern Europe is a failure of the countries of Eastern Europe.

We call on Eastern European countries to develop national strategies and action plans, as well as form advisory committees with the civil sector, to solve these problems. Furthermore, we call on Eastern European countries to set up institutions and decentralized offices to ensure acts of discrimination can be effectively processed.

Eastern European countries also need to fund projects to improve administrative, educational, healthcare, social, transport and labour market services to effectively help the vulnerable. They also need to prioritize the development of truly independent border monitoring and civilian monitoring groups to ensure a stop to human rights abuses at borders and refugee camps.

We also think that it is important to acknowledge the role of women in the communities and that they face more hardship in patriarchal societies, such as forced marriages, and that we need to address this problem with special care. We especially want to point out that women from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups are at risk of involuntary sterilization and female genital mutilation, which are still not eradicated in Eastern Europe by this day and must be eradicated as soon as possible.

Furthermore, we think that bringing this topic in focus through campaigns, as well as in the aspect of climate change and other topics would be beneficial for solving the problems.

We call on countries in Eastern Europe to not forget the most vulnerable in society which are hardest hit by the economic hardship and face increased hatred and discrimination in the times of pandemics, environmental disasters, and war.

We also call on them not to forget that all of the mentioned situations can happen to anyone in the world at any given point in time, and we would like them to be aware of the psychological burden of the people facing these problems. Vulnerable groups are no one's enemies, unless politics makes them as such. Inclusion is the golden rule of a better tomorrow.