

**Minutes of Protection Working Group
24th September 2024**

Place: UN House – Bucharest (hybrid format)

Facilitators: Jorunn Brandvoll, Cristian Musat, Wendy Zillich

24 online participants from FONSS, UNFPA, UNICEF, CNRR, UNHCR, PATRIR, Roma Education Fund, Romanian Red Cross, East European Institute for Reproductive Health, Save the Children); 10 participants in-person from ICRC, FONSS, UNHCR

Agenda

1. Developments related to the assistance program based on Emergency Ordinance (EO) no. 96/2024 - presentation of the new Info Tool
2. Findings from UNHCR and partners' participatory assessment exercise
3. Review of protection priorities for 2025/2026 RRP plan

1. New info tool related to Emergency Ordinance no. 96/2024

UNHCR presented the updated Info Tool on the Governmental website, available at <https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/>. The Info Tool already existed on the website, but the information focused on the old assistance program, that is no longer available to people displaced from Ukraine. Under the leadership of the authorities, the new Tool was designed with the support of many organizations - Project Voyager supported the technical part of the Tool, and other organizations such as CNRR, Mures Hub, World Vision, FONSS, FONPC, UNICEF, UNHCR contributed with the content and verification of the received information. The Info Tool can be found on the website, under the section '**INFO INTEGRARE**' and the Tool does not collect any personal data of the people submitting the questionnaire. At the moment, the Tool is available in Romanian and Ukrainian, but it will also be available in English and Russian. People interested in finding out more information can select the topic that interests them, with the disclaimer that for now there is no information on the lump sums regarding the assistance for accommodation and also the information on accessing medical services. This information will depend on the adoption of the Government Decision and the review of the information from the ministry of Health. Meanwhile, organizations are encouraged to use the existing Guidelines published by the National Insurance House, CNAS.

With regard to temporary protection (TP), the available information focuses on required documents, information on the residence address, where to apply. On education, there is information on how to register, conditions for accessing scholarships etc. Regarding accessing the labour market, there is information on locations for registering for finding jobs, available resources to find a job or support, as well as some general information on the minimum salary. There is also available information on accessing social benefits for new-borns, state allowance for children, support for persons with disabilities for accessing the procedure (receiving a disability grade, where to file requests, the rights and corresponding obligations they have), unemployment benefits, the VMI (eligibility criteria, where

to apply, how it is paid, rights and obligations). At the end of the form there is a list of contacts with the available Hotlines as well as several resources.

UNICEF stressed their plan to disseminate information about the tool through an online campaign for 3 consecutive months with 10 consecutive days of posting messages each month using Facebook. The webpage that should be promoted is the governmental website “Protectie Ukraina” and they will also promote the government’s call center. UNICEF also stressed the concern that the forms potential beneficiaries have to fill in should be translated and be available in a downloadable format. Regarding the possibility to have the forms in a downloadable format, there are some discussions between the Government at DSU, as these forms would require hosting on a website and they take up quite a lot of space due to their large size. UNHCR informs that it is also planning to do weekly posts mainly using its Telegramm channel and it is agreed to coordinate the messaging.

FONSS suggested that the platform should be more user-friendly, for instance by placing each Hotline under its corresponding topic. However, this may lead to people calling those numbers directly, instead of firstly trying to get their information from the Tool. Other organizations are encouraged to provide their phone numbers if they would like to be mentioned. One colleague refers to the Helena Helpline.

2. Presentation of the findings from the participatory assessment exercise and planning for 2025/2026 with a focus on protection needs/activities

The participatory assessments (PAs) represent an annual exercise that UNHCR conducts at a global level to better understand the needs and challenges of the refugee communities and where refugee communities are interviewed around specific topics with a view to them identifying the main protection challenges but also the most appropriate solutions to address them. PAs are conducted through focus groups which take into account age, gender and diversity aspects by interviewing together focus groups of different profiles. 42 FGDs were held across 12 locations using a Kobo tool; 340 refugees participated (256 female and 84 male), aged between 9-84 years; held in Bucharest, Cluj, Constanta, Iasi, Suceava, Baia Mare, Sibiu, Medias, Galati, Tulcea, Timisoara and Oradea; data collection period mid-July to 31st August.

Recommendations from the communities:

2.1. Elderly people (aged 60-84) highlighted severe language barriers, high costs and reliance on NGOs in accessing medical services. Regarding social protection, heightened anxiety regarding the end of the housing subsidies, and they do not know where to access information, hence the reliance on NGOs for guidance. They reported a severe social isolation caused by growing resentment from the local population, and the lack in dedicated spaces for interaction specifically for their age group.

2.2. Persons with disabilities (86 refugees - 60 women and 26 men; aged 21-75) reported language barriers in accessing the necessary medical services, as well as high costs. On social protection they highlighted difficulties in accessing disability benefits and finding support networks. They have also highlighted a feeling of isolation due to lacking social engagement opportunities and spaces to meet.

2.3. Adults (146 persons - 116 women and 30 men; aged 20-60) reported limited access to family doctors and high costs for medical services, as well as general language barriers. On social protection they reported having limited knowledge on available assistance programs and complex procedures in accessing benefits, coupled with unclear eligibility criteria.

2.4. Roma community (11 individuals - 9 females and 2 men; aged 16-55): Focus on housing issues, pointing out widespread reluctance of Romanian landlords to lend them accommodation which leads to reliance on shelters. They have strong internal social networks, but limited interactions with broader society, facing prejudice. They also face challenges in accessing long-term employment.

2.5. Youth (only females, aged 11-19): they face language barriers in following Romanian curriculum and participating in Romanian-led activities. They are interested in following vocational trainings, but they reported that information, opportunities and quality of trainings depend and vary on each location.

2.6. Children (53 children - 29 girls and 24 boys; aged 7-15) reported language barriers and incidents of bullying, as well as struggling with the cultural transition. Regarding extracurricular activities, they lack variety, especially in sports and arts.

3. RRP 2025/26

The priorities highlighted in the 2024 RRP were presented (1. Maintaining a favorable protection environment through the provision of information, counselling and border monitoring; 2. Prioritizing technical advice and capacity support at national and local levels in identifying and providing services to persons at heightened risk; 3. Fostering social cohesion and mitigating risks of intolerance and discrimination through events involving refugees and the host community) and a discussion was held on any adaptations needed for the 2025/26 plan. Actors present pointed out the need to have a greater focus on community-based interventions for 2025/26 and work with RLOs. There will be a continued need for the work of cultural mediators and interpreters with a view to helping people access services. The group coordinators explained they would develop a draft narrative which will be shared with all members for comments before sending it to Interagency colleagues. RRP partners were reminded to submit their activities and budget requirements to Inter-Agency colleagues by 27th September.

4. AOB

The ICRC is suggesting to include presentations on numbers, flows and trends at the beginning of each PWG session for a general overview of all members. ICRC also offers to present on their main priorities for the 2025 and underlying protection analysis in the next session.

Action Points:

What needs to be done	By whom	By when
Regularly request information on access to the different social benefits by Ukrainians to keep track of progress	UNHCR	31 Oct 24 and then in regular intervals
Insert information on access to social benefits in practice to the online tool	All	Whenever cases are identified

designed for the purpose of monitoring access in different locations		
Review the new info tool and report any identified inconsistencies or challenges	All	As soon as possible
Disseminate the Info Tool by all the PWG members and coordinate on dissemination efforts	All PWG members	
Follow up on description of hotline services in the new info tool (one description missing)	UNHCR	15 th October
Coordinate on checking whether forms to be filled for accessing benefits are all available in relevant languages. Follow up as necessary.	UNHCR/CNRR + all	
Make sure all interested organizations submit planned activities and needed budget for 2025/2026 to interagency colleagues by 27 th September. Provide protection input where needed.	All RRP partners	27 th September