MINISTERUL AFACERILOR INTERNE
DSU
DEPARTAMENTUL PENTRU SITUAȚII DE URGENȚĂ

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

ROMANIAN CENTER FOR COMPARATIVE MIGRATION STUDIES
CENTRUL PENTRU STUDIUL COMPARAT AL MIGRAȚIEI

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE ACCOMMODATION CENTRES IN ROMANIA

Executive Summary

Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation that began on February 24, 2022, over 175,000 refugees from Ukraine registered for Temporary Protection in Romania[1]. In response, the Government of Romania has provided a housing support through various programmes ensuring the basic needs of refugees from Ukraine are met, initially through the 50/20 Programme (Emergency Ordinance no. 15/2022) and then with the transition to established programmes on 1 May 2023 that differentiated lump-sum allowances for holders of temporary protection to cover accommodation and food costs[2]. On 28 June 2024, a new ordinance[3], EO No. 96/2024, was adopted, introducing temporary housing support for newly arrived refugees for three to four months and removing legal barriers preventing access to social protection services. Refugees who received temporary protection before July 1, 2024, are entitled to social benefits, including child allowances and unemployment benefits, while those receiving temporary protection after that date would have access to a one-time, four-month lump-sum allowance before transitioning to the said benefits.

While these programmes aim to support basic needs, findings from the several assessments conducted in the past years reveal persistent housing challenges, underscoring the growing financial strain and increased reliance on collective centres. Thus, the 2023 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA)[4] and the 2024 Social and Economic Insights Survey (SEIS)[5] reveal significant trends and challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in Romania regarding the housing situation. In 2023, 4% of refugees lived in collective centres, with an additional 8% sharing housing or residing in hotels or hostels. By 2024, the percentage of refugees living in collective centres increased to 7%, though the majority (93%) continued to live independently. A marked change occurred in refugees' ability to cover housing costs. In 2023, 78% could manage rent and utilities though many were benefiting from financial aid from NGOs or government programmes. However, by 2024, only 56% of households could pay these expenses on time, with 43% facing significant financial difficulties, leading to delays in housing or utility payments. Additionally, 14% of refugees found these payments especially challenging, reflecting a deteriorating economic situation and suggesting a potential increase in demand for collective accommodation centres soon.

1 https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782.

2 For the first four months, a single person received 750 lei/month, while families received 2,000 lei/month, alongside 600 lei/month per person for food. From the fifth month until the end of 2023, the accommodation allowances remained the same. The eligibility requirements changed progressively, with initial minimal conditions, but by the fifth month, refugees needed to be employed, and children had to be enrolled in school.

3 https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/288970.

4 https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107642.

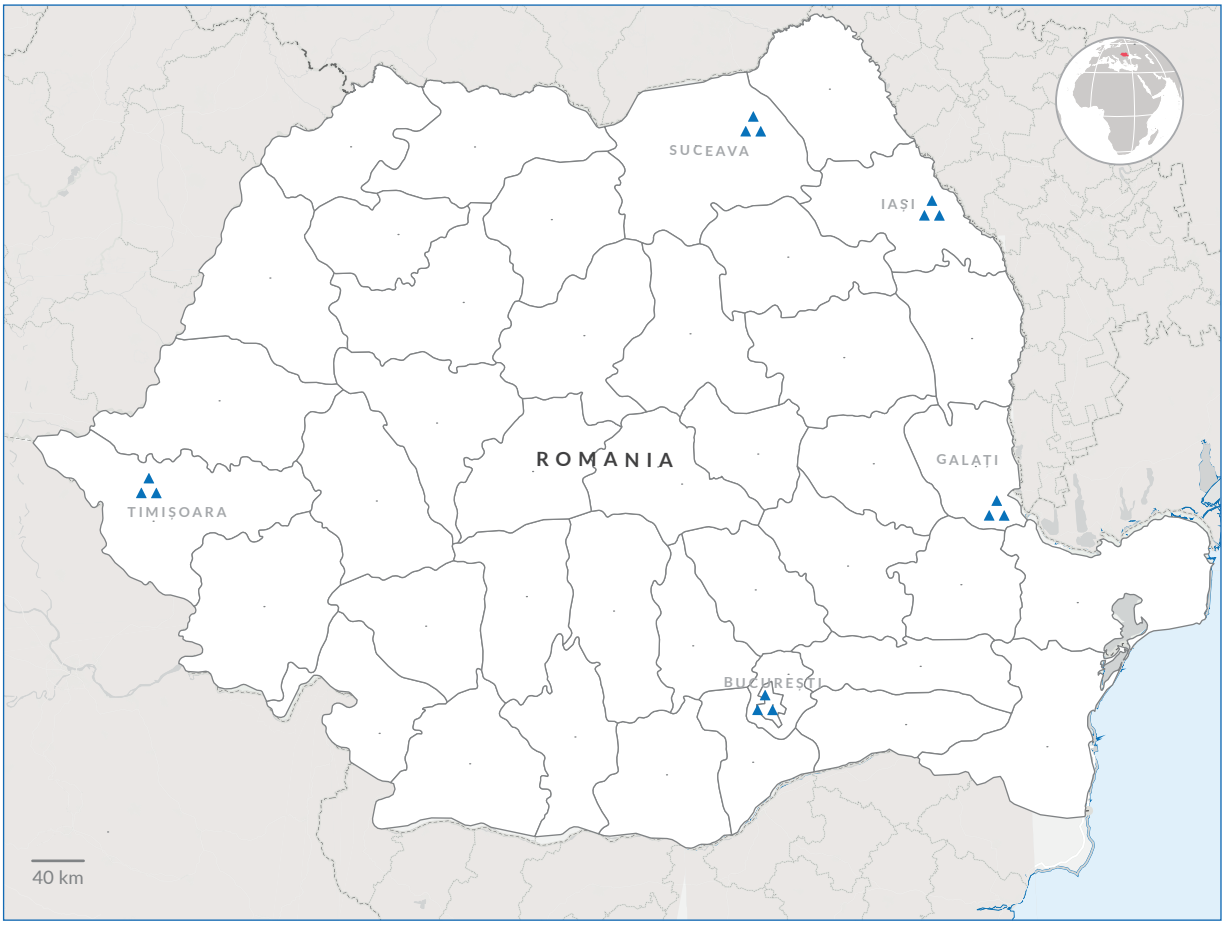
5 The data for the 2024 SEIS has been collected and analysed, the report is due for publishing in the following period.

Accommodation assistance remains a critical area of intervention for new arrivals but also for those facing challenges in becoming self-reliant, particularly more vulnerable refugees, such as persons with disabilities or older persons with chronic medical conditions. The Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, together with the support of the national and local authorities, other UN agencies, civil society and other actors aim to develop sustainable solutions for the medium to long-term accommodation for the most vulnerable refugees from Ukraine, while also extending capacity to accommodate a potential new influx of displaced people or respond to other emergencies that require temporary housing for persons affected (e.g. natural hazards), while fostering local capacity for social and protection services and enhancing civic participation.

In this context, the 2024 collective accommodation centres assessment initiative focused on identifying collective centres that could potentially be used for longer-term accommodation solutions while also drawing from best practices established in these centres. As many collective centres had closed when the exercise was launched, ultimately five refugee collective centres in locations across Romania with a significant refugee population and diverse needs participated. This paper presents a summary of the aggregated findings from the assessments conducted at the collective centres located in Bucharest, Iasi, Galati, Suceava, and Timișoara. The DSU and UNHCR, in collaboration with its county-level inspectorates (ISU), developed a site assessment tool to monitor the centres' operational status and needs, enabling data-driven decisions for future, longer-term accommodation solutions.

Map 1 | **Collective Sites**

Refugee locations: Collective sites



The paper underscores the need to address shortcomings in these centres and provides recommendations to improve both short-term conditions and long-term sustainability in the case of future emergencies (influx of refugees, natural disasters, etc.) while further involvement of the local authorities in the management of these collective centres would contribute to becoming useful resources not only for refugees and newcomers, but also for other vulnerable groups. In parallel, these centres can serve as community and service hubs, fostering volunteer activities and services for all.

Not the least, this document can serve as a crucial tool for local authorities to advocate for resources, apply for funding programmes, attract donations, and inform future government decisions regarding accommodation and support for refugees. The insights gained from this assessment can also shape responses to future crises, providing a strategic framework for local governments, international organizations, and NGOs working to meet the evolving needs of displaced populations and their host communities.

Collective Centres

The assessment of the five refugee collective centres in Romania—two university dormitories (Căminul 9C Universitatea Politehnica Timișoara and Universitatea Tehnică de Construcții București - UTCB Tei Center in Bucharest), one municipality building (Centrul de Asistență Umanitară și Socială Nicolina în Iași), and two residential facilities (M11 in Galați and Association "Sfântul Ioan cel Nou" in Suceava)—covers various elements specific to each location. Key findings, detailed in individual factsheets, highlight variations in housing stability, infrastructure needs, accessibility, and funding challenges.

While Suceava's centre currently does not host refugees and Timisoara lacks capacity for future intake, other centres face uncertainty in their continuation of providing shelter due to funding issues[6]. In terms of infrastructure, moderate repairs are needed in Timișoara and Iași, while more serious issues such as inadequate ventilation and heating affect the Bucharest centre. Health service access is generally available but lacks specialized care, and sanitation varies, with shared facilities raising privacy concerns in more crowded centres. Food provision is no longer available in any of the centres, and some are not equipped with kitchens, adding pressure on residents to source food from local markets. The need for non-food items is ongoing, particularly for clothing and hygiene supplies, and the centres rely heavily on support to meet these demands. Protection services are comprehensive in some locations with some local organizations complementing the work of the local authorities in the areas of child protection, gender-based violence, and mental health, but gaps persist. Communication support for residents includes limited language courses and information services, and some interpretation services.

Further information on the conditions and facilities in each of the assessed collective centres can be accessed in the accompanying individual factsheets.

6 As of 4 November, UTCB's dormitory for hosting refugees officially closed due to the University's long-standing plans to rehabilitate the entire building. UNHCR, together with the local authorities and local NGOs, assisted accommodated refugees in UTCB with relocation support.

Main findings

The data overview of the five collective centres assessed offers indication of the existence of common challenges faced by all these locations, while, at the same time, revealing the specific needs identified in each of the centres.

Insecure Funding

The long-term viability of the collective centres is jeopardized by insufficient and unstable funding sources. These centres predominantly rely on temporary governmental or municipal financial support, making them susceptible to disruptions in services or even closure when funding initiatives end. The lack of consistent and reliable funding not only affects operational continuity but also compromises the quality of care and services provided to refugees.

Dependence on External Resources

Data indicates the collective centres predominantly depend on external actors, including UN agencies and NGOs, for critical supplies like food and non-food items, as well as essential services. This reliance leads to variations in service delivery, which undermines the stability and reliability of support systems for refugees.

Long-term Planning and Emergency Preparedness

There is an urgent need for proactive long-term planning by the relevant stakeholders to prepare for future crises. This involves establishing strategies to quickly scale up operations, particularly in longer-term shelter, in response to increases in refugee populations or natural hazards, for example.

Further Training for Staff

Many of the centres are facing a shortage of personnel specifically trained to address the specific needs of refugees. For instance, in Timișoara, the university staff is not trained on standards of conduct and humanitarian response work. This skill gap can detract from the quality of care provided, especially for vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

Space Constraints in Dual-Purpose Facilities

Centres such as those in Timisoara and Bucharest, intended as university dormitories, face significant space constraints when repurposed for emergency accommodation. These facilities are better suited for short-term use, as their main priority remains serving student housing needs.

Need for Enhanced Accessibility and Specialized Services

Most centres struggle to adequately accommodate individuals with special needs, such as mobility or severe mental health conditions, with only limited provisions in place for disabled residents. Since these centres primarily support persons with high degrees of vulnerabilities, enhancing accessibility and availability of specialized services ensures that their needs are addressed.

Structural Deficiencies:

Several centres, including those in Iasi and Bucharest, face significant infrastructural challenges such as faulty electrical systems, mold growth, inadequate sanitation facilities for disabled individuals, and deteriorating building conditions. These structural issues can compromise the health and safety of residents, necessitating immediate attention and repair to create a safe and supportive environment.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The findings of this initiative, together with related assessments, indicate that there are limited solutions in Romania to provide long-term accommodation for vulnerable groups, and that none of the centres assessed could serve this purpose in their current state. The following recommendations aim to improve both existing and future collective accommodation centres to meet the needs of all displaced persons, including Romanian communities affected by emergencies.

1. Sustainable Funding

Securing diverse and continuous funding sources is essential to maintain operational stability and avoid disruptions from short-term government programs. This will enable collective accommodation centres to be adaptable and responsive in an emergency. This can be done by fostering partnerships between municipalities, NGOs, and the private sector to expand financial support, as seen at UTCB (Bucharest), which benefits from a combination of government and NGO funding.

Good Practices:

In Germany, community sponsorship programs[7] integrate local fundraising and corporate support, demonstrating a sustainable model that Romania could replicate.

In Romania, private sector resources have been mobilized to create transitional housing solutions for refugees by partnering with municipalities and businesses in high-demand areas. This collaborative approach repurposed private apartment buildings and hotel facilities to accommodate individuals displaced by the conflict in Ukraine, but it can be replicated in the future for other types of emergencies.

2. Maintain Sound Infrastructure and Facilities

Seek buildings to serve as accommodation centres that are structurally sound, have well established and functioning utilities (e.g., heating and plumbing) and have the necessary safety protocols in place. Address urgent structural and safety issues in centres such as UTCB (Bucharest) and Iasi, which face significant challenges including inadequate heating, ventilation, and plumbing. Adequate number of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities in correlation to the centre's capacity, with private, lockable toilets and showers should also be ensured. Related repairs should always be prioritized to ensure continuous safe and comfortable living conditions.

3. Expand and Enhance Access to Services

Reliable access to protection and healthcare services must be ensured, catering to vulnerable groups, particularly those with specialized needs. This can be achieved through establishing in-house basic service and referral mechanisms to outside service providers, focusing on elderly persons, individuals with disabilities, and those requiring mental health care. It is also critical that cooking facilities are installed to ensure residents struggle to meet their basic nutritional needs and become overly dependent on external food sources, which harms their well-being and daily life.

7 https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Forschung/Forschungsberichte/fb44-evaluation-nest.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=6

Good Practices:

The Romanian Red Cross launched the **Health Caravan initiative**, providing vital mobile medical services to rural areas across Romania, including centres housing Ukrainian refugees, serving both the host and refugee communities. The project deployed fully equipped mobile medical cabinets staffed by a team of doctors, nurses, and volunteers.

In Galați, local authorities assigned on-site medical staff to deliver free, consistent basic healthcare services directly to refugee residents at M11. Bringing medical services directly to the centres, enhances access to healthcare, particularly for very vulnerable persons facing logistical or financial challenges in seeking medical assistance.

Some refugee centres in Germany[8] have created community gardens where refugees can grow their own food, paired with cooking classes that teach nutrition and self-sufficiency. Romania could implement similar programs to boost food security and create opportunities for community bonding.

4. Enhance Community Engagement and Capacity

To enhance the resilience of collective centres, efforts should be made to better integrate them into the community. This can be done through increasing the involvement of local authorities in the management of centres to ensure they serve as resource hubs for both displaced persons and local populations. Local coordination mechanisms established can seek to implement, if not already done, local emergency response plans that include capacity scaling in case of an emergency.

Good Practices:

Community centres like the Nicolina Center in Iasi have sought to foster social cohesion by hosting joint activities for Ukrainian refugees and Romanian residents, promoting mutual understanding and integration.

In Barcelona, Spain, refugee centres are designed as community resource hubs, offering language classes, job training, and legal support to both refugees and local residents[9]. Similar community and/or service hubs also exist in Romania, the Nicolina Center in Iasi, Malva Community Center and RomExpo integrated service hub in Bucharest, Katya Center in Brasov and the Ukraine House in Cluj, but they are not always located in areas where forcibly displaced persons reside or that are easily accessible for refugees, and their activities have the potential to address larger categories of population.

5. Strengthen Communication and Language Services

Improved communication and language services are crucial for vulnerable populations to access information and integrate effectively. For non-Romanian speakers, offering Romanian and English language courses in collective centres in partnership with nearby language institutions helps to strengthen their inclusion in the larger community and enhances their ability to access services that may be unavailable in their preferred language. Additionally, having staff on site that speak the language(s) of the accommodated groups and having available translation tools can also help address this need.

Good Practices:

Local authorities in Romania have developed a strong system of mutual collaboration and coordination with UN agencies and NGOs to ensure that refugees from Ukraine receive timely and accurate information about their rights, services, and available opportunities, which is a practice that can be continued in the future. This has also been supported through assigned NGO

8 Welcoming International: Creating a World Where Everyone Feels at Home
9 Help and support for refugees from Ukraine | Ajuntament de Barcelona

staff to work directly alongside them. This partnership improves access to local services, offers translation assistance, and enhances the delivery of essential support. Additionally, several centres have partnered with local language schools and NGOs to offer Romanian language courses directly on-site, aiding integration efforts for all

6. Expand Volunteer and NGO Involvement

Engaging NGOs is vital for bridging gaps in service provision, particularly in specialized areas such as mental health, legal support, and education. Training NGO staff and volunteers in emergency response and humanitarian work ensures readiness to support vulnerable populations effectively. These trainings can be conducted by different actors, including public local service providers (e.g. General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection and General Directorate for Social Assistance DGAS), UN agencies and NGOs.

Good Practices:

Belgium has developed strong **volunteer networks**[10] that connect refugees with local mentors, who assist with practical needs and help them integrate into the community. Romania could create similar networks to enhance social integration of refugees and other vulnerable groups.

7. Long-term Planning and Sustainability

Given the current state of the collective accommodation centres assessed, long-term policy solutions are required to ensure they can serve as reliable emergency accommodation options beyond short-term crisis responses. Advocacy can promote the adaptable use of collective centres during non-crisis periods to maximize utility and sustainability and planning for the flexible use of facilities to accommodate future refugee flows or other vulnerable populations during times of emergency, ensuring readiness and resource availability.

10 https://fedasil.be/en/resettlement/community-sponsorship

Concluding Remarks

The assessment of the five refugee collective centres in Romania highlights current significant challenges and needs in accommodating refugees from Ukraine, underscoring the essential role these centres play not only in the current refugee situation but also in the face of future humanitarian crises or natural hazards. Despite their importance in offering shelter and essential services, issues particularly related to inadequate funding and structural faults, diminish their overall suitability and sustainability. Substantial commitment to secure sustainable funding, improve infrastructure, and enhance service delivery are essential to ensure the successful establishment of a collective accommodation centre for emergency purposes. Efforts to continue engaging local communities and strengthening coordination among stakeholders will be key to creating a supportive environment that meets residents' diverse needs and promotes their long-term inclusion and integration prospects into Romanian society. These centres not only address the immediate needs of vulnerable populations but also serve as vital resources for future crises, requiring a coordinated approach involving government authorities, UN agencies, NGOs, and local communities.

In addition to their current role, the collective centres hold potential for broader use, including serving local vulnerable populations during non-crisis periods through service provision, spaces for community activities and other activities. This dual functionality would ensure that the centres remain operational and adaptable, ready for emergency use while also benefiting the local community. Through strengthening partnerships and learning from best practices, Romania can create a sustainable model that supports both inclusion and long-term resilience for all vulnerable populations.

For further information, please reach out to: **rombuim@unhcr.org.**

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This report was prepared by Alexandra Porumbescu, Andriana Coșciug & Anatolie Coșciug @ **CSCM.**

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Contact us:
UNHCR Representation in Romania
Information Management Unit
e-mail: rombuim@unhcr.org