
Minutes

Protection Working Group meeting – 27 September 2022

Teams online

Agencies present: Action Contre la Faim, AMURT, Centrul Filia, Centrul pentru Studiul Migratiei, CNNR, EERIH, ICRC, Internews, NRC, IOM, Oxfam, PATRIR, Plan International, Reach Initiative, Save the Children, Sensiblu Foundation, UNHCR, UNICEF

Main topics discussed:

- [Introductory remarks, and agenda points presentation](#)
- [Presentation of the findings of Area Based Assessment \(ABA\) in Constanta \(Reach Initiative, Marie Aftalion\)](#)
 - REACH is an organization which collects data in emergency situations to inform the humanitarian response.
 - The general objectives of the assessment was to inform an area-based response by humanitarian organisations and local authorities in Constanta, and to examine the relationship between refugees and the host community there.
 - Data was collected using five tools (survey of refugees out of sites, survey of host families and host community, FGDs with refugee community, FGDs with host community, KIIs). The data collection period was between the end of July and the end of August.
 - Accommodation:
 - Due to the summer/tourist season, it was expected that refugees would struggle to find accommodation as many were staying in hotels or accommodation used during the summer season. Some hotels retained the allocation of some rooms for refugees and others were given sufficient notice to find alternative accommodation.
 - Only 15% of respondents resided in a collective site.
 - More than half (58%) of survey respondents lived in rented accommodation and paid, at least, a part of the rent. 30% of respondents intended to stay in their current accommodation as long as they could but 25% did not know how long they could stay in their current accommodation.
 - Less than half (45%) of households that have minors have a separate study space for children in their accommodation.
 - Host perspectives: 60% of hosts intended to host until there was no longer the need to. Possible reasons for stopping hosting included misbehavior and an increase in bills. 57% of hosts benefitted from the 50-20 scheme. Those who did not reported it was because they could afford it/ did not need it or because refugees were paying rent. Part of the host population reported a perception that rent had increased since the arrival of refugees in the area.

- Information:
 - Access to information was found to be limited as there was no information centre or centralized source of information. Informal information channels were found to be inefficient as information got lost amongst hundreds of messages on messaging platforms such as Telegram and on social media.
 - Local stakeholders lacked information on the needs of refugees.
 - Refugees wanted to access information on financial support, healthcare, and education.
- Humanitarian Assistance:
 - The main needs reported by refugees during the HH survey were accommodation, education, and health. The most mentioned needs during FGDs were the need for cash and information.
 - Only 65% reported ever having received humanitarian assistance since being in Constanta from INGOs, UN agencies, and religious organisations. 93% were completely or somewhat satisfied with the assistance they had received.
- Education:
 - Key challenges to accessing education were the language barrier and the lack of space.
 - 86% of HH reported that children had access to education (online or in-person) before the summer but for 13% of children, HH members did not know where they would be schooled in the upcoming school year. A community school which 13% planned to attend had not been set up yet.
 - Only 2 children were attending kindergarten, out of a group of 49 children of kindergarten-age. Mothers who participated in FGDs repeatedly reported the difficulties to access childcare; and diapers were mentioned as being very expensive.
- Healthcare:
 - Most (52%) respondents were not aware of what health facilities were around them – only 10% knew of a nearby GP, and 2% knew of mental health facilities.
 - The main barriers to accessing healthcare included: costs, language barrier, lack of information on where facilities were located and how to access them. Those who had accessed medical services reported mixed experiences in terms of ease of access and costs.
- Employment:
 - Most respondents had lost the job they had before the war and 28% had found a new job in Constanta, mainly seasonal work in hotels and restaurants.
 - Main barriers included the language barrier, lack of childcare, lack of vacancies and generally not knowing where to look for work.
 - There was a general unwillingness to find work as refugees do not think they will be staying in the area for the long-term.
- Relationship between refugee and host communities:
 - Integration is not seen as a priority by refugee or host communities.

- Learning English is seen as a better solution than learning Romanian by both refugee and host communities.
- Only 15% of refugees were aware of formal integration activities (language classes) and only 6% were aware of social activities (e.g., sports groups, bake sales). On the other hand, 42% of the host community reported awareness of formal initiatives and 35% about informal ones.
- 60% reported that the relationship between refugees and hosts was good or very good.
- Perception of wealth, that refugees were not in as dire a situation when compared to local vulnerable groups, that refugees have privileges which local population does not have.
- Other findings:
 - Three out of four representatives of NGOs who were interviewed reported that programmes supporting local vulnerable groups have been reduced or stopped. Churches were the only actors who had not decreased or changed assistance to local groups.
 - Local authorities were not reported to be a major actor in the response in Constanta.
 - Most respondents (90% of households) have Temporary Protection but only a percentage had registered for TP in Constanta as it was more efficient to register in other counties.
- Comments and discussion:
 - Several participants remarked that their interactions with refugees and local authorities were in line with the ABA findings i.e. that there was a lack of information on available support and services and several gaps (e.g. in terms of access to education for children) when compared to other areas. PWG members were invited to extend/ shift their focus to Constanta to provide necessary support for refugees there.
 - CNNR have a small presence in Constanta and UNHCR's field office in Galati will be covering the area of Constanta.
 - UNFPA are interested in extending services for GBV survivors to Constanta.
 - Konstantina Loupeidou (UNHCR) will convene an ad hoc meeting of the PWG to discuss the update/expansion of GBV referral pathways (including Constanta) and activities/events for the 16 Days of Activism. Interested members of the PWG were asked to contact Konstantina. It will be decided by the members of this meeting, whether regular GBV Sub-Working Group meetings will start to be held.
 - UNICEF has a new project working with the Prosecutor's Office in Constanta to establish child-friendly hearing rooms and to build capacity on child-friendly approaches within the justice sector.
 - Question on the potential reasons only 2% of respondent reported knowing about mental health facilities: respondents reported that they had no need for

such services, but it also stems from the general lack of information provision and access to information about services in the area.

- Question on why local actors were not major actors in the response: The lack of information was the key finding. Local authorities had a perception that refugees would not settle in the area in the long-term. Furthermore, they had competing priorities and insufficient funding to cover all areas of need, for both local and refugee population.
- [Highlights of second UNHCR Survey on Intentions of Refugees from Ukraine \(UNHCR, Jorunn Brandvoll\)](#)
 - General overview:
 - UNHCR conducted a survey, *Lives on Hold*, focusing on the intentions of refugees in relation to returns to Ukraine. The survey was carried out in countries neighbouring Ukraine and in other EU countries, such as Germany and France.
 - Data was gathered by interviewing beneficiaries of cash assistance, through FGDs, and phone surveys. The outcomes were weighed according to the different populations in each country, to have as representative information as possible. The survey results are regional (data has not been disaggregated by country yet).
 - Countries neighbouring Ukraine had a much higher percentage of refugees registered for TP than those which are further. 77% of refugees in countries neighbouring Ukraine have TP.
 - Most respondents were adult women.
 - Accommodation:
 - Refugees are more likely to be living in rented accommodation in neighbouring countries than they are in other countries where they are more likely to be provided with accommodation. Romania has the highest share of sharing apartments – with refugees benefitting from the 50-20 program. Moldova has the highest share of refugees being hosted by relatives. Poland has the highest share of refugees who are renting alone.
 - Education:
 - There are big differences between countries as far as education is concerned. Across all countries, over 70% of respondents reported they will send their children to formal schools while 18% will follow the online curriculum. The perception in Romania is that most parents prefer online education for their children, which is contrary to what is happening in Poland and Slovakia.
 - Employment:
 - 28% of refugees are employed or self-employed and 4% are undergoing training, apprenticeships, or are volunteering. 83% of those who work are working in the host country while 15% are working remotely for a Ukrainian employer. The biggest challenge reported was the language barrier (65%), and the lack of language courses, of recognition of diplomas, and of childcare.
 - Intentions:
 - A very low percentage of refugees reported wanting to return to Ukraine in the near future: 13% are planning to return in the next three months, whilst 17%

- are undecided. The majority of respondents, 79%, plan to stay where they are. A higher percentage of respondents plans to stay in countries neighbouring Ukraine than in other countries. The general perception is that refugees want to move westwards, but survey data shows otherwise - that people are settling down more.
- Those who want to return to Ukraine do so because they want to be home and to return to family members. Smaller numbers mentioned lack of livelihood opportunities, education, and accommodation in host countries as being reasons for wanting to return.
 - Comments and discussion:
 - The findings on uncertainty and lack of information impacting refugees' decision-making process were also confirmed in the Internews report. Whilst carrying out the Internews survey, people were asking for more information on the medium-term so they could decide what to do for their children's education and for their livelihoods. A lack of information on the Romanian education system, may have impacted why parents opted for online education.
 - PATRIR pointed out that a lot of Ukrainians in Spain and Germany want to go back to Romania to be closer to Ukraine. They also noticed different trends among refugees in different location – e.g., a group of refugees in Sighisoara's talking about staying in Romania for the long-term whilst refugees in Cluj are more focused on returning to Ukraine as soon as they can. In terms of education though, both wanted to keep their children in the Ukrainian school system, regardless of their intention to stay in Romania or return to Ukraine.
 - [Review of Activity Info reporting by RRP partners \(Inter Agency/Protection Coordination\)](#)
 - The RRP for Romania was launched earlier on in the year and outlines plans for activities for various sectors. A lot of actors are doing a lot of work but reporting needs to be stepped up for accountability purposes and to showcase the work being done to donors, Government, etc. on a collective level, better reporting would help in identifying persistent gaps.
 - Sector indicators:
 - Only 7 partners under the RRP reported on the indicators.
 - Only 2 partners reported on the protection indicator. Overall implementation is good but there is more to report on.
 - The main concern is the GBV indicators: only 1 partner reported on these indicators.
 - Reporting is also very low for the mental health indicator.
 - [AOB/ Next steps](#)
 - Bucharest Forum: The Romanian Government invited EU members states and other states (including Norway and the UK) to discussion the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. There were very different approaches to inclusion across member states particularly for education and employment.

- Visit of EP Committee: The delegation was briefed on issues affecting Ukrainians in Romania. They had questions on TP status, potential social tensions, education, and access to health services.
- Refugee Data Meetup: A meeting was organized by the IM Working Group for IM actors to share information on surveys, assessments, etc. and for local authorities to meet and discuss challenges. A discussion is currently underway on structuring such exchanges to facilitate the sharing of good practices.
- New Government website (<https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/>): Partners raised concerns that not all the relevant information is adequately reflected on the new website. UNHCR has asked Mdme Turza's office for a focal point with whom feedback on information on the website can be shared. Partners were invited to share feedback with UNHCR, with the Snr Protection Officer, Jorunn Brandvoll. Feedback will then be raised collectively in meetings with the Government. The Protectie Ucraina website should from now on be promoted as the main information platform. The border authorities will distribute leaflets about the website and the Government will provide details on how partners will have access to information material.
- ICRC was invited to give a presentation on restoring family links at the next Protection WG meeting.