

PROTECTION BRIEF

ROMANIA

Operational Context and Analysis

During the reporting period, approximately 1,095,000 border crossings of persons forcibly displaced from Ukraine to Romania were recorded, while approximately 681,900 border crossings back to Ukraine. This brings the total to approximately 6,420,000 border crossings to Romania and 3,965,000 back to Ukraine, since the start of the war in Ukraine. At the moment, some 77,000 Ukrainian and third-country nationals (TCN) from Ukraine are present in the country¹.

The Government of Romania has provided a comprehensive response to its largest-ever refugee influx and a favorable environment for the reception and protection of Ukrainian citizens and Third Country Nationals (TCNs), supported by UN agencies, national and international NGOs. The comprehensive support program developed by the Government of Romania provided housing and food support for a significant percentage (67% at a national level at the end of 2022², going up to in 85% in some areas in 2023³) of refugees from Ukraine. The program changed in May 2023, incorporating conditionality related to employment and education enrollment, which signaled the Government's adaptation of its response from an initial emergency phase to an inclusion phase. The current stage, aimed at facilitating the socio-economic inclusion of the refugees able to achieve self-sufficiency and enabling effective access to national social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable, has brought many opportunities but also challenges for all the involved stakeholders.



Initial registration for the Cash for Protection program @UNHCR integrated service-hub in Romexpo, Bucharest

¹ General Inspectorate of the Border Police - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782>

² UNHCR, Rapid Survey of the 50-20 program UNHCR Romania - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97974>

³ UNHCR. Area Based Assessment Galati, Romania, Oct. 2023 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/105634>

Through the regular assessments it conducts, respectively Protection Profiling and Monitoring (PPM), Area-Based Assessments (ABAs), as well as Focus-Group Discussions (FDGs), UNHCR has been engaged in a thorough and systematic data collection and analysis of the profiles, needs and intentions of refugees, with the aim of adapting its programming and advocacy, while promoting evidence-based interventions. The current Protection Brief draws on the findings collected by UNHCR partners between January and June 2024 through Protection Profiling and Monitoring interviews with 746 households comprising 1,779 refugees. The Protection Brief outlines three of the key protection challenges, respectively access to housing, access to livelihoods and access to social protection, as well as UNHCR's recommendations to strengthen access to these rights.

Key Trends and Figures



1,095,000 border crossings of Ukrainians and TCNs from Ukraine and Moldova between January and June 2024⁴



681,000 border crossings to Ukraine by Ukrainians between January and June 2024⁵



77K* Refugees from Ukraine in Romania⁶



2.8 Average household size⁷



167,000 Temporary Protection (TP) permits issued since the beginning of the response⁸



TP beneficiaries: 55% female and 45% male, 65% adults, 30% children and 5% elderly⁹



4% of households have children who are separated from both parents¹⁰



73% of respondents have immediate family members who remained in Ukraine¹¹



16% of respondents have at least one household member whose documentation is missing or expired¹²



2% of respondents who visited Ukraine faced difficulties upon their return to the host country¹³



31% of households have at least 1 member with a serious medical condition¹⁴



6% of households have at least 1 family member with a disability¹⁵

* Figure was last updated on 10th of April and will not be updated because of difficulties in determining exact stock population following Romania's aerial and maritime accession to the Schengen space on March 31st 2024.

⁴General Inspectorate of the Border Police, Jan – June 2024

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiM2I0NjM5ZjAtZDk3Yy00MTk2LTk0ZmUtODQ1YThiYmMxNjBkiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBJLTU1NDNkMmFmODBiZS1s1mMiOj9&pageName=ReportSection>

⁵ Ibidem

⁶ Ibidem

⁷ UNHCR, Romania Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, 2023 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107642>

⁸ General Inspectorate for Immigration, Feb 2022 – June 2024 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/234?sv=54&geo=10782>

⁹ Ibidem

¹⁰ UNHCR, Protection Profiling and Monitoring results Jan – June 2024, - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/330?sv=54&geo=0>

¹¹ Ibidem

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

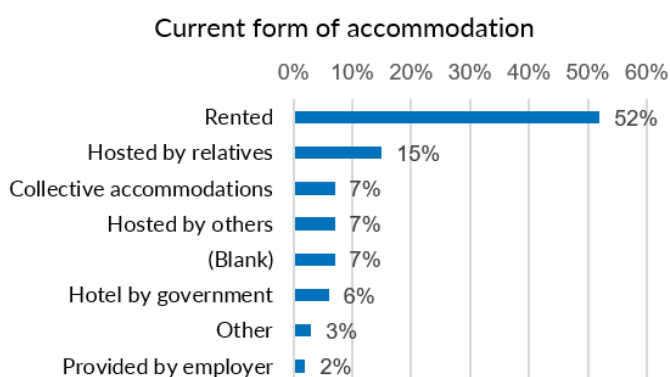
¹⁵ Ibid

Protection concerns

Access to Housing

The Government of Romania’s effort to promptly create a housing and food support program for persons forcibly displaced from Ukraine is commendable as it ensured that these basic needs were met. The transition, in mid-2023, to a program where payments are linked to employment and/or education enrolment conditions, resulted into certain vulnerable profiles not meeting the criteria and being excluded from the material assistance or housing support in collective shelters. Such profiles include people of a certain age who are less likely to find employment, single caretakers who do not have suitable daycare arrangements or persons with specific needs who find it challenging to have their disabilities recognized because of the complex and long procedure for such recognition in Romania. These changes, together with delays in the disbursement of funds, made accommodation one of the main challenges in the refugee response as evidenced through multiple assessments, such as Protection Profiling and Monitoring or the Area Based Assessment conducted in the city of Galati in 2023¹⁶.

The upcoming end of the current governmental assistance program on 30 June 2024 has had an impact on the perception of security of tenure as revealed by Protection Profiling and Monitoring data, with the percentage of respondents who are renting an accommodation who declared they do not know how long they can maintain their current arrangement reaching 28%. This percentage is significantly higher (56%) for respondents living in collective accommodation supported through the programme. 52% percent of respondents who are renting accommodation stated that they have a rental contract, however 19% of those declared that they will have to leave their accommodation within three months as they cannot afford to pay the rent.



On the other hand, 50% of respondents living in collective shelters declared that they have to find another accommodation because the program is ending, or the shelter is closing. Challenges with funding for NGOs who are providing protection services or assisting with staffing costs in collective shelters also contribute to this, whereas administrative hurdles and budget constraints prevent public social services from stepping in. It is necessary to underline that many refugees currently living in collective accommodations have very complex protection profiles, often with multiple vulnerabilities stemming from disabilities, medical conditions, household composition, etc. and are unlikely to become self-resilient. A recent assessment conducted by a UNHCR partner in one such shelter revealed that around 50% of the households accommodated would be unable to be self-reliant once the assistance comes to an end, and would continue needing comprehensive assistance, including accommodation support. On the other hand, the limited supply of social housing units (less than 3%

¹⁶ UNHCR. Area Based Assessment Galati, Romania, Oct. 2023 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/105634>

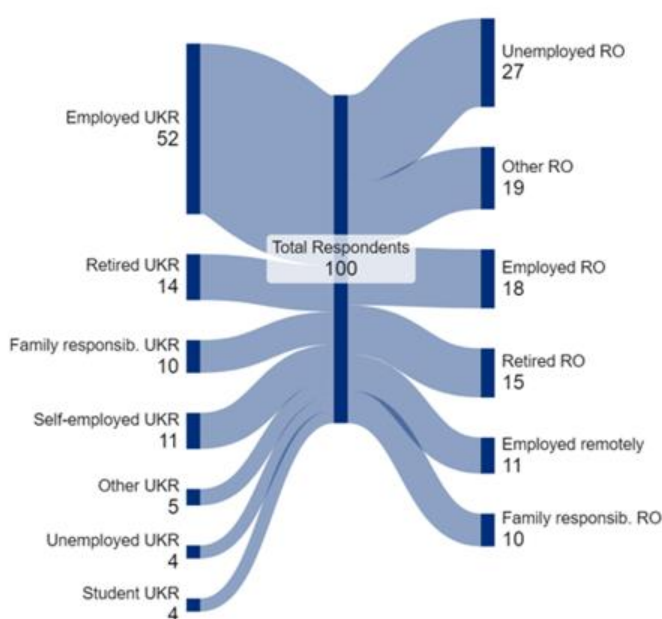
of all available housing units in Romania are owned by public authorities), significantly limits the possibility of assigning social housing for refugees from Ukraine.¹⁷

In this context, UNHCR is exceptionally partly covering staffing costs and providing protection services through partners between February and June 2024 for the two largest collective shelters in Romania, which host very vulnerable refugees. This ensures continuation of activities in a very delicate period. UNHCR is also supporting collective shelters country-wide through NFI provision. In addition, UNHCR has supported over 9,000 vulnerable refugees through the Cash for Protection programme from July 2023 to November 2023, over 9,200 refugees through its Winterization programme, and continues to assist in 2024 through its targeted Cash for Refugees with Specific Needs programme. At the same time, UNHCR and RRP partners have created a technical workgroup which is advancing to the Government a Briefing Note on collective accommodation as part of the advocacy related to upcoming changes in the legislative framework and the creation of a more targeted, needs-based support.

Access to Employment

Ensuring the right of Temporary Protection holders to access the labour market under dignified conditions to achieve self-reliance is crucial for their inclusion in Romanian society. The Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment conducted by UNHCR and partners in mid-2023 revealed that 33% of those interviewed declared that they are engaged in paid employment, 27% are unemployed or looking for work, and 33% are outside the formal labour force (meaning they are not able to work or not seeking employment, that they are receiving income from informal work, or that they may be teleworking).¹⁸ As of June 2024, around 22,000 refugees from Ukraine registered with the National Employment Agency as job seekers, out of whom 2,900 have found jobs through its services. On a national level, over 6,600 refugees from Ukraine are officially confirmed to have active employment contracts. As per the latest report on the inclusion of refugees from Ukraine published by the Government of Romania, the sectors with most registered employment contracts are manufacturing (19%), construction (17%), trade (11%) and hospitality (11%).¹⁹

Type of activity in Ukraine vs. Romania in 2024 in percentages



At the same time, Protection Profiling and Monitoring data from 2024 revealed that 27% of respondents declared that they are unemployed, whereas employment was identified as the 4th most urgent need by 23% of respondents²⁰. Out of those employed, 12% declared that they do not have a contract, 31% said that they work excessive long hours, and 4% declared that the payments they

¹⁷Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Snapshot Report, February 2023 - <https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Refugee-Response-Snapshot-Feb-2023.pdf>

¹⁸UNHCR, Romania Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, 2023 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107642>

¹⁹Government of Romania, Report on the integration of refugees from Ukraine, February 2024 -

https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Raport-integrare_feb-2024-ENG.pdf

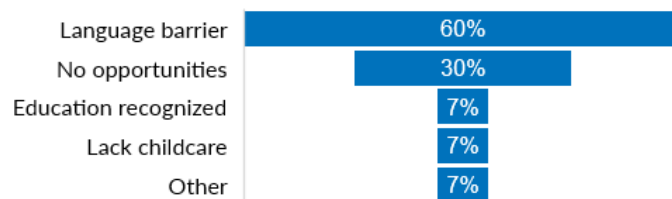
²⁰ UNHCR, Protection Profiling and Monitoring results Jan. – June 2024 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/330?sv=54&geo=0>

receive are irregular, pointing towards occasional abusive or exploitative practices which need to be addressed.

Comparing the type of activity respondents were engaged in before and after displacement, it is worth highlighting the significant difference between those who declare they were employed or self-employed in Ukraine (52% and 11%) and those who declare they are currently employed in Romania (18%) or employed remotely (11%). As such, there is a significant share of refugees who are currently unemployed but have previous work experience from Ukraine, who are likely to benefit from support to re-enter the labour market.

In terms of the main barriers to accessing employment, Protection Profiling and Monitoring revealed that the language barrier is the most cited reason by those who stated they are unemployed (60%),

Barriers to accessing employment



followed by the lack of opportunities (30%) and challenges related to education/skills recognition (7%)²¹, results which are in line with findings from the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment²². At the same time, 74% of respondents declare that they have completed higher education or university studies, which points to a potential

difference of expectations in terms of labour market inclusion and a reluctance to accept lower skilled jobs. While the national economy has long grappled with a shortage of lower-skilled labour force following systematic emigration from Romania after EU accession and relied on attracting foreign labour force to fill these gaps, effectively promoting the value of such jobs to Temporary Protection beneficiaries remains challenging. Satisfaction with the quality of the support services provided by the National Employment Agency (information about the labour market, career counselling, vocational trainings, Romanian language courses, certification of professional skills, etc), varies significantly as revealed by Focus Group Discussions conducted by UNHCR. While the MSNA revealed that the employment sectors of refugees from Ukraine in Romania partially match with their work experience or training, those with a background in specialized professions such as education (8%) or healthcare (7%) struggle to work in their fields because of the complex and resource intensive qualifications recognition processes.²³

In response, UNHCR is promoting the implementation of a sustainable livelihood strategy together with its partners that can be transitioned fully to the public authorities over time. UNHCR and its partners' priority is linking refugees from Ukraine with any formal employment that is most easily attainable for them to generate an income and reduce their protection risks, while gradually improving their language skills. Once refugees have earned a formal job, continued assistance can be offered to support their career advancement in accordance with their skills, experience and goals. This is done, *inter alia*, through targeted livelihoods projects carried out by UNHCR's partners to complement the governments' efforts, coordination efforts through the Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Working Group with other UN and NGO partners, and strategic advocacy with the Government and through engagement with the private sector. Regarding language acquisition, UNHCR is facilitating professional language classes among job seekers registered with UNHCR partners (up to 2,000), aiming at gaining language skills necessary for the workplace.

²¹ UNHCR, Protection Profiling and Monitoring results Jan. – June 2024 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/330?sv=54&geo=0>

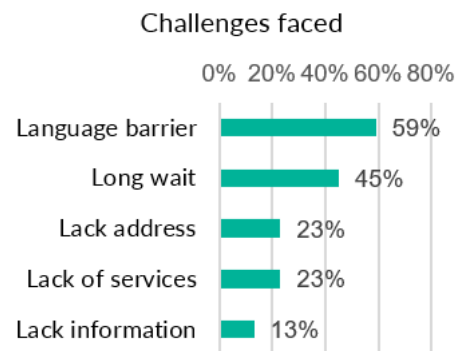
²² UNHCR, Romania Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, 2023 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107642>

²³ Ibidem

Access to Social Protection

Fostering access to social protection for vulnerable persons forcibly displaced from Ukraine who do not possess the necessary material resources to minimize protection risks is one of the main challenges of the current phase of the refugee response. The Multi Sector Needs Assessment conducted in mid-2023 revealed that 66% of the 1,222 respondents do not receive social benefits from Ukraine. Out of the 33% that do, 20% receive retirement pensions, 9% receive parental benefits and 5% receive disability allowance²⁴.

Protection Profiling and Monitoring results revealed that the most significant challenges reported by respondents in accessing social protection benefits in 2024 are connected to three main areas, the legal framework, the system's capacity and practical challenges, such as lack of information, and the language barrier. The lack of legal provisions that allow for the certification of a residential address of Temporary Protection beneficiaries which is necessary to access social benefits together with the lack of the address on the temporary residence permit itself have been the main legal impediments. This issue has been addressed by the issuance of a Governmental Decision on May 17 which creates the normative framework and the means to certify a residential address on the Temporary Protection permit, however, there will continue to be some additional issues that may represent barriers to effective access to social protection benefits and that will need to be addressed. There is for instance a need to codify an exception in the normative framework to make sure that refugees will not be required to travel back to Ukraine to obtain proof that they are not receiving similar benefits in Ukraine. While minimum wages in Romania have increased significantly in recent years,²⁵ surpassing inflation, and praiseworthy and much awaited modifications of the social protection system in Romania took place this year the social protection system is still facing significant challenges, mostly stemming from low levels of funding, adequate targeting and an inherent complexity.²⁶ Navigating this elaborate system may pose significant challenges for refugees, considering the language barrier and the limited information and awareness on its intricacies. This translates into a need for support from humanitarian actors, making the process resource and time intensive, whereas the transfer value of benefits remains low compared to the cost of living.



In response, UNHCR has shared a series of legal analyses with the line ministries, providing recommendations for addressing the issue of the certification of the residential address to facilitate the inclusion of Temporary Protection holders in the social protection system. It is understood that these technical recommendations together with advocacy efforts have had an impact on the Government's decision to consider amending the legislative framework with a view to ensuring access to social benefits for Temporary Protection holders.

Calls to Action

UNHCR commends Romania for its ongoing comprehensive support for refugees from Ukraine and for its willingness to engage with UN agencies and civil society to identify and address gaps, share good

²⁴ UNHCR, Romania Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, 2023 - <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107642>

²⁵ European Commission, In-depth Economic Review Romania 2024 - https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c5b5a8cb-6114-46e6-b7be-e47c689022c4_en?filename=ip275_en.pdf

²⁶ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Improving Social Protection in Romania, 2020 - <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/16834.pdf>

practices and improve the overall response. UNHCR reiterates its commitment and that of its partners to continue providing assistance and to this purpose, it formulates a series of recommendations for all stakeholders involved in the response.

On Access to Housing, UNHCR's recommendations are:

- To identify the most vulnerable refugees who will continue to require accommodation support in collective shelters after the end of the current program and create the necessary framework to facilitate their effective access to dignified solutions.
- To strengthen the nexus between public social services and civil society organizations to ensure that protection services are available for refugees living in collective accommodations.
- To assist the smooth and efficient transition from the current assistance program to the social protection mechanisms to mitigate protection risks including related to housing.
- To contribute to the inclusion of housing support for the most vulnerable refugees in the legal framework that will determine the conditions of the upcoming government program.

On Access to Employment UNHCR's recommendations are:

- To strengthen the information provision as well as the services available through the National Employment Agency, specifically the language courses, skills training and entrepreneurship support.
- To facilitate the procedure for recognition of qualifications for specialized professions, in particular in healthcare and education.
- To remove legal and regulatory barriers and encourage private enterprise initiatives through financial services to include the significant proportion of refugees that were self-employed before displacement in the active labour market.
- To identify ways of linking ways of accessing childcare options with facilitating labour market inclusion.

On Access to Social Protection, UNHCR's recommendations are:

- To consolidate the social protection system by enhancing availability and geographic coverage of specialized services, e.g. for persons with disabilities, for the most vulnerable refugees.
- To ensure the application procedures to access social benefits will become more accessible by simplifying the procedures, providing tailored information on them and assisting them in the process.
- Enhance transfer value of subsidies for social benefits for all populations to mitigate the effects of inflation and match the average growth in salaries. For refugees, this would result in increased resilience and improved standards of living, facilitating inclusion.
- To update an internal instruction sent by the Ministry of Labour to the National Payment and Social Inspection Agency which has blocked the provision of social benefits from local authorities.