

Rapid assessment on the access of refugees from Ukraine to bank services

Since the beginning of the international armed conflict in Ukraine on 24th February 2022, **more than 4.7 million refugees from Ukraine have crossed the border into Romania**, both directly from Ukraine and via the Republic of Moldova. Out of these, more than **142.624 have been issued Temporary Protection permits** in Romania, and as of 10 September 2023, **86,586 refugees remained in the country**.

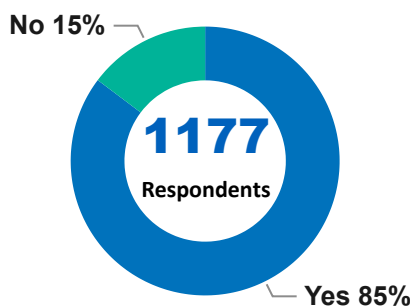
In order to carry on their lives in Romania and access basic services and livelihood opportunities, the refugees from Ukraine have to also access banking services in the country, moreover, due to the fact that one of the main criteria to access the new government assistance programme requires that all its beneficiaries have a Romanian bank account in order to receive the assistance.

Through this rapid assessment, UNHCR aimed to better understand the how many refugees managed to open a bank account in Romania, which were the most accessible banks and what are the main challenges and barriers in accessing financial services.

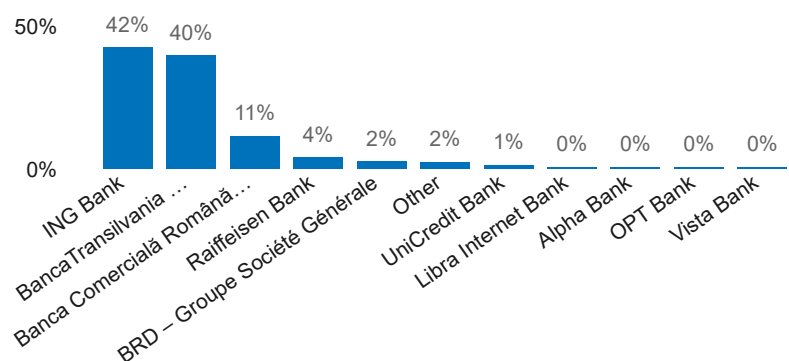
Access to banking services

Among the 1,177 participants of the survey, a considerable 85% (n=1,002) successfully established bank accounts in Romania, while the remaining 15% have yet to do so, for several reasons indicated in the below section. Noteworthy, banking institutions opted for by refugees during the successful account-opening process include ING Bank (42%), Banca Transilvania (BT) (40%), Banca Comerciala Romana (BCR) (11%), Raiffeisen Bank (4%), and BRD (2%).

respondents having opened a bank account in Romania

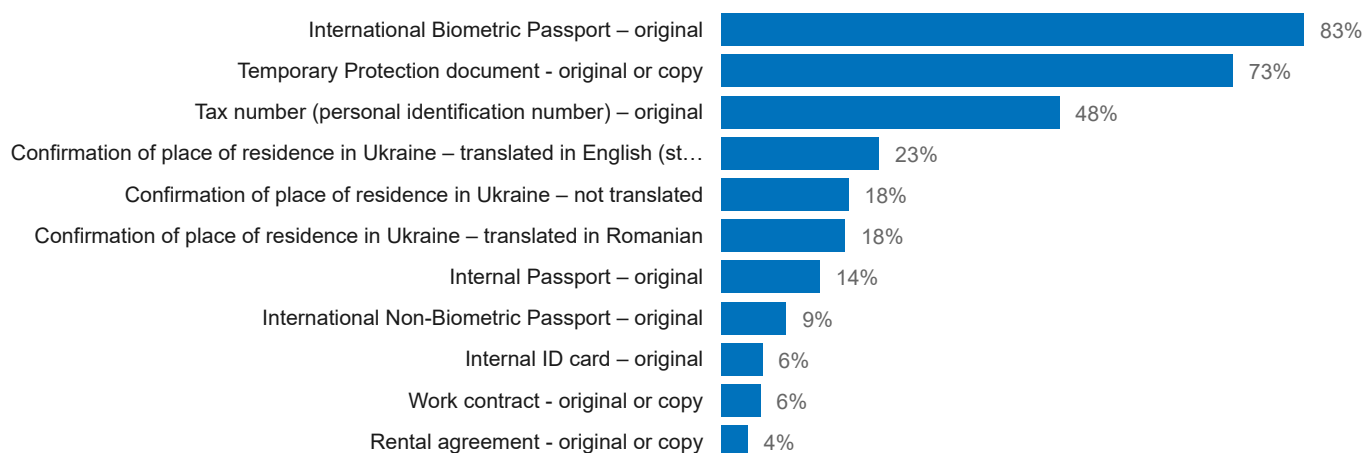


Banks refugees opened accounts with*



The top five most frequently requested documents during the account-opening process included the International Biometric Passport (83%), Temporary Protection document (73%), Tax number (personal identification number) (48%), Confirmation of residence in Ukraine (in English) (23%), and Confirmation of residence in Ukraine (untranslated) (18%), followed by other documents listed in the graph below.

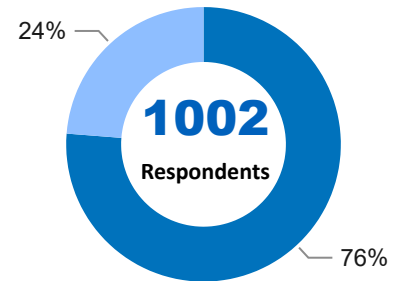
Documents needed*



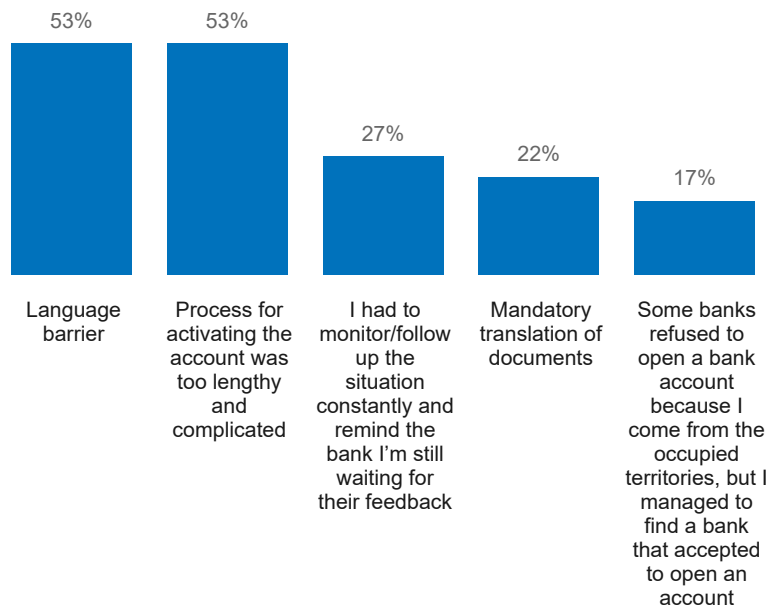
Concerning phone number requirements, 75% of respondents indicated that banks did not specify the type of the phone number required, whereas 14% were required to provide Ukrainian phone numbers, and the remaining 11% were requested to provide Romanian numbers.

Challenges during the registration process

Addressing challenges faced during the registration process, a distinct subset of 24% of respondents reported encountering difficulties. These challenges predominantly included language barriers (53%), complexities in account activation (53%), follow-up delays (27%), the need for document translation (22%), and occasional bank refusals (17%). Notably, among the 238 respondents who reported issues, a substantial 69% found resolutions, while 20% indicated ongoing pending matters, and 11% remained with unresolved concerns.

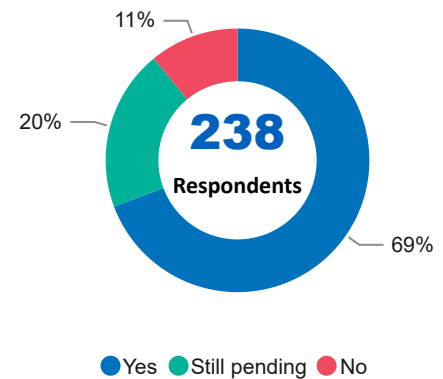


Types of challenges faced during the registration process



● I had no problems ● I faced some challenges

Were the problems solved?

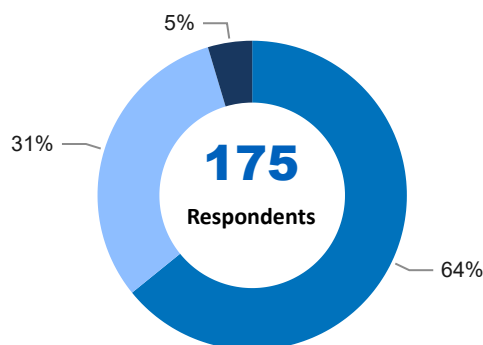


● Yes ● Still pending ● No

Reasons not to open a bank account

Beyond the scope of the survey, a total of 175 participants revealed that they did not possess bank accounts in Romania. Among these individuals, 64% attributed their lack of accounts to a lack of necessity, 31% reported challenges during the account-opening process, and the remaining 5% expressed a lack of interest.

Reasons to not open a bank account



● I didn't need to ● I had problems in opening an account ● I don't want to

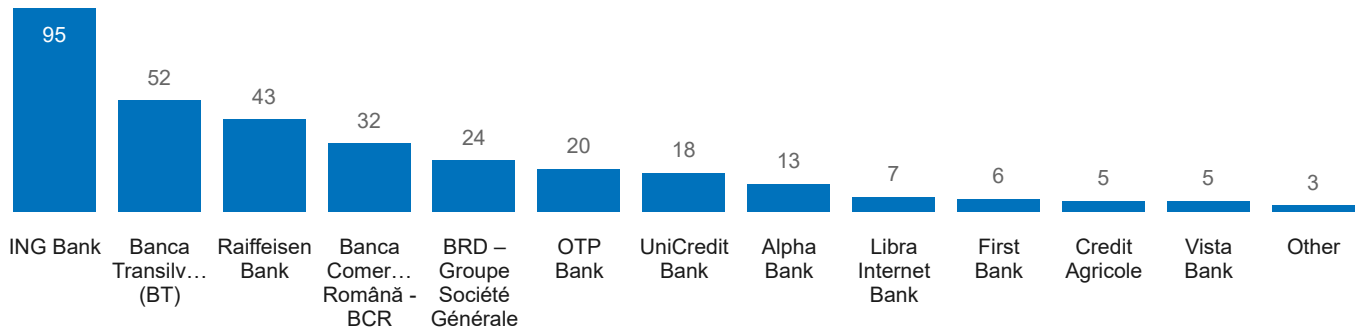
Type of Problem

Occurrence

Type of Problem	Occurrence
Language barrier	58
Other	44
I am registered in an occupied territory	27
Lack of notarized translation of documents	21
Bank refused without indicating reason	20
Bank policy	16
Bank refused to allow my family to act as a translator	15
I don't have documents (international passport, national passport, TP or tax number in Ukraine)	14
They required to be accompanied by a certified translator/interpreter	13
I can't provide translation of my address in Ukraine	12
They require a rental contract	12
I don't have a Romanian phone number	10
They require a proof of employment	10
Bank didn't call back after providing documents	9

The challenges reported in relation to banking institutions primarily included language barriers (n=58), registration within occupied territories (n=27), lack of notarized document translations (n=21), unexplained bank refusals (n=20), and restrictive bank policies (n=16). Furthermore, an additional 44 respondents reported encountering unlisted issues. Notably, ING Bank (n=95), Banca Transilvania (n=52), Raiffeisen Bank (n=43), Banca Comercială Română (n=32), and BRD-Groupe Societe Generale (n=24) were identified as the banks most frequently associated with these challenges.

Banks with which refugees reported having a problem in opening an account



Methodology and demography

The study relied on structured surveys that employed self-administered surveys conducted via Telegram, encompassing a total of 1,177 refugees over the span of June 6th to 11th, 2023. A convenience-based sampling methodology was implemented.

Among the Counties hosting refugees, Bucharest (346), Constanta (301), Sibiu (105), Maramures (69), and Suceava (52) emerged as the top five origins. For other Counties, participant counts ranged from 1 to 41 individuals.

Regarding their Ukrainian origins, the most frequently cited oblasts included Odeska (456), Khersonska (141), Donetska (79), Mykolaivska (78), and Kyivska (68). Additionally, 76 respondents identified Kyiv city as their place of origin. For other oblasts, participant counts ranged from 1 to 57 individuals, with only a solitary respondent declining to provide an answer to this question.

Conclusions

Amidst the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the movement of refugees to Romania has set in motion financial integration. This UNHCR-led assessment underscores the refugees' proactive endeavors in accessing banking services, revealing both achievements and challenges. This assessments did not find systematic challenges or recurring themes and showed a mostly favorable environment for accessing financial services. Nonetheless, one of the main limitations of this survey, namely the sampling methodology employed which might have led to a more digitally savvy population that might navigate more easily through the possible challenges in this process.