Post Distribution Monitoring - Transition MPCA

Summary

Since the beginning of the full scale invasion of 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 **144,152 have been issued Temporary Protection** permits in Romania, and as of the end of September 2023, **85,006 refugees remained in the country**.

In response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine into neighboring countries, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) implemented a three-month Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) program starting in 2022 and continuing into the early months of 2023. The assistance amounted to 568 RON per person per month, with an additional one-month payment for more vulnerable households meeting specific targeting criteria. Furthermore, a Winterization Cash Top-up assistance was provided during the winter season to alleviate its adverse impact. These cash assistance rounds were part of the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) for the Ukraine situation and were delivered in close coordination with the Government of Romania.

On April 12, 2023, the Government of Romania approved a new Emergency Ordinance amending the previous assistance program for food and accommodation. Eligible refugees now receive 2,000 RON per family (or 750 RON for single individuals) for accommodation and 600 RON per person per month for food. To mitigate protection risks and negative coping mechanisms among refugees during the transition to the new program, UNHCR initiated the **"One-time top-up MPC to enable refugees with accommodation support during the 50/20 program transition period"** in the months of May and June.

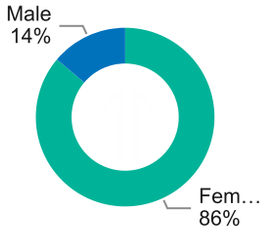
The aim of this program was to assist refugees in meeting their accommodation needs and addressing specific unmet requirements during the transition period. It primarily targeted the most vulnerable refugees based on criteria determined by UNHCR Romania, providing a transfer value of 568 RON per individual. A single payment was distributed to all eligible households, and by the end of the program, 30,557 individuals had received the cash assistance.

As part of its commitment to monitor service quality and ensure accountability to the affected population, UNHCR conducted a Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) survey to evaluate the Transition Multi-Purpose Cash program in Romania. This document presents the survey findings organized into nine sections: (1) Demographic characteristics of the sample, (2) Methodology, (3) Receiving and spending the cash assistance, (4) Risks in accessing the assistance, (5) Problems in accessing and spending the assistance, (6) Markets and Prices, (7) Outcomes, (8) Coping mechanisms, and (9) Accountability to the Affected Population.

1.Demographic composition

As shown in the graphs below, the average household size in the surveyed sample consists of 2.7 individuals, totaling 517 individuals assessed. Regarding gender disaggregation, out of 188 respondents, 86% were women, and 14% were men. Within the 517 individuals, the two largest age groups were 18-59 years old (with 124 females and 45 males) and 5-17 years old (with 66 females and 61 males). In terms of geographic representation, the top counties were Constanta (48), Bucharest (44), Suceava (38), and Maramureș (13). In the other counties, the sample sizes ranged from 1 to 8 individuals.

Geographical distribution of the sample

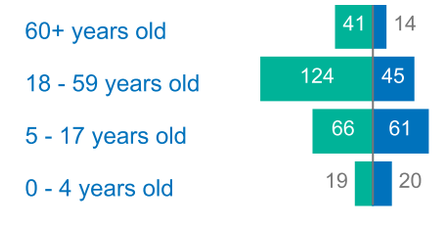


188
Households

2.75
Average Household Size

517
Total individuals

Population pyramid



2.Methodology

Using a structured survey, UNHCR conducted phone interviews with a total of 188 refugee households between 27 July and 25 August 2023. These households were randomly selected from the UNHCR list of refugee recipients of cash assistance with a confidence level of 95% and a 7% margin of error. Additionally, a 100% buffer was included in the sample to account for potential non-responses due to the fluidity of the number of refugees.

3.Reception and expenditure of Cash Assistance

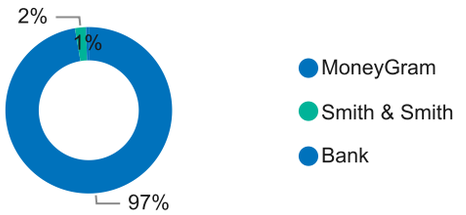
The third section of the monitoring questionnaire aimed to better understand the reception and expenditure of the assistance. Considering that all beneficiaries were disbursed the same amount of 568 RON per person, the survey asked refugees to report on the amounts received and their perception of this. Reportedly, the average amount received by the refugees was around 1,450 RON and the median amount of 1,136 RON per household, with the preferred transfer modality being through MoneyGram (97%). Regarding the perception on the amount received, 97% of the respondents reported that they received the expected amount of cash, while 2% stated that they did not receive the expected amount. Considering the difference in amounts from the previous assistance programmes which added to a slightly higher amount (653 RON), the very small percentage may tell reflect the fact that the community was properly informed on about the programme.

In terms of timing, 95% of the respondents reported that the cash assistance arrived on the expected date, while 4% reported that it did not arrive on the expected date. The top three decision-makers reported by the respondents regarding cash spending were: female head of the household (52%), the entire household (26%), and both husband and wife (17%).

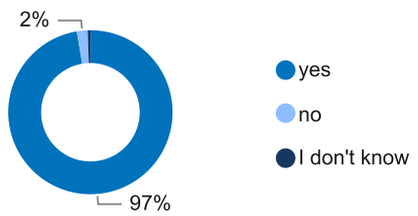
1,136
Median amount received (in RON)

1,450
Average amount received (in RON)

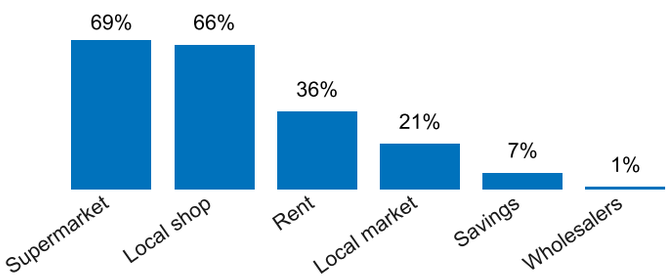
Transfer Modality



Expected amount



Where was the cash spent*

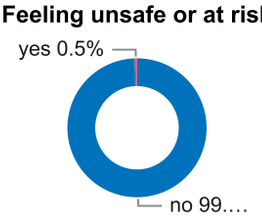


The top 3 places where respondents chose to spend the cash were: **supermarket (69%)**; **local shop (66%)**; and on **rent (36%)**. Furthermore, 91% of the respondents reported that they were able to find quality items/services in the market, while only 2% of respondents reported that they were unable to find mostly/not at all items/services in the market; furthermost, 7% of the respondents reported that they did not know if they were able or unable to find quality items/services in the market. The most frequently reported items /services not found were: Medical items (n=6).

4.Risks in accessing the cash assistance

Regarding the perception of risks and safety concerns when accessing or using the assistance, there was only one instance where this was reported. The respondent stated that they felt unsafe or at risk during the enrollment process, when keeping the money at home after receiving it and while spending it.

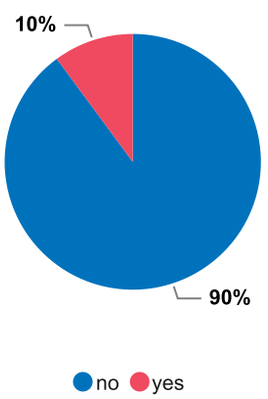
Feeling unsafe or at risk



5.Problems in receiving/withdrawing or spending the cash assistance

During the survey, participants were also asked whether they encountered any problems or issues in the process of receiving, withdrawing, or spending the cash assistance. While 90% of the respondents reported that they hadn't encountered or were not aware of any problems, 10% reported facing at least one of the following issues: the registered person couldn't access or withdraw the cash (0.5%); wrong or invalid PIN (8%); refusal of services by shop/market owners (2.3%); and poor services from the financial service provider (i.e., the financial service provider did not have any Romanian currency, or did not have any more cash in the location where refugees went to pick up the assistance, or the system of the financial service provider would not work, or experienced delays) (8%).

Encountering problems

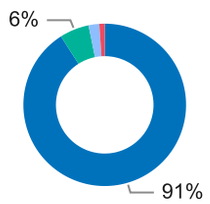


*The results don't add up to 100% because the question allowed for multiple choice

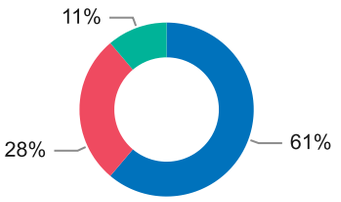
6.Markets and prices

Refugees were also questioned about their experiences in the market. The results revealed that the majority of the respondents (91%), were able to find the items they needed and only 1% didn't, while 2% found mostly and 6% didn't know. When enquired about the price of items and services, the respondents had differing opinions. According to the survey, 61% of the respondents claimed a general increase in the price of items or services, while 36% reported that they did not notice any increase in prices. The remaining 26% of the respondents admitted that they did not know how to determine if prices had changed.

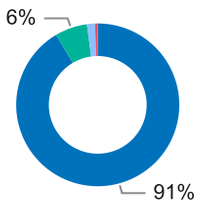
Finding the needed items/services in the market



Observing and increase in the price of items or services in the last four weeks



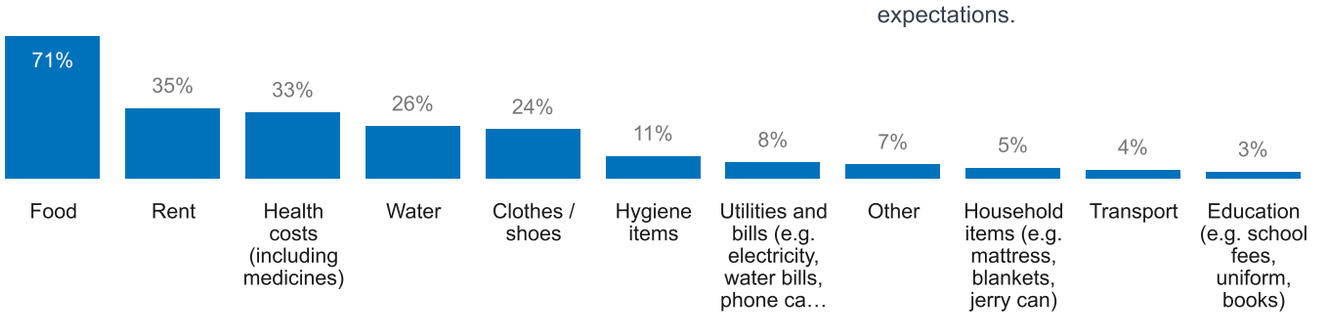
Finding quality for items/services in the market



yes mostly Don't know no

When asked about the quality of items or services they encountered, a majority of the respondents, specifically 91%, answered affirmatively, indicating that they found the right quality. On the other hand, 6% of the respondents admitted that they were uncertain about the quality of items or services they encountered. Besides, 2% of the respondents reported that they were uncertain about finding the right quality of items or services. Only a small minority of 1% of the respondents reported that they did not find the right quality of items or services in the marketplace. Specifically, the respondents mentioned items such as medicines as the ones that were not readily available or did not meet their quality expectations.

On what was the assistance spent*



7.Outcomes

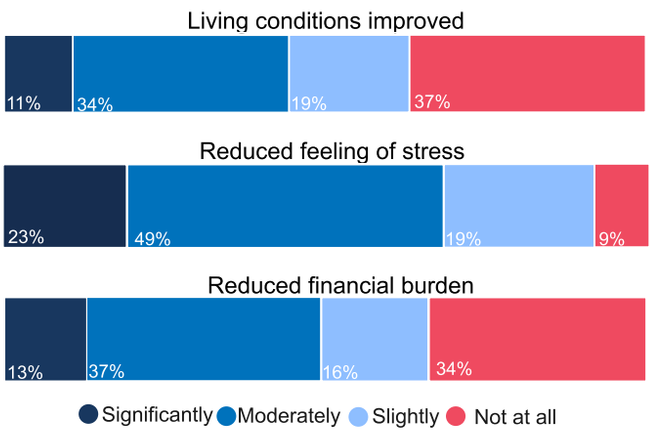
The survey also sought to understand the impact of cash assistance on the respondents, specifically in three key areas: improvement of living conditions, reduced feelings of stress, and the alleviation of the financial burden on their households. The respondents' assessments were categorized into four levels of impact: "slightly," "moderately," "significantly," and "not at all."

In terms of **living conditions**, 19% reported a 'slight' positive impact, 34% 'moderate,' 11% 'significant,' and 37% 'not at all.'

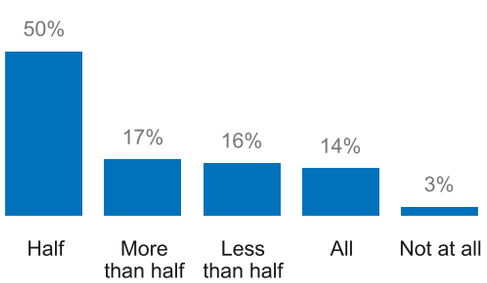
For **reduced stress**, 23% experienced a 'slight' reduction, 49% 'moderate,' 19% 'significant,' and 9% 'not at all.'

Regarding a **reduced financial burden**, 16% felt a 'slight' effect, 37% 'moderate,' 13% 'significant,' and 34% 'not at all.'"

To be noted that the data was collected still in the period in which the new assistance programme was not yet disbursed to refugees.



Meeting the households basic needs



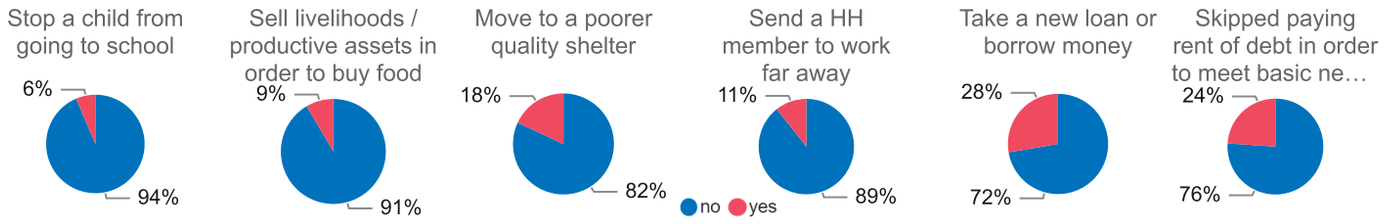
The assessment also focused on understanding how well the respondents could fulfill their households' basic needs on their own. The answers were categorized into five levels, each representing different levels at which they were able to meet these needs: "Not at all" , "Less than half", "Half", "More than half (but not all), and "All".

According to the answers, 14% reported that they were able to meet all of the basic needs of their households and another 67% half (50%) or more than half (17%). On the other hand, 16% of the respondents indicated that they were able to meet less than half and 3% were not able to meet at all the basic needs of their household.

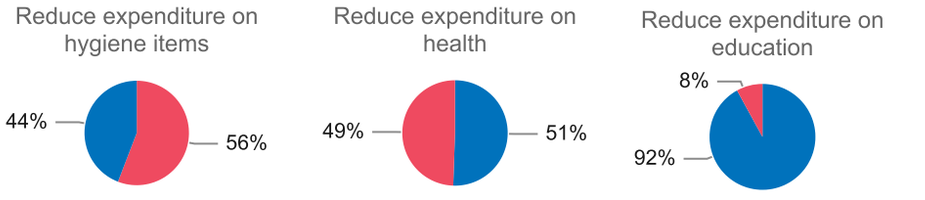
*The results don't add up to 100% because the question allowed for multiple choice

8.Coping mechanisms

In this section of the survey refugees were asked whether in the four weeks prior to the data collection they have resorted to any coping mechanism in order to meet their basic needs. 6% reported they had to prevent a child from going to school; 9% had to Selling livelihoods or productive assets; 18% moved to a poorer quality shelter; 11% sent a household member to work far away; 28% took a new loan or borrowed money and 24% had to skip paying rent or a debt.



Similarly, some households had to resort to coping mechanisms such as reducing expenditures on hygiene items (56%) reducing expenditure on health items (49%) and reducing expenditure on education items and costs (8%), in order to buy food.



Extreme Coping mechanisms

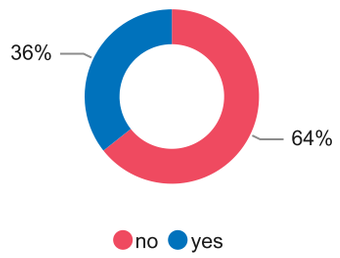
Among the of the surveyed refugees only 1% have have also reported resorting to extreme coping mechanisms, such as begging or asking strangers for money (n=2).

9.Accountability to Affected Population

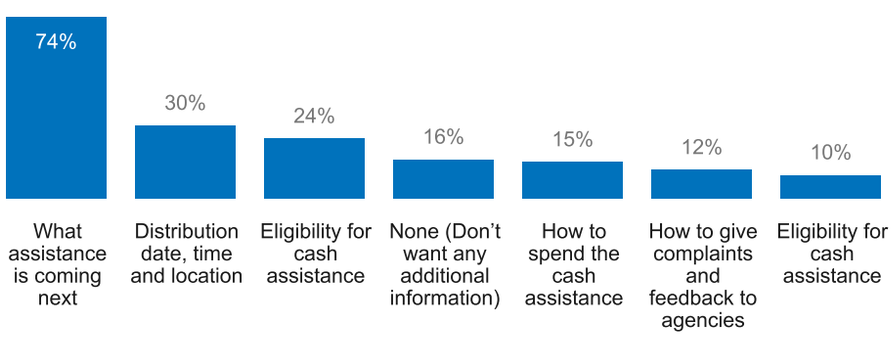
In terms of informational needs, 74% of respondents prioritized information about what assistance is coming next. Additionally, 30% of respondents expressed a desire for information regarding the distribution details, including the date, time, and location of the assistance. Furthermore, 24% of respondents expressed a need for information on the eligibility criteria for cash assistance.

Regarding preferences for assistance, if the program were to resume, 78% of respondents indicated a preference for cash assistance (as oppose to in-kind of a combination of both). When asked about their awareness of reporting complaints and providing feedback on cash assistance from UNHCR, only 36% of respondents answered affirmatively. Among these respondents, 91% indicated that they would use the hotline as the preferred channel for reporting concerns or providing feedback. Additionally, 6% mentioned community mobilizers as their preferred means of communication, while a small fraction of 3% indicated an unspecified channel of preference.

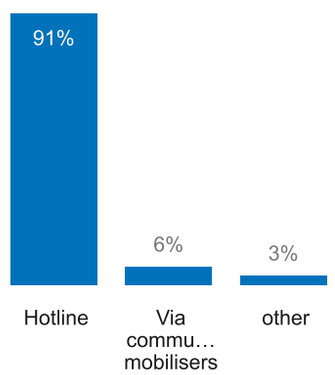
Knowing how you can report complaints and feedback on the cash assistance from UNHCR?



Information provision*



Channel



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