REGIONAL PROTECTION MONITORING REPORT

ROMANIA

Mixed Movement Protection Brief

This document resumes the main findings of UNHCR's and its partner CNRR's protection monitoring activities in 2022/23 with asylum-seekers, refugees, and other persons who have arrived in Romania as part of mixed flows.

Summary

Between June 2022 and November 2023, as part of its protection monitoring work, UNHCR, through its partner, the Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR), has conducted 1,955 interviews with asylum-seekers, as well as to a lesser extent also with refugees and other individuals who have arrived in Romania as part of mixed flows. Interviews were mainly conducted at Romania's six reception centers hosting asylum-seekers and refugees. Questions, which are standardized across the region, were geared towards understanding the respondents' profiles, needs, movement patterns and motivations, as well as protection risks, and with a view to informing advocacy and programming.

Most of the respondents came from Bangladesh, the Syrian Arab Republic, India, Afghanistan, and Nepal. 85 per cent were male and 15 per cent were female. Approximately one third of respondents was referred to specific services for assistance.

42 per cent indicated having left their country of origin due to limited access to employment, while 32 per cent feared generalized violence and insecurity in their country of origin and 10 per cent referred to threats to their life or to their families. When asked for their destination country, 39 per cent of respondents explained they wanted to stay in Romania, while 61 per cent wanted to travel on. Many respondents reported repeated attempts to cross borders, either when entering or when trying to leave Romania.

For those trying to enter the country, 11 per cent reported having been subject to different forms of violence, such as property confiscation or destruction, physical abuse/mistreatment, and unwanted sexual attention. For those who had attempted to leave Romania in the past, two per cent reported having had experiences of mistreatment. While 64 per cent reported to be aware of the existence of voluntary return programmes, none of the respondents was interested in the option of voluntary return to their country of origin.

Methodology

UNHCR conducts protection monitoring to systematically gather information on the challenges facing forcibly displaced and stateless persons. Protection monitoring allows UNHCR to ensure evidence-based programming and advocacy, which is informed by the experiences and perspectives of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.

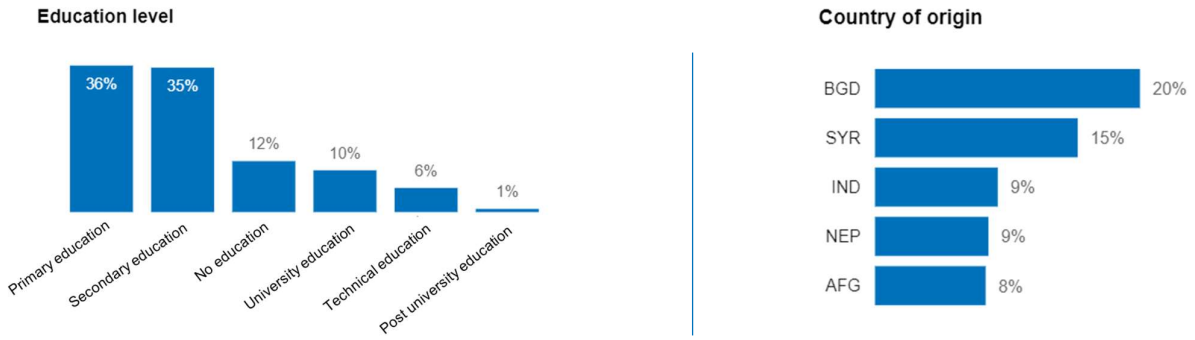
Individual interviews are conducted in different locations, including reception centers, detention centers and other locations. Trained enumerators collect data digitally using the Kobo Toolbox, which is then safely stored in UNHCR's server.

While respondents are randomly selected to reduce bias, non-probability sampling is used. Results cannot necessarily be extrapolated to all populations engaged in mixed movements in South-eastern Europe.

Respondents are identified in the selected locations and asked for their consent to be interviewed using a harmonized regional questionnaire. The results presented in this report are indicative and must be interpreted according to the limitations of the methodology and the context.

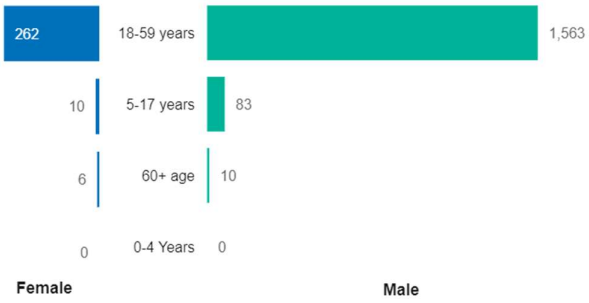
Demographics

Out of the 1,955 interviews conducted, close to two-thirds of the respondents were nationals of Bangladesh (21 per cent of respondents), the Syrian Arab Republic (15 per cent of respondents), India (10 per cent of respondents), Afghanistan (9 per cent of respondents), and Nepal (9 per cent of respondents). Looking at the share of nationalities applying for asylum in Romania in 2023, as per the information received from the General Inspectorate for Immigration, the top six countries making up to 77% of all asylum-seekers include the top four interviewed in this survey (Bangladesh - 28%, Syrian Arab Republic - 19%, Pakistan - 12%, Nepal - 9%, Sri Lanka - 5% and India - 4%). Considering this alignment, it can be assumed that the results are somewhat representative in terms of nationalities. Nonetheless, due to the limitations in the research methodology, the results should be considered indicative.



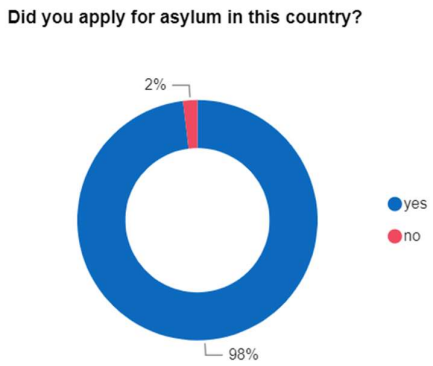
In the age group breakdown, for individuals aged 5-17 years, 11 per cent are female and 89 per cent are male. In the 18-59 age bracket, 14 per cent are female and 86 per cent are male. As the age increases to 60 and above, the representation of women rises significantly with 38 per cent of respondents being female and 63 per cent being male.

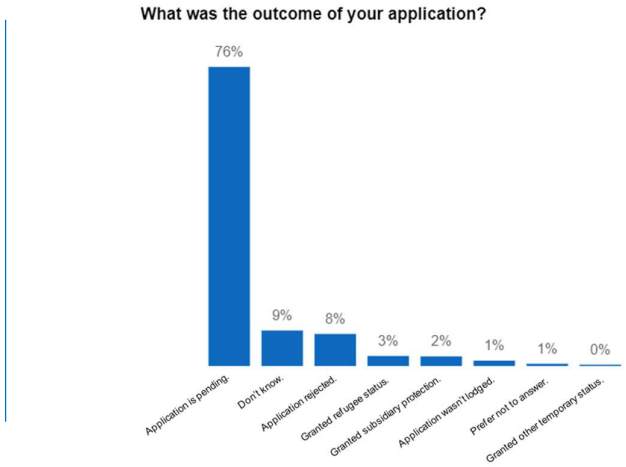
When asked about the highest level of education achieved, 52 per cent have either finished their secondary education (35 per cent), finished their university education (10 per cent), received technical training (six per cent) or hold post-university qualifications (one per cent). 36 per cent have finished their primary education only and 13 per cent reported not having received any formal education.



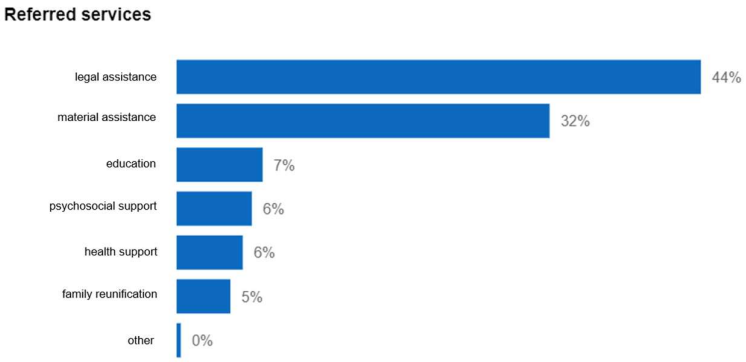
98 per cent of respondents confirmed having applied for asylum in Romania, while two per cent did not apply.

76 per cent were still waiting for their asylum decision, while eight per cent had their asylum claims rejected. Three per cent of respondents had already been granted refugee status and two per cent had been granted subsidiary protection. The remaining nine per cent were unsure about their application status, and one per cent chose not to disclose information on their asylum application.





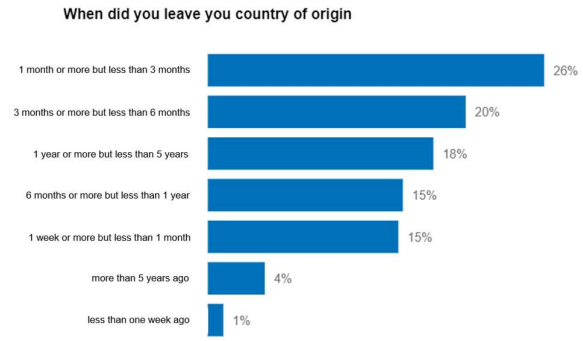
693 respondents presented specific needs that required a referral: 44 per cent needed legal assistance, followed by material assistance (32 per cent), support with accessing education services (seven per cent), psychosocial support (six per cent), support with accessing health services (six per cent), and family reunification (five per cent).

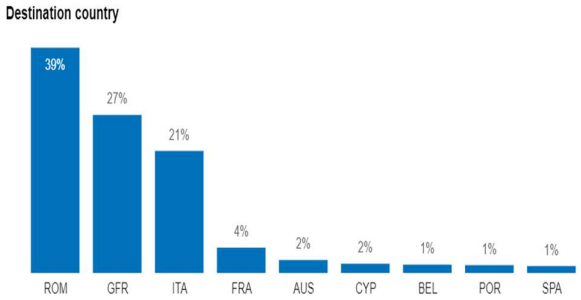


Movement pattern and possible international protection needs

27 per cent of respondents have left their country of origin one to two months ago. 20 per cent have left three to five months ago and 18 per cent have been away from their country of origin for between one year and five years. 16 per cent commenced their journey less than one month ago, while there is also four per cent who embarked on their journey more than five years ago.

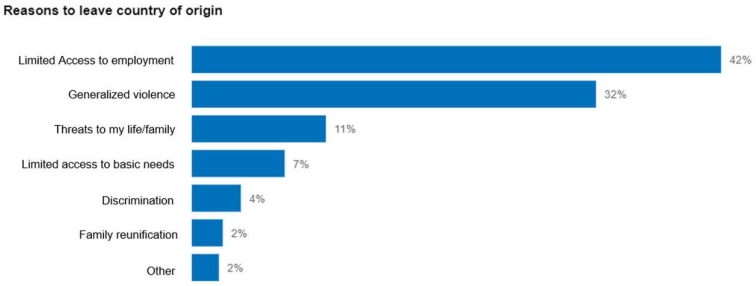
When assessing the destination preference, 39 per cent of the respondents chose Romania (ROM), 27 per cent Germany (GFR), 21 per cent Italy (ITA), four per cent France (FRA), and two per cent Austria (AUS).

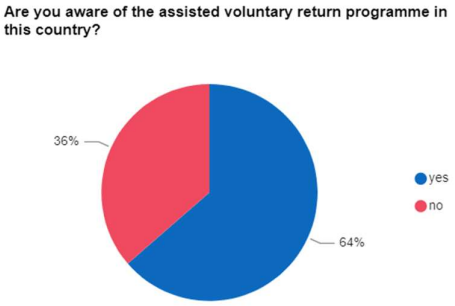




Regarding the reason for leaving the country of origin, 42 per cent indicated limited access to employment, while 32 per cent feared generalized violence and insecurity in their country of origin, 10 per cent referred to threats to life or family and seven per cent of the respondents left because of lack of access to basic services. Discrimination influenced four per cent of the interviewees, family reunification motivated two per cent of the respondents, and two per cent of the persons cited other reasons. For the purpose of the survey, respondents were only able to select one response that would best fit their reasons for leaving the country of origin.

In terms of awareness about assisted voluntary return programmes, 64 per cent of the respondents were aware that these programmes existed. However, when asked if they would be interested in returning to their country of origin, all the respondents answered negatively.

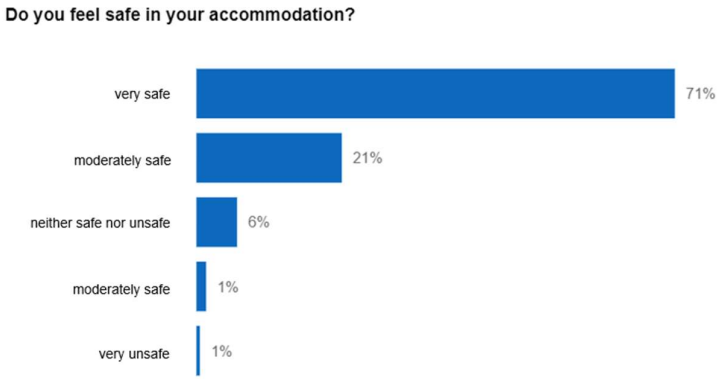


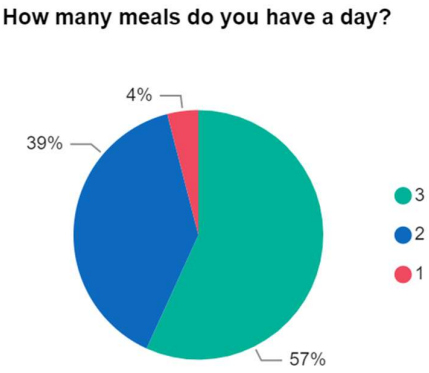


Reception conditions

When asked about accommodation, 93 per cent of respondents reported that they currently reside within a Reception Center for Asylum Seekers, with only six per cent of the respondents reporting living in private accommodation. 0.3 per cent respondents reported living in other forms of accommodation. This reflects the asylum procedural stage in which the respondents were at the time of the interview.

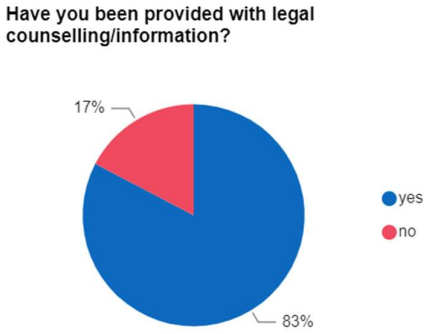
Regarding the safety of the accommodation, 71 per cent of the respondents reported feeling very safe; 21 per cent of moderately safe, and six per cent feeling neither safe nor unsafe. Only a small percentage of respondents, one per cent each, reported feeling moderately unsafe or very unsafe.

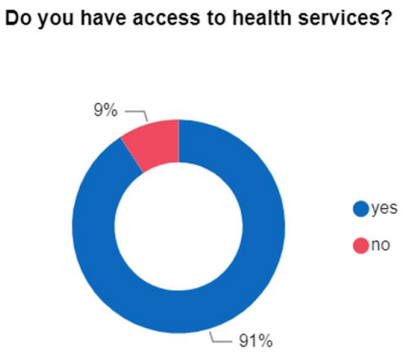




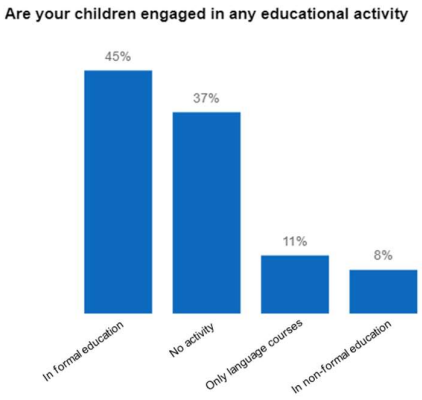
Concerning the access to meals, four per cent of the respondents reported receiving one meal a day, 39 per cent of the respondents reported having access to two meals, and 57 per cent of the respondents reported benefiting from three meals daily. These findings raise protection concerns which relate to situations where asylum-seekers' freedom of movement is restricted upon their first arrival to the reception centre and until they may be transferred to another centre. For one reception centre, for example, it has been reported that, during the time when the protection monitoring was conducted, authorities relied on donations by NGOs to ensure the provision of food to residents in the Reception Centre. If these supplies are not available or do not arrive timely, food is not available.

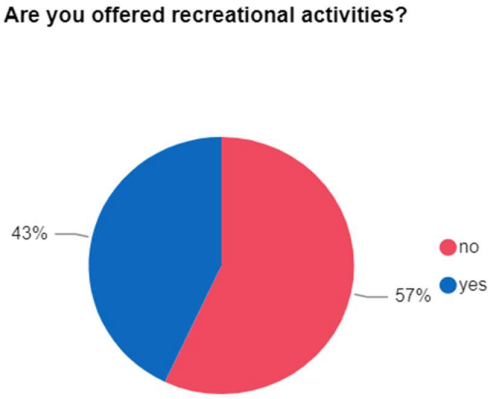
In terms of access to services, 83 per cent of the respondents reported having access to legal counselling or information, and 91 per cent of the respondents reported having access to health services. 43 per cent of the respondents reported being offered recreational activities. Only 15 per cent of the interviewed respondents were traveling with children.





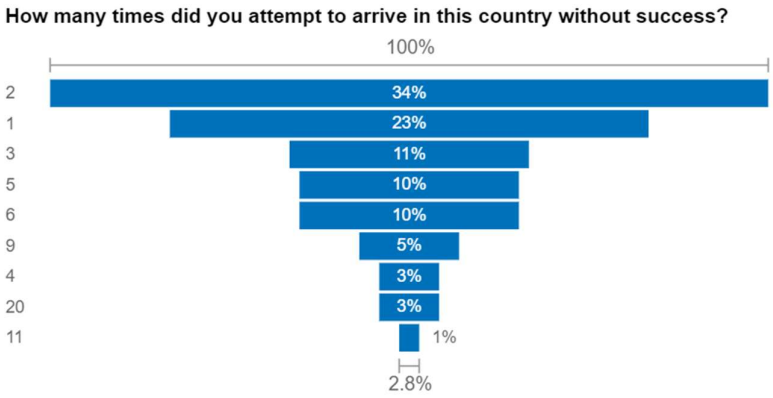
37 per cent of these households reported that their children were not engaged in any kind of activity, while 45 per cent were engaged in a formal educational activity, 11 per cent in language classes and eight per cent in non-formal education.

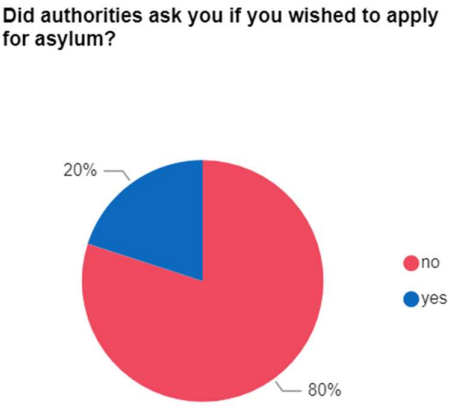




Access to the territory and asylum

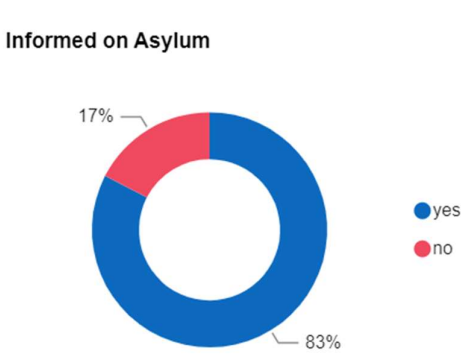
When asked about attempts to enter Romania, five percent of the total respondents declared that they have had at least one failed attempt to do so. Out of this five percent, 77 per cent of people made more than one attempt to enter, with 20 attempts being the highest number mentioned and 34 per cent of the respondents having attempted to cross twice. 95 per cent of the respondents reported having been prevented from crossing by the border police.

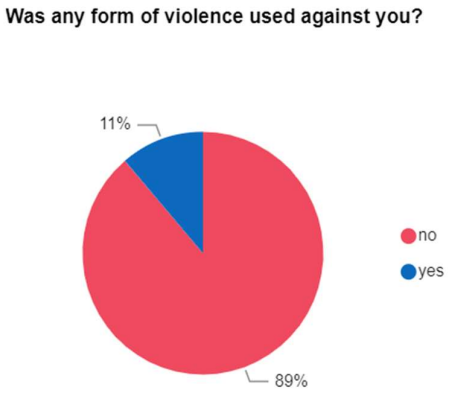




Out of the five per cent of the total respondents who reported at least one failed attempt to enter the country, 80 percent reported not having been asked by authorities if they wish to apply for asylum. However, 83 per cent of the respondents reported having been informed of the right to seek asylum through NGOs, other refugees/asylum seekers as well as through asylum authorities.

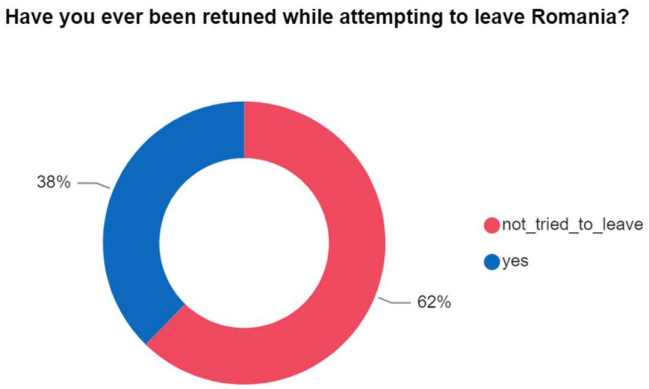
While 89 per cent of the total respondents reported that they were not subjected to any form of violence during the process, 11 per cent reported experiencing incidents including property confiscation/destruction, physical abuse/mistreatment, and unwanted sexual attention. For the interpretation of these results, it should however be noted that these incidents may be attributable to either authorities or even private persons on either side of the borders.

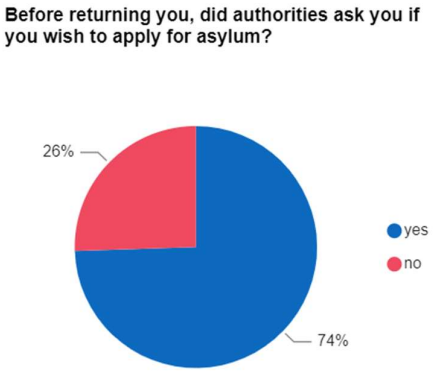




For those who had attempted to leave Romania, the main immediate destinations mentioned included Hungary (74 per cent), Italy (nine per cent) and Serbia (eight per cent). 38 per cent of the respondents reported being returned while trying to leave Romania, the vast majority (96 per cent) by the border police. 74 per cent of the respondents who found themselves in this situation reported that they were asked by the authorities if they would wish to apply for asylum before being returned.

While the majority experienced no violence during those returns (98 per cent), two per cent, corresponding to 14 respondents, reported experiencing what they have perceived as mistreatment, encompassing restrictions of movement/detention (six respondents), physical abuse/mistreatment (five respondents), confiscation/destruction of property and other forms of violence (three respondents). These respondents may represent individuals who have been lawfully detained following attempts to irregularly cross the border to a neighbouring country and who only subsequently, while in detention, expressed the wish to apply to asylum.





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ROMANIA

December 2023

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency