WHO Country Office in Romania

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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Abbreviations

AMI	Independent Midwife Association
ANDIS	National Agency for Health Infrastructure Development
ANES	National Agency for Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men
ANMCS	National Authority for Quality Management in Health
ANSVSA	National Sanitary, Veterinary and Food Safety Authority
AREPMF	Romanian Association for Pediatric Education in Family Medicine
ASEF	Asia-Europe Foundation
BCA	Biennial Cooperation Agreement
CCS	Country Cooperation Strategy
CD	Communicable Disease
CMR	Clinical Management of Rape
DDH	Data and Digital Health
DSP	Department of Public Health
DSU	Department for Emergency Services
EEIRH	Eastern European Instituteof Reproductive Health
EHDS	European Health Data Space
EHMA	European Health Management Association
ENISA	European Union Agency for Cybersecurity
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
EPW	European Program of Work
ESD	Empowerment Self-Defense
EU	European Union
EURO	WHO Regional Office for Europe
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GoR	Government of Romania GPW General Program of Work
HCW	Healthcare workers
HIS	Health Information System
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	Human Papilloma Virus
HQ	Headquarters
HRH	Human Resources in Health
HSF	Health System Financing
HSM	Health Services Management
HWG	Health Working Group
HWF	Health Work Force
HWFR	Health Workforce Registry
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICE	Information, Communication and Education
IGI	Immigration Directorate
IMS	Incident Management System
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IPC	Infection Prevention and Control
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KMC	Kangaroo Mother Care
LBW	Low Birth Weight
MDR-TB	Multi Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MSP	Minimum Service Package
MoE	Ministry of Environment
MoH	Ministry of Health
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NBW	National Bridging Workshop
NCD	Noncommunicable Diseases
NGO	Nongovernmental Organizations
NHIH/CNAS	National Health Insurance House
NHS	National Health Service
NIPH	National Institute of Public Health
NIHSM	National Institute of Health Services Management
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plan
OOH	Out-of-Home
PHC	Primary Health Care
PS	Patient Safety
PSEAH	Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
QoC	Quality of Care
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
RRP	Refugee Response Plan
SAP	Sectoral Action Plan
SCRC	Standing Committee of the Regional Committee
SEIS	Socio-Economic Insights Survey
SIS OT	Sharing Operational Tool SRH Sexual and Reproductive Health
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SRP	Strategic Response Plan
SWG	Sub-Working Group
TB	Tuberculosis
ToT	Training of Trainers
TWG	Technical Working Group
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WOAH	World Organization for Animal Health
WR	World Health Organization Representative

Foreword

As we reflect on 2024, I feel immense pride and gratitude for the progress we have made together in improving the health and well-being of the Romanian people. Throughout the past year, the WHO Country Office in Romania has strengthened its commitment to advancing health equity, ensuring access to quality healthcare, and fostering partnerships that drive lasting change.

Romania, like many nations, continues to face complex challenges — ranging from ageing populations and shrinking healthcare workforce, natural disasters and climate changes, digitization and other issues, all impacting public health and health emergencies and inequalities. However, these challenges have also sparked remarkable resilience and innovation within the healthcare system and among communities and our partners.

At the start of 2024, the WHO Country Office in Romania signed two key strategic documents with the Ministry of Health, the 'Biennial Collaborative Agreement (BCA) 2024-25' and the 'Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) 2024-30' aligning the work of the WHO with Romania's national health priorities.

Throughout 2024, the country office focused on three key pillars: the normative work under the BCA and CCS, Emergency Response and Preparedness, and the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience project with its health system strengthening components.

This report captures the breadth of our activities in 2024, showcasing the impact of our operations. I invite you to explore the pages ahead and learn about the incredible work being done to ensure health and well-being for everyone in Romania.

Our work would not have been possible without the invaluable collaboration of the Ministry of Health, the senior leadership of the Government of Romania, healthcare professionals, civil society and international partners. I would also like to express my profound appreciation to our donors for their generous support and invaluable contributions. Thanks to the assistance of our partners, the WHO Country Office in Romania has been able to expand our work and make significant strides during the year.

Looking to the future, our mission remains steadfast: To ensure that every person in Romania can live a healthy, fulfilling life. Together, we can build a healthier, more equitable Romania —one step at a time.

Thank you for your continued trust and partnership.

Dr Caroline Clarinval,
WHO Representative and Head of WHO Country Office in Romania

Biennial Collaborative Agreement and Country Cooperation Strategy

Alignment with Strategic Objectives

WHO's work in Romania is guided by two key strategic documents: The Biennial Collaborative Agreement (BCA) which provides a two-year framework for national collaboration and the Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) which offers a broader, longer-term perspective for enhancing public health. Both strategies have been developed in close partnership with the Ministry of Health, national and subnational authorities and civil societies, ensuring alignment with Romania's national health priorities and strategies.

New Era of Health Collaboration

> In 2024, the partnership between WHO and Romania's Ministry of Health reached a pivotal milestone with the signing of the Biennial Collaboration Agreement (BCA) 2024–25.

The strategy was stablished between the Ministry of Health of Romania, the WHO Country Office for Romania and the WHO EURO Office and outlines practical steps to advance WHO's Thirteenth General Program of Work (GPW 13), the European Program of Work (EPW1), and Romania's national health policies.

It highlights a shared commitment to four core strategic priorities:

(1) Universal health coverage,

(2) Effective preparedness for health emergencies,

(3) Improvements in overall well-being, and

(4) Strengthening of data and innovation capacities.

Together, these objectives support equitable access to quality health services and more effective public health responses. The agreement anchors Romania's commitment to advancing critical health priorities, including the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), emergency preparedness, refugee health support, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS), and nationwide health promotion, reflecting a shared vision to address urgent challenges while building sustainable systems for future generations.

Strategic Framework for the Future

Complementing the Biennial Collaboration Agreement, Romania's Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS), a seven-year roadmap, aligns national priorities with global health goals.

Developed in consultation with the Ministry of Health and other national stakeholders, this strategy complements and reinforces the BCA by providing a medium-term framework that builds on and sustains focus areas. It emphasizes seven strategic priorities, including the optimization of primary health care (PHC), development of a sustainable health workforce, consolidation of emergency preparedness, mitigation of risks from emerging pathogens, reduction of health inequities through better social determinants, prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, and the enhancement of health information systems for better data and innovation.

On 12 March 2024, a high-level consultation brought together Minister of Health Professor Alexandru Rafila, Secretary of State Professor Adriana Pistol and leaders from the Department of Emergency Situations (DSU), academic institutions, and international partners to discuss and finalize the CCS. The inclusive process ensured the strategy addresses Romania's unique needs while fostering innovation in healthcare delivery, crisis management, and equity-focused programs.

The formal endorsement of the Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) marked an important milestone in WHO's collaboration with Romania. Signed on 26 April 2024 during the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee (SCRC) meeting in Bucharest, the CCS reflects a shared commitment to strengthening Romania's public health system over the next seven years.

The signing, officiated by WHO Regional Director for Europe Dr. Hans Kluge and Minister of Health Prof. Alexandru Rafila, underscored the continued importance of high-level cooperation and long-term strategic planning.

Together, the BCA and CCS form an integrated continuum of action, ensuring that immediate needs are addressed while setting the foundation for sustained improvements in health and well-being throughout Romania.

Strategic Priority 1

In alignment with Strategic Priority 1 of the WHO Romania 2024-25 BCA and 2024-30 CCS, the country office supported national efforts to strengthen access to quality of health care services and awareness on important health issues. Through technical assistance, policy dialogue, and targeted interventions, WHO Romania contributed to the advancement of people-centred, primary health care-based service delivery, in line with Romania's National Health Strategy 2023–2030. Efforts focused on supporting national and subnational authorities with meeting medical needs and improving service availability, with a particular emphasis on quality assurance, financial protection, and health system performance. This section highlights some of the work carried out in close collaboration with government institutions, health professionals, and relevant national and international partners, reinforcing the commitment to universal health coverage and equity in health.

Universal Health Coverage

A. Vaccine Preventable Diseases

Measles Awareness Campaign

In response to the 2024 measles epidemic in Romania, the WHO Country Office in Romania, in collaboration with UNICEF, launched a comprehensive social media campaign between December 2023 and January 2024 to highlight the potential health risks and complications associated with contracting measles. The joined initiative utilized communication assets from both agencies, which were translated and disseminated across various social media channels.

> The campaign achieved a combined estimated reach of approximately 115,000 people across Facebook and Instagram through WHO and UNICEF Romania's channels.

Furthermore, cultural mediators shared the information via dedicated Ukrainian Telegram and social media channels, reaching a total of 24,076 subscribers.

In January 2024, WHO Romania, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, also launched a targeted measles awareness campaign in Târgu Mureş, Braşov, and Bucharest—areas with the highest measles incidence and significant Ukrainian populations. The campaign featured the display of 50 posters and digital materials in high-traffic locations such as bus stations, with an estimated potential reach of approximately 3.5 million views. To ensure broad accessibility and impact among the Ukrainian refugee community in Romania, all media tiles and videos were translated into Ukrainian and disseminated via Ukrainian Telegram groups and social media channels.

Raising Awareness on Vaccination During European Immunization Week

During the 2024 European Immunization Week, 24-30 April 2024, WHO Romania undertook a series of impactful activities and campaigns to highlight the critical importance of vaccination in preventing measles outbreaks and protecting public health. One of the standout initiatives was a video testimonial video featuring a Romanian nurse whose daughter, aged three years and ten months, had received the first but not yet the second MMR dose as the latter is administered at the age of 5 years in Romania. After contracting measles, she had to be hospitalized for a few days.

> This personal and poignant story was broadcast on national television and shared widely across social media platforms, complete with Romanian and Ukrainian subtitles.

The nurse's heartfelt account underscored the severe consequences of measles and the vital role that vaccines play in safeguarding health. The testimonial video was part of a broader effort by WHO Romania to engage the public and raise awareness about the importance of immunization. By sharing real-life experiences, the campaign aimed to connect with the audience on an emotional level, making the message of vaccination more relatable and urgent.

Click or scan
for more info.
[Facebook]

B. Communicable Diseases

Enhancing Tuberculosis (TB) Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment

Due to the generous funding support from the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

> WHO Romania has been able to support the screening and diagnostic capabilities of the Marius Nasta TB Institute by procuring two GeneXpert machines along with 600 TB and 250 MDR-TB cartridges.

The equipment has significantly enhanced national testing and screening capacity and enabled both the early detection and treatment of TB and MDR-TB patients, thereby preventing the further spread of TB within communities and ultimately safeguarding public health.

The official handover ceremony of the procured equipment on 1 February 2024, was a notable event attended by key government and international partners. Among the distinguished guests were Minister of Health Professor Alexandru Rafila and H.E. Mr. Takashi Katae, Ambassador of Japan to Romania. Their presence underscored the importance of international collaboration in the fight against tuberculosis. The ceremony highlighted the collective commitment to improving TB management and showcased the new equipment that will play a crucial role in this effort.

Models of Best Practices for TB Management of Drug Users

In response to a request from the Marius Nasta National TB Institute, WHO Romania provided a comprehensive brief on the management of TB among drug users. This brief included a detailed problem analysis, evidence-based best practices from countries across the EURO region, and specific recommendations for healthcare workers and patient management. By sharing these insights, WHO Romania aims to enhance the effectiveness of TB management strategies for this vulnerable population, ensuring that they receive the care and support they need.

Awareness Raising on Tuberculosis and Air Quality

In the bustling city of Bucharest, a groundbreaking initiative and creative approach to health awareness was set in motion to combat the dual threats of TB and air pollution. A pivotal study conducted by the National Institute of Pneumology and the Medical University in Bucharest, revealed a troubling link between TB and air pollution in Romania. The findings highlighted the need for action and WHO Romania therefore partnered with the National Institute of Pneumology “Marius Nasta” and the National Arts University to raise awareness about this critical issue.

To mark World TB Day on 24 March 2024, WHO Romania and its partners launched an innovative competition, inviting students from the National Arts University to create a mural that would encapsulate the message of TB awareness and its connection to pollution. The theme ‘Tuberculosis & Pollution’ challenged young artists to think creatively about how to convey this important message. 26 talented students submitting their pitches and the competition quickly captured the public’s imagination.

Over 4,000 online votes were cast, demonstrating the community’s strong engagement.

The winning design, chosen for its powerful imagery and compelling message, was painted on the wall of one of the buildings of the Marius Nasta Institute using AirLite, an innovative air-purifying paint that transforms harmful air pollutants into harmless compounds, symbolizing the fight against both TB and pollution.

The mural, a vibrant and thought-provoking piece, not only beautified the space but also serves as a constant reminder of the importance of TB prevention and treatment and the official unveiling of the mural took place on 12 June 2024 in the presence of representatives from the National Institute of Public Health, the National Health Insurance House, and the Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy. The impact of the mural didn't stop at the Institute's walls.

> The winning artwork was also displayed on public transport and in places of high foot traffic in Bucharest, Craiova, and Iaşi — cities with high levels of pollution and TB incidence.

Commuters were greeted with the striking image, prompting them to think about the link between air quality and health. This public display was part of a broader awareness campaign, aiming to educate and inspire action among the general population.

This project is an example of WHO Romania's dedication to combating tuberculosis and the collaboration between WHO Romania, the National Institute of Pneumology, and the National Arts University highlights the power of creativity and community engagement in addressing public health challenges.

As the mural continues to stand tall, it serves as a testament to the collective efforts of artists, health professionals, and the community in the fight against TB and air pollution. It is a story of innovation, collaboration, and hope - a story that continues to inspire and drive change.

C. Sexual and Reproductive Health

International Day of the Midwife

On 14 May 2024, the Order of Nurses and Midwives, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and supported by the WHO Country Office in Romania, organized a significant event to celebrate the International Day of the Midwife. This year's theme, "Renewing Midwifery Tradition for a Healthy and Sustainable Future," highlighted the critical role midwives play in advancing maternal and newborn health in Romania.

> The event was attended by Health Minister Professor Alexandru Rafila, as well as key representatives from health institutions, civil society, diplomatic missions, and midwives from across the country.

The main focus of the conference was to advocate for the enhancement of midwifery services. This joint initiative also served as a vital platform to raise awareness about the contributions of midwives and to explore ways to equip them for the evolving healthcare needs in Romania.

Kangaroo Mother Care

WHO Romania facilitated the translation of the WHO joint position paper on Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC), a key document promoting KMC for all preterm and/or low birth weight (LBW) infants as essential neonatal care.

The guidelines highlight the importance of KMC in improving the health of infants, mothers, and families. They call for global action to ensure KMC is available to every preterm or LBW newborn. Key elements include early, continuous skin-to-skin contact, exclusive breastfeeding, and integrating KMC into national health programs.

> By translating this document into Romanian, WHO Romania supports local policymakers, healthcare professionals, and civil society in advancing KMC implementation, ultimately improving neonatal and maternal health outcomes.

The translated document will be a vital resource for policymakers, clinicians, and researchers, offering evidence-based recommendations for effective KMC adoption in Romania's healthcare system.

Meeting with Sibiu and Timişoara Maternity Hospitals

In February 2024, WHO Romania conducted mission to Timiş county to hear from respective health authorities and selected health service providers about regional health needs, with regards to sexual and reproductive health services, and to explore opportunities for collaboration and support.

> Discussions emphasized the importance of improving maternal and child health services, enhancing access to sexual reproductive health education, and addressing service gaps.

The delegations visited the Louis Ţurcanu Children's Hospital in Timisoara to get a first-hand impressing on ongoing efforts to improve pediatric and perinatal care.

In September 2024, WHO Romania met with clinical leads at Sibiu Maternity Hospital to discuss strengthening sexual and reproductive health services. WHO proposed an observational study to introduce skin-to-skin, responding to the fact that in many maternal hospitals mothers and babies are still separated immediately after birth. Recruitment challenges are often highlighted as a key barrier to implementing immediate skin-to-skin contact in the first hours after birth and this as well as any other gaps identified by the observational study can then be addressed. Discussions also focused on the need to enhance midwifery education and address high teenage pregnancy rates through targeted educational interventions. As an action point, WHO recommended promoting the hospital's achievements in KMC and conducting a retrospective analysis of care outcomes.

D. Mental Health

Stress Management for Healthcare Workers

In response to the requests made by healthcare workers, impacted by accumulated stress exacerbated by COVID-19 and the influx of Ukrainian patients, WHO Romania conducted a series of evidence-based stress management workshops. This initiative used WHO's 'Doing What Matters in Times of Stress' methodology to equip healthcare professionals with preventive strategies and self-care techniques.

Between February and May 2024, several workshops were delivered across key healthcare institutions nationwide, including but not limited to the Marius Nasta TB Institute in Bucharest, the Clinical Emergency Hospital for Children "Louis Țurcanu" in Timișoara, and the Emergency Clinical Hospital in Sibiu. The participants, comprising medical doctors, nurses, and other clinical staff, represented a broad range of specialties such as Intensive Care, Emergency Department, Orthopedics, Surgery, Pediatrics, Cardiology, Gastroenterology, Neurology, Rehabilitation, and Nephrology.

The workshops provided healthcare professionals with practical techniques for stress management, burnout prevention, and adaptive coping strategies to enhance resilience in high-pressure clinical environments. Through structured interactive sessions featuring expert facilitation and role-play exercises, these training sessions allowed participants to develop and practice adaptive coping strategies in a supportive environment, fostering both individual resilience and improved response to occupational stressors.

> 12 one-day workshops were conducted across Romania: three in Bucharest in February for 66 nurses and doctors from the Marius Nasta National TB Institute; three in Timișoara in March) for 75 participants from three local hospitals; three in Sibiu in April for 80 healthcare providers; and three workshops in Iași in May for 84 participants, totaling 305 healthcare professionals trained nationwide.

Advancing National Mental Health Policy and Capacity Building

In 2024, WHO Romania, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, advanced efforts to strengthen Romania's mental health system through collaborative meetings and strategic planning. With the groundwork laid, the next phase focuses on conducting Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and capacity-building activities to further refine policy priorities and enhance mental health service integration. These efforts aim to ensure evidence-based decision-making, workforce development, and improved coordination, contributing to a more sustainable and responsive national mental health framework.

Awareness Raising on Self-Harm and Suicide

On 6 June, WHO Romania organized a workshop in Bucharest focused on self-harm and suicide prevention strategies. The session combined theoretical frameworks with practical intervention techniques, designed to strengthen participants' capabilities in identifying and supporting vulnerable individuals.

> The workshop featured notable speakers including Dr Irina Minescu, who examined how parental support functions as a protective factor for adolescents, and IFRC representative Murat Yuksel, who presented evidence-based risk assessment methodologies and management protocols.

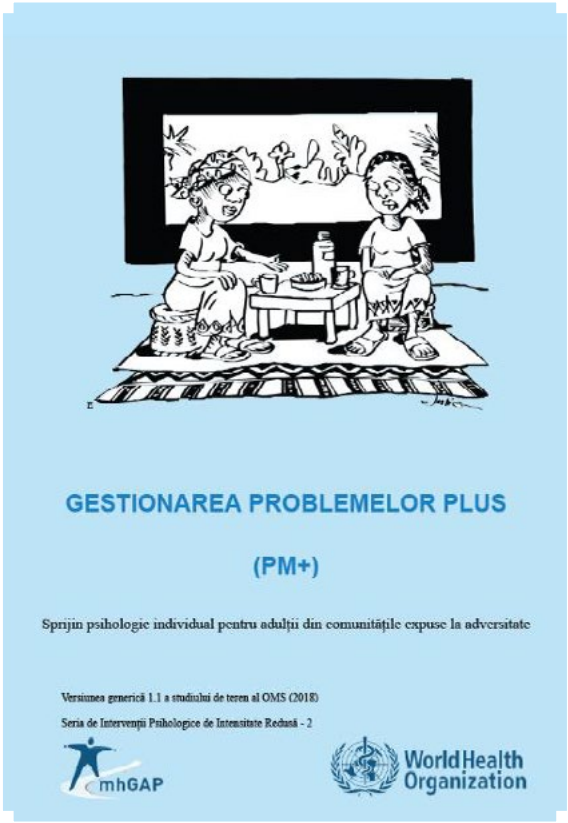
Building on this initiative, WHO Romania subsequently facilitated an online webinar introducing the newly translated Romanian version of the IASC guidelines for addressing self-harm and suicide in humanitarian contexts, ensuring these vital resources are accessible to Romanian-speaking professionals. Such initiatives develop community capacity to recognize warning indicators, implement effective crisis intervention protocols, and establish appropriate follow-up care. In contexts where stigmatization of mental health concerns remains a barrier to treatment-seeking behaviour, these activities serve dual purposes: they provide practitioners with evidence-based methodologies while simultaneously contributing to the destigmatization of psychological distress discussions, which may facilitate help-seeking behaviours among affected individuals who might otherwise remain unidentified within healthcare systems

Translation and Contextualization of Problem Management Plus (PM+) Manual into Romanian

WHO Romania worked on contextualizing and translating the manual on the low-intensity psychological intervention Problem Management Plus (PM+) from English into Romanian.

> The final version being approved by a specialist team from the National Center of Mental Health and Fight Against Drugs.

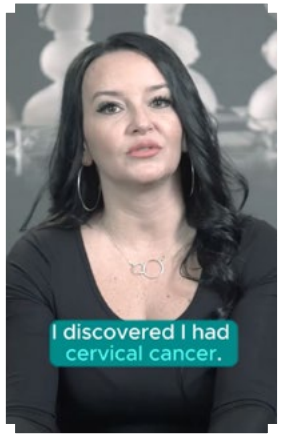
The guidelines were translated for use in future training sessions. This governmental approval increases the probability of sustainable implementation of PM+ across Romania's healthcare system. By making these evidence-based guidelines available in Romanian, the initiative enables knowledge dissemination among local practitioners, fostering the development of a more responsive mental healthcare workforce throughout the country.



E. Health Promotion

HPV Vaccination and Cervical Cancer Screening

To mark International Cancer Day on 4 February 2024, WHO Romania undertook an important initiative in the fight against cervical cancer by launching a heartfelt awareness campaign. At the heart of this initiative was an inspiring video that highlighted the experience of a cervical cancer survivor. Through her heartfelt testimony, she recounted her journey from diagnosis to recovery, describing the challenges she faced and the support she received. Her treating physician also shared important perspectives, emphasizing the importance of a strong doctor-patient partnership in overcoming the disease.



Beyond sharing a personal story, the video served as an educational resource, offering viewers essential information on prevention and early detection of cervical cancer. The video is available here:

Click or scan for more info. [Instagram]

On 3 July 2024, the country office hosted a key policy dialogue on cervical cancer screening, bringing together decision-makers and health experts to address critical challenges in prevention and early detection.

> Distinguished officials such as Health Minister Professor Alexandru Rafila, Secretary of State Professor Adriana Pistol, and representatives from the National Institute of Public Health and the National Institute of Health Services Management were among those in attendance.

Their participation highlighted the importance of this initiative in shaping national health strategies. The dialogue resulted in a comprehensive executive summary, which has since been endorsed by both the Ministry of Health and the National Public Health Institute and these efforts continues to strengthen cervical cancer awareness, prevention, and policy development in Romania and demonstrate a shared commitment to improving women's health and well-being.

On 14 November, to mark the Global Day of Action for the Elimination of Cervical Cancer, WHO Romania supported the National Institute of Public Health in organizing a high-level roundtable event titled "Accelerating Progress in Cervical Cancer Elimination." The event brought together experts, policymakers, and health advocates to reflect on progress and strengthen commitment to cervical cancer prevention. The agenda featured insightful presentations on HPV

vaccination, screening strategies, and both national and international efforts, with contributions from the European Cancer League and WHO Regional Office for Europe. Emphasizing the importance of intersectoral collaboration, the event fostered dialogue and strategic planning to scale up evidence-based interventions and move closer to eliminating cervical cancer in Romania.

Road Safety

On 17 November 2024, World Day of Remembrance for Traffic Road Victims, WR Dr. Clarinval participated in a compelling video aimed at raising awareness about the importance of safer roads. The video highlights a sobering statistic:

> Every 33 seconds, someone is killed or seriously injured on Romanian roads.

Traffic accidents continue to be a leading cause of preventable deaths, impacting drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists alike.

To address the urgent issue of road safety on Romanian roads, the WHO Office in Romania and the Titi Aur Academy joined forces and organized a special session dedicated to defensive driving. The event, which took place at the Titi Aur Academy circuit, focused on prevention and responses to road hazards, as well as raising awareness of the main risk factors for road accidents.

Recognizing the urgent need for action, WHO Romania will continue to engage with national stakeholders and aims to delve deeper into the challenges and opportunities surrounding road safety in Romania. By fostering collaboration and understanding, WHO Romania hopes to develop effective strategies to reduce traffic-related injuries and fatalities, ultimately making roads safer for everyone.

Click or scan
for more info.
[YouTube]

Oral Health

In early 2024, WHO Romania launched an oral health promotion campaign in collaboration with the Iasi Department of Public Health (DSP Iasi) with the aim to assess and improve the oral health status of school children from grades 0-8 in Iasi County, including Ukrainian refugees.

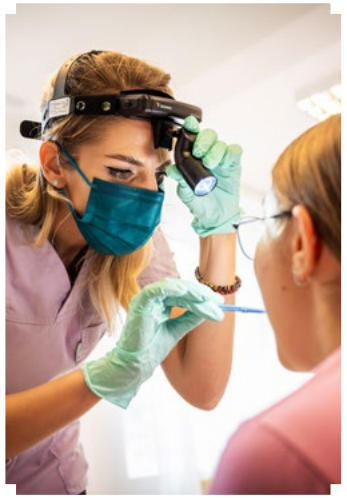
Key components of the campaign included:

- Oral health and awareness sessions in schools in Deleni, Cotnari Todiresti, Scobinti and Ceplenita, educating children on the importance of maintaining good oral health and general hygiene and providing oral health kits, including toothbrushes and toothpaste, to participating children;
- Free Dental checks and referrals for children with parental consent by volunteer dentists and nurses to detect dental issues early and ensure prompt care if necessary;
- Promoting the puppet show 'Pantilio's Dream' by the cultural association 'Georgiana Rusu' about a boy who learns about oral hygiene.

> By the end of 2024, over 1,000 children between 6-14 years have benefited from this comprehensive campaign and the collaboration between WHO Romania and DSP Iasi.

Collaboration sets a precedent for future health promotion projects, highlighting the importance of preventive care and education in improving children's health. The outcomes of the campaign so far included

- Improved oral health status among school children;
- Increased awareness and practice of good oral hygiene habits;
- Early identification and treatment of dental issues in children and
- Strengthened collaboration between WHO Romania and local public health authorities.



Strategic Priority 2

In line with Strategic Priority 2 of the WHO Romania Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS), WHO Romania supported national actions to strengthen the health and care workforce with regards to the Ukraine refugee response and emergency preparedness. In the context of ongoing regional challenges, the country office played a key role in coordinating health support for refugees from Ukraine and strengthening national capacities to respond to potential public health hazards. While not exhaustive, the main activities highlighted under this pillar reflect WHO's strategic commitment to building a resilient, well-trained, and responsive health workforce in Romania.

Ukraine Refugee Response

F. Leadership and Coordination

WHO Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis is guided by a clear management structure based on the Incident Management System (IMS) and closely aligned with WHO's Strategic Response Plan (SRP), the Romanian Government's National Plan for the Romanian response and the Refugee Response Plan (RRP).

Effective cooperation between RRP partners has been essential to reduce service gaps, prevent program duplication and maximize the impact of deployed resources. As the Health Sector lead, WHO oversaw the establishment of Health and MHPSS working groups shortly after the onset of the Ukraine war, which provided platforms for stakeholders from government and (inter)national agencies as well as NGOs to engage on sector specific refugee programming.

WHO Romania continued to chair both the Health Working Group (HWG) and the MHPSS sub-Working Group (sWG) throughout 2024 by conducting monthly meetings and providing an opportunity for participants to present relevant topics, discuss sector specific challenges, devise collective solutions and share opportunities, achievements and lessons learned throughout the response.

> At regular 4-6 months intervals, WHO also convenes Health and MHPSS partners for in person events to facilitate the development of professional relationships and inter-organizational collaboration.

These events further provide an opportunity to integrate capacity building exercises to strengthen partner's ability to serve the needs of the refugee community. In November 2024, WHO Romania held an in-person working group meeting for 40 Health and MHPSS partners. The event combined interactive sessions to reviewing ongoing health programs and assess refugee needs, with a capacity building initiative on health messaging. The latter session aimed to strengthen participant's ability to tailor health messages to cultural and socio-economic contexts of the target audience

Monthly MHPSS Sub-Working Group Meetings

WHO Romania is also co-chairing the MHPSS sub-working group and conducted 11 meetings with 236 participant engagements from government agencies, UN organizations and (inter)national NGOs throughout 2024. Several meetings featured thematic sessions with guest speakers on key topics such as MHPSS-focused Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E), creative writing for psychosocial support, and partner presentations on ongoing programs. These meetings have strengthened coordination, knowledge exchange, and capacity building, fostering a unified and responsive MHPSS approach.

G. Addressing Information Gaps on Available Services for Ukrainians

Many Ukrainians continue to face barriers when attempting to access free-of-charge national health services, key causes being a limited awareness of available services, entitlements and pathways to care. The 2024 UNHCR Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) confirmed that nearly 60% of Ukrainians who had struggled to access health services, did so due to lack of information. Throughout the conflict, WHO Romania has worked to bridge these information gaps through a mapping of refugee-inclusive services, providing information and guidance and ensuring that refugees are able to receive essential care when need.

Information Materials on How to Access National Health Services

To support Ukrainian refugees arriving in Romania both digital and printed materials were distributed, including leaflets and posters outlining how register for Temporary Protection Status and access free primary healthcare services.

These materials include a QR code which links to further resources:

- The Protectie Ucraina portal, which offers centralized guidance on legal rights, healthcare access, family reunification, and protection measures for Ukrainian nationals.
- The CNAS Ukraine Support Page, which provides information on how to find a family doctor, what medical services are covered, and how to access treatment under the Romanian public insurance system
- The WHO Medical Translation Booking Platform, where refugees can schedule free interpreter support for medical visits.
- The Midwives Association Help Page, which offers support for accessing reproductive, maternal, and newborn health services, including direct hotline numbers for Ukrainian speakers.

MINISTERUL SĂNĂTĂȚII

World Health Organization
European Region

Доступ до медичних послуг для українців після прибуття до Румунії

КРОК 1

Щоб отримати безкоштовну первинну медичну допомогу, Ви повинні зареєструватися для отримання статусу тимчасового захисту. Подайте заявку на цей статус у Генеральну інспекцію з питань імміграції. Після отримання статусу обов'язково зареєструйтеся у сімейного лікаря. Для громадян України зі статусом тимчасового захисту сімейні лікарі надаватимуть безкоштовні послуги первинної медичної допомоги, включаючи вакцинацію.

КРОК 2

Якщо Вам потрібна допомога у спілкуванні з сімейними лікарями, Ви можете звернутися на гарячу лінію медичного перекладу у будь-який час та замовити перекладача для Ваших візитів. Ця послуга безкоштовна.

КРОК 3

Під час першого візиту до сімейного лікаря візьміть із собою паспорт та документ про тимчасовий захист. Не забудьте взяти у лікаря роздрукований документ з унікальним кодом, який підтверджує Вашу реєстрацію в системі Національного будинку медичного страхування. Слідкуйте за тим, щоб не загубити цей документ, адже він Вам знадобиться для всіх медичних послуг, гарантованих Національним будинком медичного страхування у майбутньому.

ВАМ ВАРТО ЗНАТИ:

Сімейний лікар може надати вам:

- направлення на спеціалізовану допомогу
- направлення на аналізи крові та інші тести
- медичні довідки
- рецепти на ліки
- рекомендації щодо медичної або паліативної допомоги вдома

вакцинацію (*необхідно надати лікарю документи про раніше проведенні вакцини. Деяким лікарям може знадобитися переклад цього документу)

ЦЕЙ QR-КОД МІСТИТЬ ПОСИЛАННЯ НА :

- Список сімейних лікарів
- Посібник для українських біженців щодо доступу до системи охорони здоров'я в Румунії
- Гарячу лінію з перекладачами, які допомагають з перекладом під час візитів до лікарів

НОМЕР ЕКСТРЕНОЇ СЛУЖБИ: 112

WHO Cultural Mediators

WHO Romania's cultural mediators have played a pivotal role in facilitating refugee access to free-of-charge national health services. As Ukrainians, they have firsthand insight into impediments refugees commonly face when attempting to access entitled services. Their support has included personal guidance on accessing care, how to register with a family doctor and book appointments, and in the case of vulnerable and elderly individuals, accompaniment to consultations. In 2024, nearly 2000 refugees received direct assistance in accessing necessary care, underscoring the continuing need for personalized support.

WHO cultural mediators have also maintained a strong online presence, responding to refugee queries via social media, email, and messaging apps. The digital outreach has been crucial for individuals who cannot attend face-to-face consultation, whether due to mobility issues, work schedules, or living in rural and remote areas. Cultural mediators have also leveraged social channels to share messages on healthcare access, including details on entitlements, updated legislation, and procedures for accessing essential care. In 2024, over 400 refugees accessed these online materials.

Feedback received from beneficiaries

Tetiana, Ukrainian Refugee from Constanta

I am infinitely grateful to your organization WHO for support and invaluable help!

Honestly, I can't even imagine how I would have coped without you. Thanks to you, I better understood how the CNAS system works, because before I had no idea about it. You helped me find the necessary specialists at a time when I was already in despair, not knowing where to turn. It is thanks to your support that I am now undergoing such an important treatment for me.

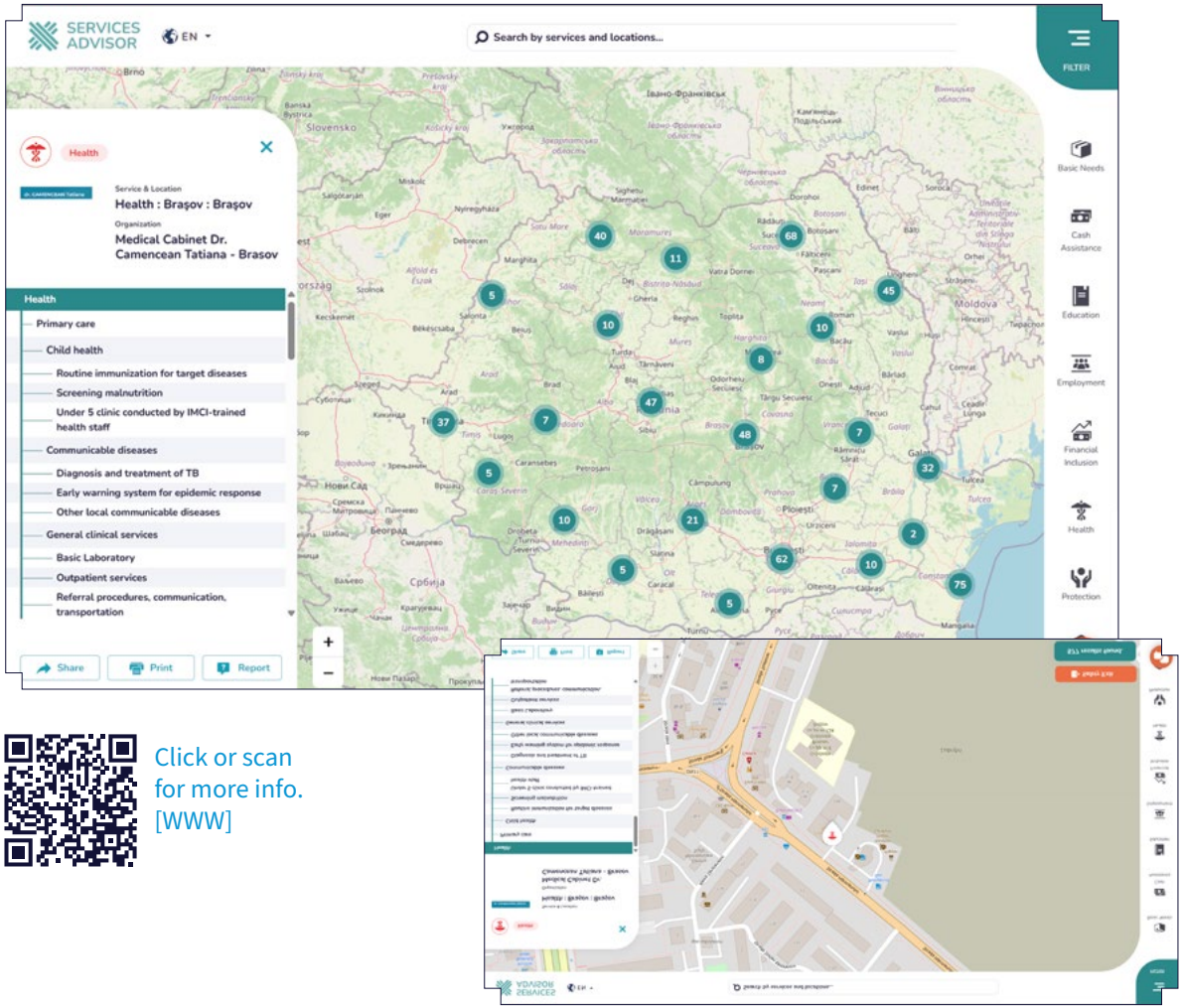
Words are not enough to express all my gratitude. You came to the rescue at the most necessary moment, and I am grateful to everyone involved in your organization, and especially to those who helped me directly. You have done more for me than I could have imagined. Even though I was already embarrassed to contact you so often, you always supported and helped with any issues. You literally led me by the hand, albeit remotely, to where I needed to go. You made appointments for me with doctors, labs, explained everything. It was a huge help! I sincerely wish you healtha, strength and all the best! I am infinitely grateful!

Thank you — it reminds us why we do it!

Service Mapping

Limited awareness of the availability of refugee-inclusive health services meant some Ukrainians had to rely on private care or emergency services. To address this, WHO Romania regularly mapped and verified free-of-charge national health services across the country, including hospitals, specialist centers and family doctor clinics. The identified refugee- inclusive services were then disseminated via Ukrainian Telegram channels, WHO Romania social media platforms and the UNHCR Service Advisor platform.

In 2024, more than 122 health services have been identified across in Romanian counties with high refugee numbers and this directory has provided essential guidance and information for both new arrivals and longer-term residents on where to find health services such as vaccination, mental health support and maternity care. The ongoing mapping initiative also uncovers critical service gaps—such as pediatric specialists or dentistry—prompting further advocacy and coordination efforts.



Click or scan for more info. [WWW]

Health Information Hotline

The Independent Midwife Association (AMI) has played a critical role in addressing the healthcare needs of Ukrainian refugees since the start of the conflict. Through its telephone hotline, refugees have received personalized guidance on navigating Romania's health system and accessing essential services ranging from family doctor registration to breastfeeding guidance and access to (online) prenatal classes. Moreover, the hotline also provides immediate links to safe referral pathways for GBV survivors and safeguards their well-being.

Following funding cuts, WHO Romania ensured the hotline's continuation during the second half of 2024, safeguarding timely access to information on free primary and specialist care for the Ukrainian community. During this period, the hotline supported over 800 refugees via calls, messages, and appointments and assisted Ukrainian beneficiaries with family doctor registration, scheduling of medical appointments, and access to pediatric and reproductive services.

Health Information Booklet

Alongside online and in-person health access support, WHO Romania also created a bilingual UKR-ROM health information booklet aimed at empowering Ukrainian refugees to navigate Romania's national healthcare system, which also outlines refugee entitlements as well as processes for accessing primary and specialized healthcare services.

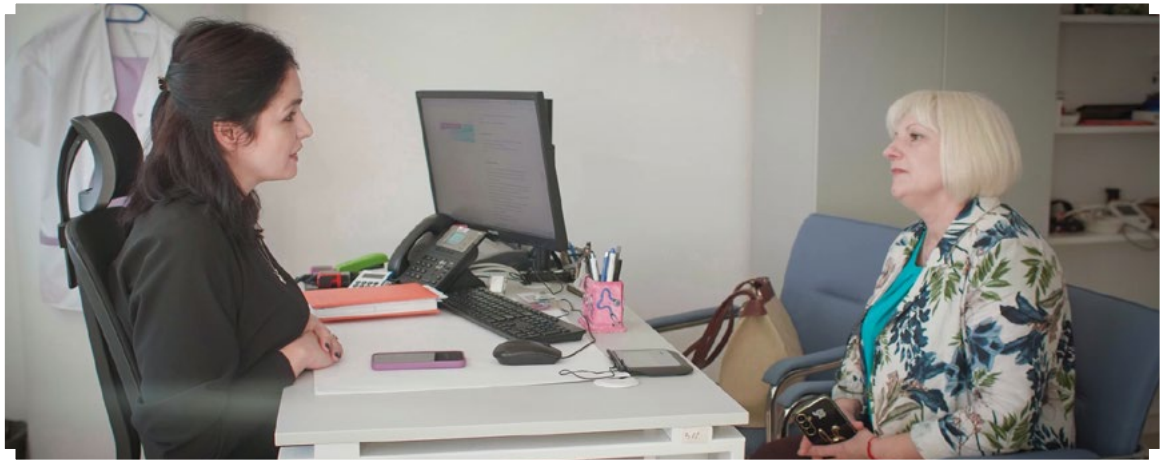
Additionally, the booklet covers tips for healthier living, including common health topics like hypertension, TB, HIV, immunization, maternal care, as well as adolescent-focused sections on sexual and reproductive health. Useful Romanian phrases are also included, equipping readers with basic vocabulary to communicate effectively during medical visits. The bilingual version also allows family doctors to become aware of the health information provided to Ukrainians.

The booklet is currently only available electronically – via the QR code displayed below - to ensure that the health access information provided is never outdated.

Click or scan for more info. [PDF]

H. Ensuring Refugee Access to Essential Health Services

Despite their entitlement to healthcare, many Ukrainian refugees have struggled to access essential primary and specialized health services. Administrative and linguistic obstacles have deterred many from seeking care, whilst the increased workload and time burden of treating refugees has disincentivized many family doctors and medical specialists from engaging with the refugee health program.



Supporting Refugee Entry to the Romanian Healthcare System

Family doctors are the entry point to the Romanian healthcare system, registering patients, providing primary care and facilitating referrals to specialized services. Access to a family doctor is therefore essential for ensuring the health and well-being of refugees.

Challenges such as the administrative burden of registering and requesting reimbursement for treating refugees, coupled with family doctors' already heavy caseloads and low financial remuneration for treating refugees, have created significant barriers to access. WHO Romania has therefore supported selected family doctors in counties with high refugee numbers to ensure that essential healthcare access is readily available to the Ukrainian community. WHO Romania supported family doctors have been operating in 9 counties including Brasov (2), Bucharest (2), Cluj (1), Constanta (1), Galati (1), Sibiu (1) and Suceava (1) and provided 2775 consultations to 1430 refugees throughout 2024.

Empowering Family Doctors to Engage with the Refugee Response

As part of WHO Romania's ongoing efforts to ensure sustainability of its Ukraine refugee response, the country office established a network of Romanian family doctors actively engaged in delivering care to Ukrainian refugees. This network aims to promote best practices and shared learning, reduce service disparities across counties, and build long-term capacities within the primary care system by connecting frontline providers who play a critical role in coordinating patient access to essential services.

Engaging with Subnational Authorities to Address Barriers

Close engagement with subnational authorities has been crucial to rapidly identify gaps or barriers to healthcare access affecting both the Ukrainian communities and underserved populations in Romania. WHO county coordinators operating in counties with high refugee numbers have been essential in maintaining close coordination between the WHO Country Office in Romania and key local health stakeholders. Through regular meetings and advocacy, they identified bottlenecks—from digital registration glitches to shortfalls in specialist care—with the country office then able to highlight these issues to regional and/or national decision-makers.

Addressing Language Barriers

To address language barriers, WHO Romania launched a UKR«ROM telephone translation hotline in April 2024. The service offers free, confidential and on demand telephone translation for medical and psychological consultations, delivered by expert interpreters.

The initiative offers dual benefits

(1) refugees are empowered to access care, eliminating their dependency on in-person translators, whilst

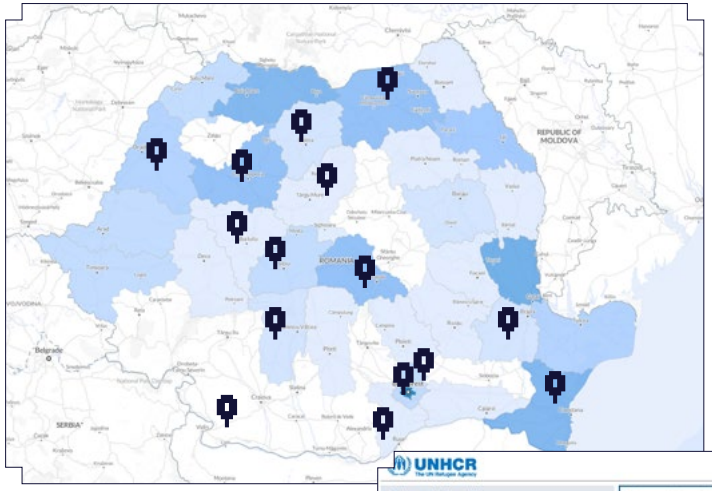
(2) the decreased complexity and time burden of treating refugees has incentivized more medical providers across Romania provide care to refugee patients. This service has therefore played a key role in integrating Ukrainian patients into the Romanian national health system by ensuring sustainable refugee access to primary and specialist health services.

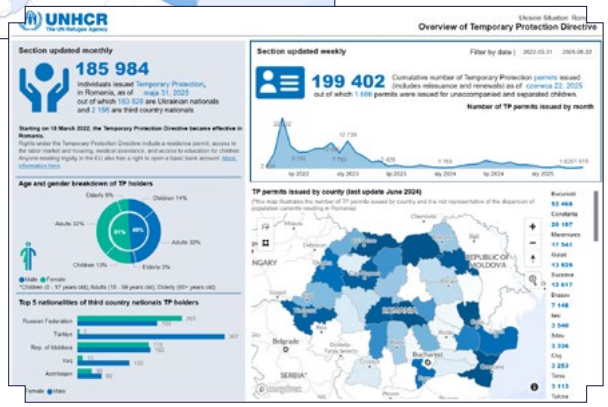
To ease access to the hotline, WHO Romania launched a booking platform which allows refugees and medical providers to pre-book interpretation slots for planned appointments. This ensured the availability of interpretation services for upcoming consultations whilst support for ad-hoc or 'emergency' calls is also provided, dependent on the availability of an interpreter.

Since its launch in April 2024, the translation hotline has provided interpretation support for 617 consultations, with a total call time of 9,339 minutes.

Whilst uptake was recorded nationwide, the highest usage was observed in the counties of Bucharest, Constanta and Cluj, which mirrors the distribution density of refugees in Romania.

The booking platform also includes a feedback function, and the service has so far received a 5-star rating from all its reviewers.





Click or scan for more info. [WWW]

Feedback received from beneficiaries

Koltun, NGO Representative — August 2024

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and admiration for the work of the translator who accompanied our beneficiary on a visit to the psychologist. The translation was performed at the highest professional level, contributing to a comfortable and productive atmosphere during the consultation.

The translator demonstrated exceptional attention to detail and an understanding of the importance of accuracy in conveying information, which is particularly crucial in such delicate and sensitive situations. His ability to translate promptly and accurately ensured clear and complete understanding between our beneficiary and the psychologist. I would like to specifically highlight the translator's respectful and tactful attitude towards both parties, as well as his ability to maintain confidentiality and neutrality, which fostered trust and openness in communication.

We are very satisfied with the quality of the services provided and highly recommend this translator for similar tasks. Thank you for your professionalism and high-quality work!

We truly appreciate your thoughtful feedback!

I. Encouraging Healthy Behaviors Among the Refugee Community

The Socio-Economic Insight Survey (SEIS) published in August 2024 also highlighted that over 30% of households reported having a chronically ill family member, which when combined with reports of rising infectious disease and low vaccination rates, emphasized the need to promote healthy behaviors.

Promoting Vaccination Uptake

Vaccine hesitancy has been a core driver of low immunization uptake, both among Romanian and Ukrainian communities, reflecting globally observable trends in vaccine disinformation. Confusion over differences between the Ukrainian and Romanian vaccination schedules have further impeded uptake among Ukrainians.

In April 2024, WHO Romania partnered with WHO EURO to examine barriers faced by Ukrainian communities in accessing vaccination services. Through stakeholder interviews and field research, the assessment identified limited pediatric services and access to family doctors as well as the difference and/or absence of Ukrainian immunization as some of the issues hindering the integration into the Romanian vaccination schedule. Based on these findings, the study produced 20 targeted recommendations, ranging from clear government guidelines on refugee vaccination to specialized training for healthcare workers on Ukrainian immunization schedules.

In response, WHO Romania has implemented targeted strategies to increase immunization demand, including provider training, public awareness campaigns, and direct engagement with family doctors, ensuring that both Ukrainian and Romanian communities benefit from stronger disease prevention measures.

The country office organized a training for 65 humanitarian and healthcare workers to strengthen capacity to communicate about vaccines and combat vaccine hesitancy.

Developed in collaboration with the WHO EURO Risk Communication and Vaccination teams, the curriculum focused on building trust, fostering stronger community relationships, and understanding diverse attitudes toward vaccination. It also provided tailored communication strategies to address common concerns, counter misinformation, and respond to disinformation affecting vaccine acceptance.

To further promote vaccination acceptance and address common misconceptions and information gaps, WHO Romania partnered with the Romanian Association for Pediatric Education in Family Medicine (AREPMF) to develop thirty promotional videos on vaccination, based on the book 'Handbook of Vaccination in Family Practices'. In the bilingual subtitled videos, family doctors, pediatricians and vaccination specialists provided information on areas such as infant immunization and address frequent causes for vaccination concern amongst the population.

Click or scan for more info. [YouTube]

Promoting Health and Wellbeing

To further promote healthy behavior in the Ukrainian community, WHO cultural mediators supported by this program shared communication materials related to health and wellbeing via their networks, and on dedicated social media channels.

> During this reporting period, topics posted ranged from 'How to Stay Safe in the Heat' to 'Breastfeeding' and 'Vaccination'. These posts reached >20,000 individuals.

Forced displacement and conflict-related trauma has increased mental health needs within the Ukrainian refugee community and Romania's mental health structure has struggled to address the additional demand. To fill the gap, WHO cultural mediators with backgrounds in psychology or social sciences have provided individual and group psychosocial support services and organized art and music therapy sessions for Ukrainian children and families. In 2024, over 1300 refugees benefited from these psychosocial support sessions, with feedback being overwhelmingly positive.

J. Mental Health

MHPSS Strategic Workshop

On 28 March 2024, the national MHPSS Strategic Planning Workshop brought together 21 participants from the MHPSS sWG including representatives from NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, and the government. Priority areas for interagency coordination were identified such as ensuring the sustainability of service provision, enhancing capacity building, and developing robust advocacy strategies. By comparing previous and current service mapping findings, participants gained a clearer understanding of the evolving scope of MHPSS services. These efforts underscore the commitment to integrating MHPSS into broader health and emergency response frameworks, fostering a collaborative approach to mental health and psychosocial support.

Translation and Adaptation of Global MHPSS Materials

In 2024, WHO Romania focused on equipping partners with essential technical tools to improve service delivery by initiating the translation of the following guidelines:

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Minimum Service Package (MHPSS MSP), an easy-to-follow intersectoral package, listing activities and actions humanitarian actors should put in place for an effective MHPSS response.

IASC Guidance, Addressing Suicide in Humanitarian Settings to support program implementers, coordinators, and humanitarian actors in addressing suicide and self-harm in humanitarian settings.

IASC Information Note on Disability and Inclusion in MHPSS to ensure MHPSS programming in emergency settings is accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

These translations widen the access to global MHPSS specialized knowledge, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive care aligned with international standards while respecting local realities. All guides have been shared with the members of the MHPSS sub-Working Group.

K. Improving Services for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The refugee population in Romania is disproportionately composed of women, many of whom are travelling alone or with young children.

> This community faces heightened vulnerability due to unstable living conditions, economic insecurity, and limited access to social protection. Reports of exploitation during transit and resettlement—as well as conflict-related sexual violence and intimate partner violence—are unfortunately common.

These risks have underscored the urgent need to strengthen GBV prevention and response mechanisms. Yet, health system gaps, limited frontline capacity, and uncoordinated referral pathways continue to hinder access to timely, survivor-centered care. In response, WHO Romania has partnered with national and international actors to expand healthcare worker training, enhance institutional readiness, and promote community-based prevention efforts that better protect and support survivors.

Strengthening GBV Response

On 14-15 May 2024, WHO Romania and the East European Institute for Reproductive Health (EEIRH) conducted a Training of Trainers (ToT) session to equip healthcare professionals with the skills needed to enhance Romania's response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The-2day program focused on building the capacity of first-line health professionals and managers to strengthen GBV support networks and improve healthcare interventions for survivors.

Developed in collaboration with the WHO EURO GBV focal point, the training provided in-depth knowledge on clinical-legal frameworks, the development of health facility protocols, and the application of WHO guidelines for managing cases of rape and intimate partner violence. Beyond theoretical instruction, it emphasized the importance of high-quality service provision, addressing key issues such as forensic examination availability, effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the creation of coordinated referral pathways to ensure survivors receive comprehensive care.

> With nine national facilitators successfully trained, the initiative laid the foundation for continued capacity-building efforts, ensuring that GBV-responsive healthcare practices are integrated across Romania's health system.

Building on earlier efforts, WHO Romania — together with the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES) and EEIRH—launched a nationwide training initiative to strengthen healthcare responses to gender-based violence (GBV). Between June and July 2024, four specialized sessions on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) were held in Cluj-Napoca, Constanța, Iași and Timișoara.

> Led by newly trained national facilitators, the sessions equipped 105 healthcare professionals with the skills to identify and support survivors through timely, compassionate care.

The training also focused on delivering comprehensive clinical services aligned with WHO protocols and improving collaboration between health providers, law enforcement, and social services to ensure a coordinated, survivor-centered response across Romania.

Feature Story

Community-Led GBV Prevention through Empowerment Self-Defense

In May 2024, WHO Romania organized a three-day Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD) training to strengthen community-level efforts in preventing gender-based violence (GBV). Held in Bucharest, the training brought together over 25 participants, including Ukrainian community leaders, social workers, and legal professionals. The initiative offered practical, evidence-based tools to address GBV risks, with a focus on self-defense techniques, personal safety, and empowerment strategies. Developed in response to the vulnerability of displaced populations, the training aimed to build resilience and community protection mechanisms. A 10-month mentorship phase followed the workshop, ensuring long-term impact and sustained local capacity.

This is amazing to hear!

L. Enhancing Emergency Services

On 1 March 2024, WHO Romania, with the generous support of German funding, procured and handed over essential medical equipment to the Department of Emergency Situations (DSU). This vital equipment included patient monitors, ventilators for emergency transport, and portable incubators marking a significant step in enhancing the preparedness and responsiveness of emergency services across Romania.

> The new equipment is set to benefit both the refugee and host populations, ensuring that emergency services are better equipped to handle critical situations.

In a further demonstration of support, the country office donated additional medical equipment to the DSU in November 2024 which further bolsters the capacity of emergency services to provide timely and effective care in emergencies.

The collaborative effort underscores the commitment to strengthening public health preparedness and response mechanisms at the local level and the procurement and distribution of medical equipment are crucial in enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of emergency services in Romania. By equipping the DSU with advanced medical tools, WHO Romania is helping to ensure that emergency responders are well-prepared to save lives and provide high-quality care in critical situations. This initiative highlights the importance of international collaboration and support in addressing healthcare challenges and improving emergency response systems.

M. Strengthening Refugee Center Capacities

The six Regional Procedures and Accommodation Centers for Asylum Seekers and refugees located in Bucharest, Galati, Giurgiu, Maramures, Radauti and Timisoara continue to provide a range of essential support services including accommodation and onsite medical and social services to both refugees and asylum seekers. Strengthening the capacity of these centers to address the complex health needs of refugees and asylum seekers, while ensuring they are equipped to respond to potential increases in refugee arrivals, remains a key priority for WHO Romania.WHO Romania is helping to ensure that emergency responders are well-prepared to save lives and provide high-quality care in critical situations. This initiative highlights the importance of international collaboration and support in addressing healthcare challenges and improving emergency response systems.

WHO Romania visited all six regional refugee centers in Romania to assess the needs of individual centers and their respective medical staff. Based on these visits, a request for the procurement of medical items was agreed upon with the Immigration Directorate (IGI) to address immediate needs.

> Additionally, the Directorate expressed a need for capacity-building trainings, as all 6 centers had recruited new staff during Q3 and Q4-2024, most of whom have not yet received the chance to receive adequate training.

Requested training topics included Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), Communicable Diseases (CDs), Mental Health (MH), Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), and Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The centers requested for these trainings to take place in February/March 2025, and they were successfully conducted in March, allowing newly recruited staff to benefit from the sessions.

Assessment of PSEAH Needs at Refugee Centers

Accompanying the medical needs assessments, WHO's Gender-Based Violence (GBV) consultant reviewed staff readiness to handle sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH) issues. Site visits revealed limited awareness of core GBV response protocols and referral pathways. While basic medical services existed, staff often lacked training on first-response principles crucial for supporting survivors of violence.

Based on these findings, WHO planned a specialized training for border police, medical personnel, and center managers. The curriculum will emphasize a survivor-centered approach, immediate referral structures, and the legal obligations of care providers. By closing this knowledge gap, WHO aims to foster a safer, more supportive environment, where potential violations are promptly reported and managed.

Procurement of Medical Devices for Refugee Centers

As previously mentioned, a comprehensive needs assessment was conducted during the visits to all six refugee centers to identify gaps in healthcare services and any required medical equipment. Based on this assessment, a procurement plan was developed to address the most critical shortages, particularly for centers lacking basic diagnostic tools and essential medical devices. Items were selected with the aim to enhance the overall quality of care provided to refugees and immigrants and to ensure that each center is equipped with the necessary tools to offer basic services onsite forgoing the need to refer patients to the nearest hospital for simple diagnostic procedures.

> In addition to diagnostic tools (glucometers, stethoscopes, pulse oximeters, electronic blood pressure monitors, electrocardiographs, and digital thermometers), procured items also included some therapeutic (defibrillators) and supportive equipment (orthopedic frames with wheels, crutches).

In addition to addressing diagnostic, therapeutic and supportive health needs, the procurement also focused on specialized equipment, such as portable UV-C bactericidal lamps, consultation tables for adults, children and infants, medical cabinets, examination lamps, and hydraulic chairs to further improve the healthcare infrastructure in the centers.

Enhancing Emergency Preparedness in Romania

Strengthening Romania's capacity to manage public health threats has become increasingly urgent considering the growing instability within the regional and global landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the growing threat of epidemic-prone diseases, while rising geopolitical instability in Europe and beyond has heightened the likelihood of chemical or radio-nuclear events.

In collaboration with Romanian authorities, WHO has supported efforts to reinforce the country's ability to prevent, detect, and respond to emergency situations in a timely and coordinated manner. This has included advancing governmental coordination to enable institutions across sectors—such as health, defense, and veterinary services—to operate cohesively and ensure a unified, comprehensive response to public health emergencies. Efforts also focus on enhancing laboratory safety and disease detection capacity, both to prevent the accidental release of hazardous pathogens and to facilitate the rapid identification of emerging infectious threats. Furthermore, the development of stronger systems for sharing health information across sectors is critical to ensuring that signals of potential biological hazards are communicated swiftly and accurately among all relevant stakeholders.

Together, these actions aim to protect the health and safety of the Romanian population, reduce the impact of future crises, and contribute to the long-term resilience of the country's public health system.

N. Strengthening Inter-Sectoral Emergency Coordination Capacity

The need to strengthen Romania's (sub)national health emergency preparedness and response was underscored by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

> Like many countries, Romania faced logistical challenges and inter-sectoral coordination difficulties, limiting its ability to respond effectively to rapidly increasing health demands.

To enhance Romania's all-hazards emergency preparedness, WHO Romania has collaborated closely with the Department of Emergency Situations (DSU) to strengthen the country's Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

The EOC serves as a primary coordination mechanism for emergency prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. During 2024, the WHO Romania country office conducted an in-depth review of existing legislation and strategies to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for capacity enhancement. This was complemented by field missions to regional EOCs to assess resource availability and operational capacity.

Based on these findings, WHO Romania drafted new standard operating procedures for alert and response mechanisms as well as threat specific emergency procedures, which will be incorporated into future training programs.

Strengthen Prevent and Response Capacity for Zoonotic Diseases

In line with WHO's mandate to advance global efforts to control zoonotic diseases (i.e. diseases with an animal origin),

> WHO Romania launched a new initiative in 2024 to support the Romanian government in implementing the Surveillance and Information Sharing Operational Tool (SIS OT)

A platform supporting authorities in advancing collaboration between animal, human and environmental health sectors to combat zoonotic disease emergence.

> As part of this effort, the country office facilitated the establishment of a multisectoral working group, bringing together representatives from the Ministry of Health (MoH), National Institute of Public Health (NIPH), National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority (ANSVSA), and Ministry of Environment (MoE).

This working group developed a SIS OT implementation plan, outlining necessary steps and responsible institutions as well as a timeline for execution. Additionally, a common order was drafted, providing a legal framework for appointing focal points from relevant institutions, defining their objectives, duties, and tasks to ensure a coordinated rollout of the SIS OT Development Plan.

One Health Workshop

In March 2024, Romania organized its first One Health National Bridging Workshop (NBW), a unique initiative that brought together experts from the health, veterinary, and environment sectors. The “One Health” approach recognizes that the health of people, animals, and the environment are closely connected, and that working together across these areas is essential to prevent and respond to health threats.

> The workshop, supported by WHO, the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), aimed to strengthen collaboration between sectors and define practical ways to work together more effectively.

Over three days, participants worked together to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities, and developed a national roadmap outlining practical actions to improve cooperation. The roadmap focuses on key priorities such as establishing a government-level One Health coordination body, improving joint responses to outbreaks, and creating better systems for sharing information between sectors. The workshop generated strong momentum among national institutions, who committed to using the roadmap as a foundation for future planning. Romania’s NBW not only helped to build stronger connections between institutions but also positioned the country as an active supporter of international efforts to make health systems more resilient and better prepared for complex, cross-sector challenges.

Strategic Priority 3

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is at the heart of NextGenerationEU. It is a pivotal tool designed to provide grants and loans to bolster reforms and investments across EU Member States. RRF plays a crucial role in mitigating the economic and social aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic while ensuring that Member States emerge more resilient, sustainable, and prepared to navigate the green and digital transitions. The RRF supports the reform and investment packages put forward by the Member States in their National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRP).

NRRP for Romania includes the health care and digitalization component designed to address key challenges within the health system. This initiative focuses on reducing avoidable mortality rates, minimizing regional, social, and rural-urban disparities in access to basic health services, and increasing access to quality health services. Additionally, it aims to improve hospital and pre-hospital infrastructure, optimize healthcare expenditures, and enhance resource management, integrity in the health system and development of eHealth and telemedicine systems.

Health Systems Strenghtening

O. Technical Assistance for the NRRP

NRRP for Romania includes the health care and digitalization component designed to address key challenges within the health system. This initiative focuses on reducing avoidable mortality rates, minimizing regional, social, and rural-urban disparities in access to basic health services, and increasing access to quality health services. Additionally, it aims to improve hospital and pre-hospital infrastructure, optimize healthcare expenditures, and enhance resource management, integrity in the health system and development of eHealth and telemedicine systems.

As a knowledge-based organization, the WHO is offering technical assistance to the Ministry of Health (MoH) for implementing the health care and digitalization components of Romania's NRRP. The agreement for the NRRP between the MoH and WHO was signed in June 2022 and covers five key technical areas:

- Quality of Care & Patient Safety (QoC & PS)
- Human Resources in Health (HRH)
- Health Services Management (HSM)
- Health System Financing (HSF)
- Data and Digital Health (DDH)

Activities in all these work areas are supported by strong communication efforts to address Romania's country-specific recommendations for improving health care access and efficiency and strengthening health system's resilience. Aiding on communication has been a priority in 2024 and this included a national integrated communication campaign to raise awareness of historical achievements among the public.

Moving into the second year of collaboration between WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), the country office and Romanian Ministry of Health, the NRRP project further progress on the agreed reforms for health, which are essential for the equitable and sustainable transformation for the health care system and Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Despite the dynamic and challenging election year in 2024, WHO remained committed to supporting the implementation of legislative reforms aimed at enhancing health workforce capacity, digitization, health system financing and the quality of care.

Romania has made notable strides in all these areas of work, with WHO assisting the MoH in outlining the necessary frameworks and facilitating engagement with national stakeholders.

Furthermore, as part of the WHO technical assistance, Romanian stakeholders benefitted by participating in regional and sub-regional events to gain experience in strategic and capacity-building meetings on each project stream. The WHO also facilitate knowledge exchanges between Romanian authorities and the relevant institutions and most reputable academia and associations in the WHO European Region.

In 2025, the WHO will strive to maintain momentum and pace of deliverables through ongoing engagement with the MoH and the national stakeholders. As the project moves into the second half of the implementation period, the focus will be on strengthening the management of key health functions at the MoH and ensuring sustainable transformation across all agreed areas of work.

Key Achievements in 2024

- Organized 150 coordination meetings, stakeholder meetings, and communication events with international experts and advisors to ensure coordinated and relevant operationalization of agreed steps for Quality of Care, Health Service Management, Human Resources in Health and Data, Health System Financing and Digital Health;
- Completion of a Technical Guidebook to measure and monitor 25 Quality of Care (QoC) indicators and 5 training modules to support the implementation of the QoC indicators in health facilities across the country;
- Held 2 workshops and 4 field visits on Human Resources for Health to explore strategies to strengthen the retention of the Health Work Force (HWF);
- Hosted 2 National Symposiums on Cybersecurity and Digital Governance to discuss threats and opportunities to leverage digital tools to improve health care delivery and outcomes;
- Collaborated with over 60 representatives of key institutions and organizations across Romania to support the development for the Master Plan to implement the National Digital Health Strategy; and
- Delivered 1 National Integrated Communications Campaign to promote NRRP. This included TV and radio spots, out-of-home billboards inside and outside the capital complemented by digital banners, a social media campaign with a total reach of approximately 27 million people.
- Supported MoH to organize a regional Integrity and Anti-Corruption Practices workshop in Iasi (Northeast part of the country) to raise awareness on how it impacts the health care sector and the legislative measures for reporting. Attendees included hospital managers, economic directors, public health authorities, the MoH, the US Department of Justice, the U.S. Embassy, and an expert from WHO HQ.
- Designation of the National Institute for Health Service Management as a Collaborating Centre with the WHO;
- Hosted the 29th European Health Management Association (EHMA) Conference in Bucharest on 5-7 June 2024.
- Delivered to MoH an Analysis of the Priority Action Programs for the MoH and National Health Programs for the National Health Insurance House (NHIH);

P. Quality of Care and Patient Safety (QoC & PS)

Effective Universal Health Coverage (UHC) cannot be achieved without attention to Quality of Care and Patient Safety (QoC & PS). As countries strive towards achieving Health for All, it is crucial to ensure that the services provided are effective, safe, and centered around the needs of the people. The health care component of the NRRP for Romania seeks to improve access to quality health services, making QoC & PS a critical area of collaboration between the WHO and Romania.

The work under the QoC pillar is supported by the WHO Office on Quality of Care and Patient Safety in Athens, Greece, who is providing technical expertise and advise to the MoH.

> Following the implementation of the QoC Pilot Study in 2023, which sought to test the feasibility and potential impact of the 25 identified quality indicators in 6 hospitals appointed by the MoH.

the technical team developed a methodological guidebook to support public sector hospitals in implementing evidence-based indicators and methodologies for data collection, to enhance the quality of care provided to patients.

WHO Romania, in collaboration with the WHO Office on Quality of Care and Patient Safety in Athens, Greece, have been working on developing further training materials to be made available to hospitals seeking guidance on implementing the indicators.

Key activities in 2024

- Publication of the Technical Guidebook for 25 QoC & PS Indicators to support implementation of QoC & PS in Romania;
- Presentation of the People's Voice Survey to main actors involved in developing health policies across Romania during a Human Resources in Health Workshop in Azuga;
- Supported filming of 25 testimonials from health care workers involved in the Pilot Study on the measurement of quality-of-care indicators across five hospitals (Clinical Emergency Hospital Floreasca, Bucharest University Emergency Hospital, Oncological Institute Prof Dr. Ion Chiricuta, Cluj-Napoca, Doctor Carol Davila Nephrology Clinical Hospital Bucharest, Emergency County Clinical Hospital Pius Birzeu, Timisoara);
- Supported the development of 5 QoC & PS video modules for training frontline staff;
- Development of quality performance indicators for a Health Atlas;
- A Romanian delegation participated in a prestigious summer school course organized by WHO Office on Quality of Care and Patient Safety, held in Lisbon, Portugal;
- Facilitated the participation of ANMCS Representative and The Hospital Manager for Bucharest Emergency Clinical Hospital (Floreasca Hospital) at the 2nd edition of the "Meeting of the Minds" session, which provided a platform to discuss innovative avenues for QoC and patient safety in the post-COVID era; and

- Supported the Romanian delegation's participation at the 2nd Meeting of the WHO European Quality Of Care And Patient Safety Focal Points Network. The participants were presented the results from the WHO Report on Quality of Care and Patient Safety in the European Region and the WHO Global Patient Safety Report 2024.

Fostering Knowledge Exchange on Quality of Care and Patient Safety Across the Region

The WHO European 2nd Autumn School on Quality of Care and Patient Safety, during 7-11 October 2024 in Lisbon, Portugal, focused on advancing healthcare quality and patient safety across the European region with emphasis is on achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC), guaranteeing access to high-quality health services without imposing financial burdens on individuals.

> This capacity building opportunity was co-organized by the WHO Office on Quality of Care and Patient Safety in Athens, Greece and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Education, Research, and Evaluation of Safety and Quality in Healthcare at the NOVA National School of Public Health.

The event opened with high-level addresses from key WHO and Portuguese health officials, setting the stage for a series of discussions on the foundational aspects of quality of care.

WHO Country Office in Romania facilitated the participation of a delegation from the National Authority for Quality Management in Health (ANMCS) to the 2nd WHO Autumn School, as part of the NRRP efforts to develop knowledge and expertise in this field.

Participants from Romania, alongside ones from other 14 European countries across the Region, delved into topics such as healthcare leadership, patient safety policies, quality governance and measurement and the global agenda for quality improvement. Participants benefited from global experts' views on system-wide quality improvement strategies and how healthcare systems can be reframed to prioritize safety and patient-centered care and the importance of a well-prepared healthcare workforce capable of delivering high-quality care under challenging circumstances. Panel discussions emphasized the role of leadership, system approach, outcome measurement, and evidence-based guidelines in driving healthcare effectiveness. The summer school concluded with a policy dialogue competition, where attendees pitched their ideas for enhancing quality of care, followed by closing remarks from WHO and European health leaders, marking the workshop as a pivotal platform for fostering healthcare excellence across the region.

President of the National Authority for Quality Management in Health (ANMCS)
Valentin-Florin Ciocan

> The Autumn School refined our understanding of the complex dimensions and best practices in the field of Quality of Care and Patient Safety across the region, through engaging panel discussions, interactive lectures and collaborative workshops. In addition to the sessions, we were engaged in a daily group activity on quality-of-care policy design. It was a highly engaging and constructive experience to further develop knowledge and expertise in the field of quality of care and patient safety.

Q. Human Resources in Health (HRH)

Health care cannot exist without a skilled health workforce, and a resilient health system relies on having the right health care workers, equipped with the necessary skills and motivation in the right place and at the right time.

Romania recognizes that the health workforce (doctor, nurses, midwives and other health professionals) are vital in achieving universal health coverage and helping to ensure that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without encountering financial hardship. Therefore, the health reforms under NRRP prioritize retention, recruitment, management and training of human resources in health.

Building on the 5 Sectorial Action Plans (SAPs) developed by the MoH in 2023, with the support of WHO, the technical work on HRH continue to address the HWF gaps and needs within the Romanian health system.

In 2024, The MoH, with technical assistance from the WHO, started the implementation of the SAPs, by exploring the key challenges for the retention and distribution of the HWF and ways to overcome them. The WHO technical team partnered up with a specialized local NGO to review the most recent international best practices and run field visits to map out the key good practices demonstrated by local authorities and hospitals across the country to attract and retain health care professionals in rural and underserved areas.

Evidence-based practices were used to initiate dialogue with all key national stakeholders, to collect feedback on the proposed measures and develop concrete steps for implementation.

Key Activities in 2024

- Organized 2 in-country missions to capture user-case statements from key stakeholders and to map the gaps in the current databases and systems relevant to the development of the digital platform for the Health Workforce Registry (HWFR);
- Development of a set of technical specifications for the Ministry of Health (MoH) tender on the digital platform for the Health Workforce Registry (HWFR). It is envisaged that the registry will form a repository to support future capacity planning for professionals and services;
- A series of visits have begun with the support of a national NGO to collect good practices implemented by local authorities in Braşov, Timiş, Iaşi, Călăraşi and Argeş for the retention of health workforce area in Romania;
- Assisted the MoH with the organization of a new regional Integrity and Anti-Corruption Practices Workshop with hospital managers and economic directors, public health authorities was held in Iasi (Northeast part of the country). Health Minister Prof Alexandru Rafila and Secretary of State for Health Dr Alexandru Rogobete attended the event as well as the US Department of Justice, U.S. Embassy, and experts from WHO HQ;
- Supported the MoH to implement the 5 SAPs by organizing 2 stakeholder meetings on health workforce (HWF) field visit findings and recommendations on retention in underserved areas across Romania; and
- Published a commentary that reflects on the WHO and MoH collaboration in HRH reforms in the country.

Working towards a n ational guideline to support the retention and attraction of the health workforce in remote and underserved areas in Romania

Romania has been facing ongoing critical shortage of health and care professionals, particularly in rural and underserved areas. This shortage significantly impacts access to quality care and creates disparities in health outcomes. The uneven distribution of healthcare professionals exacerbates this issue, with over 50% of doctors concentrated in the university areas, i.e. Bucharest, Dolj, Tamis, Cluj, Mureş and Iasi, leaving some regions with less than two doctors per 1,000 inhabitants, according to the National Statistics Institute[1].

The WHO technical team collaborated with a local specialized NGO to assess the latest international best practices and conduct field visits to identify effective practices demonstrated by local authorities and hospitals nationwide in attracting and retaining healthcare professionals in rural and underserved areas. vidence-based practices were used to initiate discussions with key national stakeholders, gather feedback on the proposed measures, and create actionable steps for implementation.

The three main activities Romania (literature review, field study visits and stakeholder dialogue) undertaken for the implementation of the SAP on retention and distribution of the HWF yielded substantial insights into the multifaceted challenges facing healthcare delivery in rural and underserved regions in Romania.

The initial workshop was held in Bucharest with 43 stakeholders belonging to the institutional, administrative, hospital, and clinical levels, and the Minister of Health, Prof Dr Alexandru Rafila, as well as the State Secretary, Dr Alexandru Rogobete. Good practice models were presented based on the extended literature review, and feedback was gathered for the first round of data capturing and analysis.

[1] National Statistics Institute, 2024, Number of doctors per 1000 inhabitants, Available at: https://insse.ro/cms/files/IDDT2012/Date_IDDT/T5-5-Numarul-de-medici-la-1000-locuitori.htm

Field visits were carried out in the counties of Brașov, Timiș, Iași, Călărași and Argeș. These visits provided vital insights into the practical challenges and successes in different local settings through on-site interviews. Qualitative text analysis methodology was utilised to identify key themes through multiple coding cycles. The themes largely aligned with categories observed in the literature review.

On 20-22 September 2024, a workshop chaired by State Secretary, Dr Alexandru Rogobete, was held in Azuga to discuss the topics identified from the literature review and during the field visits carried out in five counties, focusing on measures to attract and retain the health workforce in underserved areas. The participant's feedback was compiled and synthesized for the development of a national guideline of good practices.

The guideline will focus on several points of action to balance the distribution of healthcare workers in Romania in rural and underserved areas. These include limited career advancement opportunities in small urban settings, lack of modern medical equipment and technology, heavy workloads due to staff shortages, professional isolation, difficulties with housing, education facilities for children, and spousal employment in smaller communities.

President of the Multidisciplinary Society of Resident Doctors (2024-2025)
Rareș Vrîncianu

It is very important for us to be present in these conversations. As representatives of medical residents, we know the challenges they face in navigating the current health system, their fears and their main grievances looking at securing a position in an underserved or remote area. Thus, for the system to find the best solutions which ensure sustainability in the health workforce, the contribution of young doctors is essential.

R. Health Services Management (HSM)

Effective Health Services Management (HSM) practices are essential in all health care settings and play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall performance of health services. Strengthening management capabilities within health systems have become a key strategy for improving the delivery of medical assistance and building resilient systems.

The technical assistance provided by WHO to the Romanian MoH for the implementation of the health component of the NRRP included activities which aided the capacity building of HSM in the country. In 2024, WHO continued its support for the development of capacity for the National Institute of Health Services Management (NIHSM), the national provider of training programmes and professional development modules for health services managers.

In 2024, the National Institute for Health Services Management (NIHSM) was designated the WHO Collaborating Centre on Health Services Management, attesting to the essential role it has in strengthening of institutional capacity in Romania and the WHO European Region.

> Prof. Cristian Vlădescu, the NIHSM Director is the focal point for the new WHO Collaborating Centre.

NIHSM became the first institution in Romania to receive a Collaborating Centre status by the World Health Organization and will collaborate with international experts in development and research activities on health systems in Europe.

Activities under this pillar marked 2024 as a year of regional collaboration, with activities spanning from a successful Visiting Scholars Programme in Western Europe to Romania hosting the 29th edition of the European Health Management Conference (EHMA).

Key Activities in 2024

- Organized an event to acknowledge the completion of the 6 Training of Trainers (ToTs) programme covering 6 key areas for Health Service Management (HSM) capacity building. Health Minister Prof. Dr. Alexandru Rafila, NIHSM Director Prof. Dr. Cristian Vlădescu and Representative of the G6 alliance of medicine universities Dr. Jinga Viorel provided key opening statements. The event also marked the launch of the new website for the National Institute for Health Services Management (NIHSM — https://inmss.ro/en/);

- Organized a side event at EHMA, moderated by Dr. Mafaten Chaouali from WHO/Europe for a round table on Professional Body of Experts in Health Management – good practice examples from different countries. The panel included 6 countries: Romania (Prof. Dr. Cristian Vlădescu), Portugal (Alexandre Lourenço), Italy (Federico Lega), France (Catherine Keller), Spain (Jaume Ribera) and US (Eric de Roodenbeke);

- Implemented the Visiting Scholar Programme for 5 groups made of 29 stakeholders who visited Barcelona, Milan, and Lisbon to cultivate collaboration, professional growth, and knowledge exchange among educators and researchers in HSM. The program included visits in hospitals in the 3 cities, meetings with representatives of the health care institutions, developing Romanian specific study cases for future courses and attending to university classes to highlight best practice in teaching in health care;

- Supported the 29th edition of the European Health Management Conference, organized by the European Health Management Association (EHMA) in partnership with the Romanian MoH and the NIHSM in Bucharest, Romania. Over 400 delegates attended representing academia, research, hospital, and community care, discussing the latest trends in health services management;

- Designation of the National Institute for Health Services Management (NIHSM) as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Health Services Management; and

- Organized 2 full-day capacity-building workshops on Environmental Sustainability in Health Services Management, that were delivered by experts from six countries with expertise in the transition to green energy, waste, and water management in line with the existing policies and guidelines at the European level.

Strengthening hospital management's capacity in Environmental Sustainability

Data shows that around 1.4 million people die annually due to environmental risk factors in the European Region, calling for urgent action from all stakeholders through the Budapest Declaration (2023)1 mandate to address threats posed by climate change to Health, improve equitable access to resources, and integrate biodiversity into Health. Additionally, environmental sustainability falls within WHO's global priorities of the "triple crisis" of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, which frequently result in health emergencies and disproportionately impact vulnerable people2.

Healthcare facilities are significant consumers of resources, they generate large volumes of waste, including hazardous materials, making them contributors to environmental degradation and Hospitals play a leading role in environmental stewardship in the pursuit of patient care.

Adopting a proactive approach toward sustainability in hospital management, WHO/Europe, and the WHO Country Office in Romania, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, WHO Bonn Office, the European Health Management Association (EHMA) and the Nova School of Public Health in Lisbon, organized a series of workshops on Environmental Sustainability for Health Services Management, as part of the technical assistance offered for the implementation of the NRRP's Health component.

A first of its kind in Romania, two full-day capacity-building workshops were delivered by experts from six countries with expertise in the transition to green energy, waste, and water management in line with the existing policies and guidelines at the European level. The objectives were to provide knowledge of sustainable healthcare practices and highlight the implications for Health, quality of life, and well-being, equip participants with the ability to assess, plan, and implement effective environmental policies and practices in their institutions, how to co-create a culture that values and prioritizes sustainability and equip academics to lead their training sessions thus ensuring a broader network of healthcare professionals can be reached with this knowledge.

The first workshop included 19 participants from the National Institute for Health Service Management (NIHSM) and was dedicated to staff to develop their capacity and knowledge base to cascade training to health service managers. The second workshop included 15 participants consisting of hospital executives and academics from emergency and non-emergency settings, and the National Agency for Health Infrastructure Development (ANDIS).

[1] WHO European Region, 2023, Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health: Budapest, Hungary 5–7 July 2023, Available at: https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/EURO-Budapest2023-6

[2] WHO European Region, 2023, A healthy environment in the WHO European Region: why it matters and what steps we can take to improve health, Available at: https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/368160

Feedback from Director, NIHSM

Prof. Dr. Cristian Vlădescu

After these workshops, the concept of 'green hospitals' is better known in Romania. Together with the Universities and the hospitals, we will try to develop training materials and programs to raise awareness of all the participants in the health sector regarding the need of 'green hospitals' in Romania.

Feedback from Manager, Brasov County Emergency Hospital

Emil Mailat

It was a nice and motivating experience, knowing more about how sustainability can help develop the future of the hospital I represent. I was glad to see part of the ideas of colleagues from other countries already implemented. Now that we have this knowledge, we will move to the next step of identifying how we can achieve better and more sustainable results in each hospital.

S. Health System Financing (HSF)

Health System Financing is essential for advancing Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by improving service coverage and financial protection. Although each country's path to UHC is different, global lessons remain key to ensuring equitable and effective progress, reforms must be tailored to each country's unique context. While there is no universal solution, the WHO's network of experts offer guiding principles to help countries assess and align their reform strategies. Achieving UHC also requires coordinated efforts across the health system, particularly in strengthening human resources.

In Romania, national health programmes are regulated by law, which sets out the framework for implementing the objectives of the public health policy and strategy by the MoH, as the central authority of the public health field. The national health programs are addressed to the main intervention areas of public health and developed by the MoH, with the participation of the National Health Insurance House (NHIH) and carried out by the MoH and NHIH. They comprise a set of activities with multi-year development, which respond to the national priorities identified by the National Health Strategy (2023-2030).

The NRRP project in Health seeks to assist the national authorities in developing fair and sustainable system of hospital financing, based on need, costs of the services provided and patient pathways. For this purpose, the WHO conducted an in-depth analysis of national priority programs and provided a set of recommendations to improve healthcare financing. In 2025, the WHO will continue to support the MoH on Health System Financing through the WHO/EURO technical expertise.

T. Data and Digital Health

In recent years, digital health has undergone remarkable growth, emerging as a pivotal force in the pursuit of universal health coverage. Member States can now prioritize the use of digital solutions and necessary capacity-building to advance universal health coverage, protect the public in times of emergencies and enhance health and wellbeing.

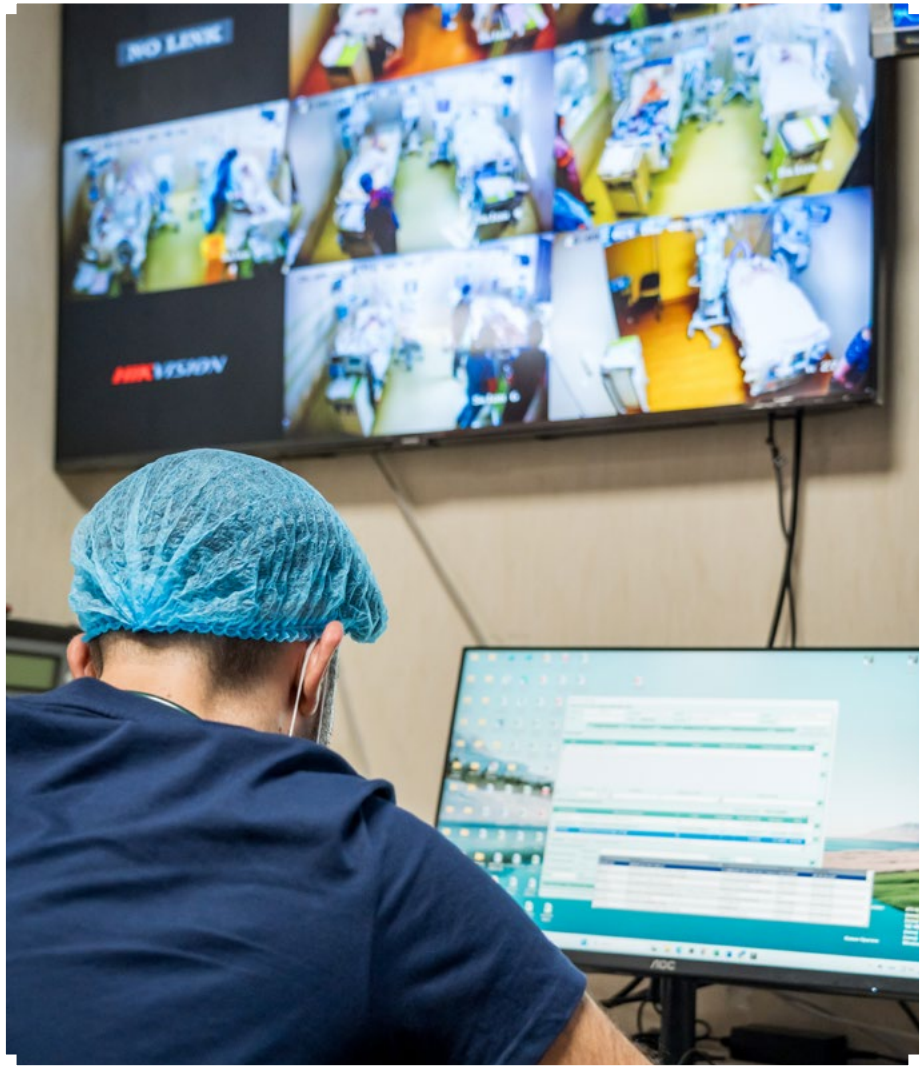
As part of the technical assistance offered to Romania for the implementation of the NRRP, the WHO is supporting the digital transformation process of the Romanian health care system, seeking to optimize the existing health information systems and databases, facilitate patients' access to health information and improve management of health services at national level.

In 2024, the Data and Digital Health (DDH) team worked together with the Digital Health Technical Working Group (TWG) to advance the design of policy and mechanism necessary for the implementation of the National Digital Health Strategy for Romania 2024-2030. Once approved by the MoH, this strategy will pave the way for a more integrated and efficient digital health system in Romania.

In addition, the work under DDH pillar underlined the importance of regional and national collaboration in advancing digital solutions in health care, with key actors in Digital Health across Europe joining the 2 symposiums organized in Bucharest to share experiences and lessons learned in the field. Furthermore, more national stakeholders joined the TWG on Digital Health in October 2024 to facilitate the transition toward a formal DH governing structure and policy framework.

Key Activities in 2024

- Convened 11 meetings with the DDH TWG to assist with requirements gathering, flow mapping and market research activities in this work area;
- Coordinated the TWG for the development and delivery of the Digital Health Strategy Action Plan and a draft of the Master Plan for the implementation of the National Digital Health Strategy (2025-2030);
- Developed a High-Level Specification Outline for the MoH Digital Health Platform, a document for market consultation;
- Supported Romania in hosting a Health Cybersecurity Symposium (18 July 2024) with the participation of representatives from the U.S., Estonia, UK, European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) and the WHO Collaborating Centre on Digital Health - Norwegian Centre for E-health Research;
- Supported Romania in hosting a Digital Health Governance Symposium (09 October 2024) to address setting up governance structures for digital health policy and implementation in Romania and knowledge exchange between key stakeholders in health and digitalization and experts from Italy, Denmark, Estonia, Portugal and the UK. Experienced representatives of Digital Health Agencies across the Region shared their experience in Governance and presented organizational options for Romania, with European Health Data Space (EHDS) being a key area of focus in the fruitful discussions; and
- Formalised engagement with an implementing partner to undertake a digital health maturity assessment across 207 Romanian hospitals to inform and future investments and decision making.



Building Resilience: Addressing Cybersecurity Threatsfor the Health Sector

Cybersecurity is crucial for protecting computer systems and networks from theft, unauthorized access, damage, or misuse.

> In 2021, global cybercrime costs were estimated at 5.5 trillion euros1, with the health sector being heavily targeted. The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) reported2 that 54% of incidents involved ransomware, and 46% were data-related threats.

Healthcare providers, especially hospitals, were the most affected, with cybercriminals primarily motivated by financial gain. Patient data and electronic health records were the main targets, leading to data breaches, service disruptions, and significant impacts on patient safety.

The European Union prioritizes cybersecurity by developing comprehensive frameworks, promoting cooperation, tackling cybercrime, and protecting critical infrastructure. In Romania, the healthcare sector faces various cyber threats that compromise patient data and disrupt services. To address these challenges, the Ministry of Health, WHO Europe, and the WHO Collaborating Centre on Digital Health in Norway organized a Symposium on Cybersecurity, as part of the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP). The event aimed to facilitate knowledge exchange, capacity building, and best practice sharing on cybersecurity and governance.

> The Symposium saw participation from 39 organizations, including national health authorities, universities, and international experts.

Presentations were provided by the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, NHS England, and Tallinn University of Technology, among others. The event covered the European Cybersecurity Regulatory framework, key threats to the health sector, and lessons learned from the UK, Estonia, and the US. An interactive session allowed participants to develop practical incident response plans.

Key learnings from the Health Cybersecurity Symposium emphasized viewing cybersecurity as a patient safety issue, maintaining public trust through transparency, and fostering a culture of open communication. A coordinated approach is essential, involving the development of a cybersecurity strategy, relevant legal frameworks, and collaboration with key stakeholders. The Symposium highlighted the importance of protecting sensitive health data and ensuring the continuity of critical services, making cybersecurity a strategic priority for the healthcare sector.

Feedback from Executive Director of the National Cybersecurity Operations at NHS England.
Mike Fell

> Putting the patient at the centre and making cybersecurity a patient safety issue is at the core of all these efforts. Rather than implementing hundreds and hundreds of policies, we try to change the culture, to make people aware of the patient harms that could result from cyber-attacks and then drive the right outcomes.

[1] Council of the European Union, 2025, What are the top cyber threats in the EU?,Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/top-cyber-threats/

[2] European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, 2024, ENISA Threat Landscape 2024, Available at: https://www.enisa.europa.eu/topics/cyber-threats/threat-landscape

U. Communications Support

Effective, integrated, and coordinated communications are essential to achieving health goals. By promoting clearly and transparently the activities and events supporting the implementation of health reforms and investments, WHO's support contributed towards not only enhancing public awareness and engagement but also fostering collaboration and trust among national stakeholders.

In 2024, Communications truly emerged as the umbrella for all NRRP activities undertaken by the technical teams. Work in this area included managing two local agencies to support MoH's communication activities on NRRP, procuring web support services and supervising the development and the implementation of the PR and Media Strategy and the Digital Communication Strategy, as well as all the communication support for the national NRRP events and activities, including risk communications management.

Key Activities in 2024

- Managed Media and Public Relations and Digital Social Media agencies to support and promote NRRP visibility;
- Delivered 1 National Integrated Communications Campaign to raise the public's awareness on the health initiatives under NRRP. This included TV and radio spots, out-of-home billboards, digital banners, and social media ads, with a total reach of approximately 27 million;
- Supported all 27 WHO-led NRRP events with communications support, including photo and video coverage and social media promotion;
- Supported the filming of 25 testimonials from healthcare workers in 3 cities across Romania and 5 theoretical modules for training frontline staff on the measurement of Quality of Care indicators;
- Produced of 1 human story with Loredana, a community nurse in the Țigănași commune, in North-Eastern Romania, serving four villages with a total population of 4,826, to highlight the essential support that nurses bring to the local community and to promote the 9 integrated community centres that will be built in Iasi County under the NRRP project. This was promoted on regional channels (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn);
- Conducted content-gathering trips in Cluj-Napoca, Bistrita and Timisoara to support the MoH in showcasing the progress and impact on the NRRP investments in health infrastructure and digitalization;
- Developed of the communication material "NRRP: Strengthening Romania's Health System with WHO technical support - An overview June 2023 – June 2024", outlining the main technical achievements over the mentioned period; and
- Developed 1 website for MoH, centralising all health-related results, activities, investments and stories under the Health and Digitalization component of the NRRP.

Bringing the NRRP in Health story closer to the public: A National Integrated Communication Campaign

The NRRP is the single most important funding program aimed to fast-track the evolution of the Romanian Public Health System. The programme of reforms and investments is unprecedented, as the system is historically underfunded and often lacks the tools and resources to enable real change. Change is the keyword and the centerpiece of what the NRRP promises. As the main media mainly focuses on communicating the shortcomings of the health system, the general public is often not aware of the impact of approximately 12 billion RON being invested in the transformation of the public health system. The aim of the integrated communication campaign was to boost the general information, acceptance and support levels of the NRRP in Health among the general population of Romania through a national public-facing integrated communication campaign. The campaign was complementary to the implementation of the NRRP in Health and an integral part of it while acknowledging the origin and ensuring the visibility of the EU funding received.

The integrated communications campaign was designed in alignment with the objectives set forth by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) of Romania. The digital part of the campaign took place between 2-23 October 2024, following the campaign's primary goal was to enhance public awareness and support for the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) in Health. This was achieved through a multi-channel strategy targeting the general public, health professionals, and national authorities.

Key activities included the development of a cohesive creative concept, the production of broadcast materials for TV and radio, and the implementation of digital and out-of-home (OOH) banners, and social media campaigns. The campaign leveraged a broad range of media channels to maximize exposure, aiming to communicate the positive impact of health reforms and investments under the NRRP across Romania.

(1) Total Reach: 27 million, covering diverse audience segments.

(2) Social media: Over 1.1 million interactions on Facebook and Instagram.

(3) Video Views: Campaign videos garnered 810,000 views on social media.

Media Channel Highlights

Television	2,695 TV spots aired with 46% premium placements, increasing visibility during peak hours
Radio	Aired on six national stations for broad coverage and reached about 9.75 million listeners, with 6.75 million hearing the ad three or more times.
Out-of-Home	98 billboard/ signage locations across 26 cities, targeting high-traffic urban areas like București, Iași, and Timișoara.
Online Ads	Banner ads on popular websites, such as stiripesurse.ro, antena3.ro, and adevarul.ro, and reached an estimated 6–8 million unique users.
Social media	Organic and paid posts on Facebook and Instagram reached 860,878 users and achieved a high engagement rate of 118% with over 1.1 million interactions.

The campaign successfully conveyed NRRP's health initiatives, utilizing a multi-channel approach to maximize audience engagement and positive public reception in Romania. The analysis of media coverage reveals predominantly positive sentiment, with key projects such as the modernization of hospitals and building infrastructure for the health system. The campaign has touched and reached many people, raising awareness of NRRP in Health and its importance for Romania.

Country Office Events and Celebrations

V. World Health Day 2024

World Health Day is celebrated annually on 7 April, and each year draws attention to a specific health topic of concern to people all over the world. In addition, the date of 7 April also marks the anniversary of the founding of WHO in 1948 and seventy-five years ago, in the aftermath of the deadliest and most destructive war in human history, the Constitution of the World Health Organization came into force - a treaty between the nations of the world, who recognized that health was not only a fundamental human right, but also fundamental to peace and security.

On 4 April 2024, the WHO Country Office in Romania organized a celebratory event to mark the end of WHO's 75th birthday and World Health Day 2024 at Bragadiru Palace in Bucharest for government representatives, national and international partners, colleagues, and friends. The theme of the event echoed the global theme chosen by WHO for World Health Day 2024, "My Health, My Right", championing the rights of everyone, everywhere in accessing quality health services.

Highlights of the evening included the performance by the Dr. Ermil Nichifor Doctors' Orchestra and an exhibition illustrating key moments in the history of healthcare progress in Romania and around the world.

Key partners and stakeholders, representatives of the Government, diplomatic missions, main institutions in the health sector and the medical community in Romania joined the celebrations, including Presidential Adviser for Health Professor Diana Păun, State Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Dr Tiberius Brădăţan and President of National Health Insurance House, Dr Valeria Herdea.

The celebration highlighted WHO Romania's ongoing commitment to public health and its rich history of contributions to the health sector, creating a memorable and inspiring occasion for all involved.

W. Convening of Strategic Partners

As part of WHO Romania's ongoing initiative to strengthen ties with key health stakeholders, the country office hosted a 'Convening of Strategic Partners' meeting on 13 September 2024. The purpose of the event was to update national and international stakeholders on its operations, enhance partnerships within Romania, and lay the groundwork for future collaborations. The event was graced by the presence of Presidential Adviser for Health Professor Diana Păun, Minister of Health Professor Alexandru Rafila, and National Public Health Institute Director Dr Simona Parvu. Other distinguished attendees included senior officials from the Ministry of Health, State Secretary for Emergency Situations Dr Arfat, and the Ambassadors from Albania, the Republic of Korea, Qatar, and Switzerland, along with numerous members of the international community.

The meeting commenced with opening remarks from WR Dr Clarinval, Dr Weiler from WHO EURO, Professor Paun, Professor Rafila, and Dr. Parvu. WHO Romania technical officers presented operational updates, followed by an open floor discussion. The event underscored WHO Romania's commitment to fostering strong partnerships and highlighted the significant progress made in its operations, setting a promising tone for future collaborations.

Financial Overview and Acknowledgements

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In 2024, the WHO Romania country office mobilized USD 9.5 million to implement WHO programs in country.

The available budget remaining stable compared to 2023 allowed the country office to continue its mandate of health for all.

WHO Romania is grateful to our donors USAid, Ireland, Republic of Korea, Norway, Germany, the European Commission, Others (Assessed Contributions, Canada, Denmark, ASEF) and the Romanian Ministry of Health and its partners for their continued support and cooperation in all areas of activities throughout 2024.

We are committed to continue strengthening these valuable partnerships to better respond to future healthcare challenges in Romania.

Total fund **US$ 9.5 million**

60%	**Romania**		2%	**Republic of Korea**
23%	**United Stated of America**		2%	**Norway**
7%	**Others**		2%	**Germany**
4%	**Ireland**		1%	**European Commission**

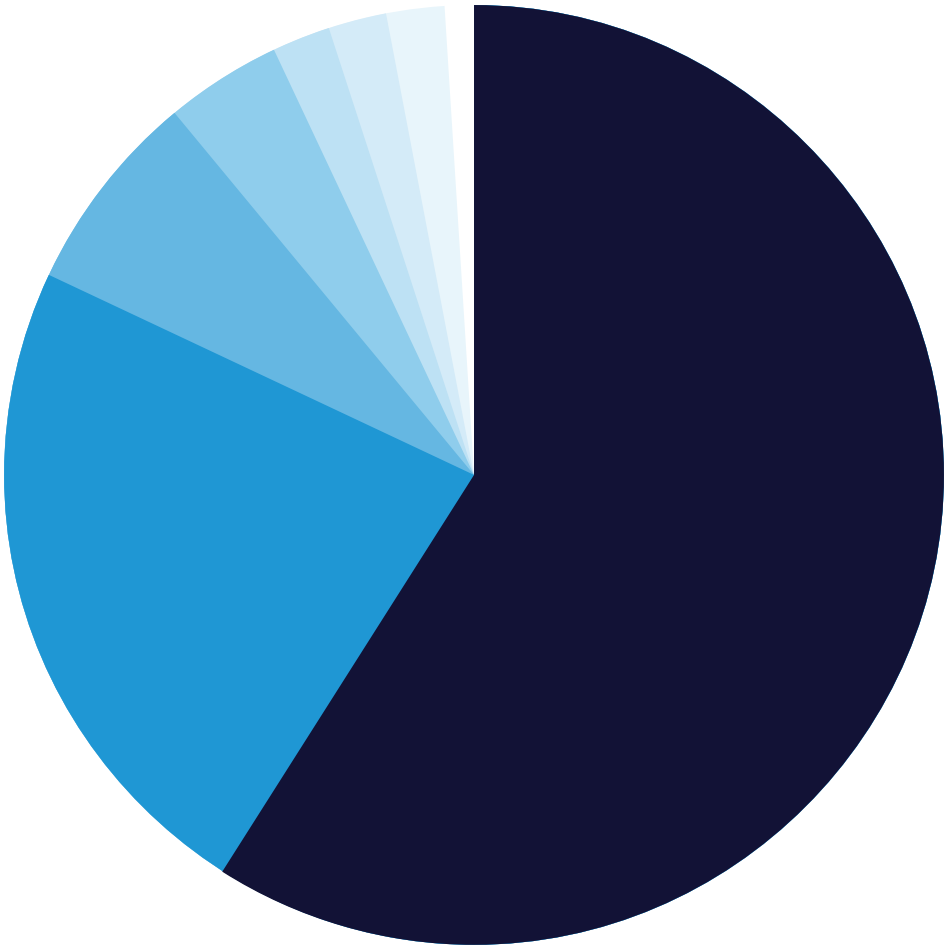

Fig.1. WHO Country Office in Romania Implemented Funding 2024

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1948 with the primary responsibility for international health matters and public health. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is one of six regional offices throughout the world, each with its own programme geared to the particular health conditions of the countries it serves.

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World Health Organization
Regional Office for Europe

UN City, Marmorvej 51,
DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00
Fax: +45 45 33 70 01

Email: eurocontact@who.int
Website: www.who.int/europe