

Information Documents

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**Report of the fact-finding mission to Romania by
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Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees
12-14 December 2022**

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I. INTRODUCTION

I.1. CONTEXT OF THE MISSION

1. The aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which started on 24 February 2022 led to the most important influx of refugees in Europe since World War II. Within days, millions left the country, seeking safety in neighbouring countries, and beyond.
2. Following the onset of the crisis in Ukraine, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (SRSG), convened, on 9 March 2022¹, an extraordinary online meeting of the Council of Europe (CoE) Network of Focal Points on Migration to obtain information about the civilian population fleeing Ukraine. The meeting provided an opportunity to highlight the need to protect persons in vulnerable situations from abuse, exploitation and trafficking. Further needs in terms of access to healthcare, including adequate support for psychological assistance, access to education, linguistic integration and access to the labour market were also emphasised by the Focal Points on Migration.
3. The SRSG convened a meeting on 24 March 2022 of the Inter-secretarial Co-ordination Group of the CoE, in order to address the needs of the refugees, as established by the Focal Points and to co-ordinate the CoE's activities with the aim of providing adequate assistance on the ground, within the CoE's mandate, and in line with the Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe 2021-2025 (Action Plan)². The SRSG organised an online meeting on 8 April 2022 with the representatives of international organisations such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF, EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and OSCE/ODIHR³, to exchange information on the actions carried out in the context of the crisis in Ukraine⁴, as well as to determine how best the CoE, within its mandate, can complement the ongoing efforts. The SRSG also exchanged with civil society representatives during the spring session of the Conference of INGOs, on 5 April 2022.
4. Based on the outcomes of these meetings and in accordance with her mandate⁵, the SRSG decided to carry out fact-finding missions to those member states most affected by this sudden and unforeseen influx of refugees. Prior to her mission to Romania, in 2022 the SRSG visited the Slovak Republic (2-4 May 2022), the Czech Republic (4-6 May 2022), Poland (30 May - 3 June 2022) and the Republic of Moldova (13-14 June 2022).

¹ [Extraordinary meeting of the Network of Focal Points on Migration regarding the situation of people fleeing Ukraine.](#)

² [Action plan on protecting vulnerable persons in the context of migration.](#)

³ [Refugees fleeing Ukraine: exchange of information with international partners – News \(coe.int\).](#)

⁴ See in this context the [Ukraine Regional Refugee Response Plan \(RRP\)](#) providing a comprehensive response by UN agencies to support countries' efforts to protect and assist refugees coming from Ukraine and [EU/FRA report: EU-Ukrainian border check points: First field observations.](#)

⁵ [Mandate of the SRSG \(coe.int\).](#)

I.2. DATES AND DELEGATION

5. This report was prepared following the visit by the SRSG to Romania between 12 and 14 December 2022 with a view to seeing first-hand the challenges on the ground and the Romanian authorities' response to them. It provides an overview of the situation of people having fled and still arriving from Ukraine based on the observations of the SRSG and her team during the mission. The visit also aimed at evaluating whether the CoE could provide adequate assistance, notably through the Action Plan. The primary focus is therefore on vulnerable persons. Major issues such as access to accommodation, to healthcare and to the labour market, which play significant roles for the protection and inclusion of refugees in the long run, are also addressed.
6. Considering the fact that the majority of people coming from Ukraine are women and children, and given their extreme vulnerability⁶, the SRSG included in her delegation a member of the CoE Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), Ms Ellen O'Malley Dunlop. Her role was to provide thematic expertise on this issue identified as a priority. The SRSG's Senior Adviser, Ms Sylvie Bollini, and her Adviser, Ms Anne Kayser, also assisted the SRSG, Ms Leyla Kayacik, during the mission.
7. The support provided by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Romania in planning and organising this visit was essential and is much appreciated, as was the openness of the Romanian authorities throughout the visit.

I.3. MEETINGS AND SITES VISITED

8. In Bucharest, the SRSG met with the Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies – Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Traian Hristea; the Secretary of State for Justice, Mr George Cătălin Șerban; the Secretary of State of the Ministry of Health, Dr Tiberius Marius Brădățan; the Secretary of State responsible for the educational integration of Ukrainian refugee children – Ministry of Education, Mr Ionel-Florian Lixandru; the Secretary of State, Ms Elena Tudor, President of the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption; and the President of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, Ms Luminita Popescu.
9. She also met with Mr Florin Cotosman, President of the National Employment Agency (ANOFM) and experts from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, including experts dealing with people with disabilities.
10. Furthermore, the SRSG had the opportunity to exchange with Ms Renate Weber, the People's Advocate (Ombudsperson) of Romania.
11. The delegation met with the Deputy Director of the Civil Protection General Directorate within the Civil Protection Department, Colonel Silviu Stoian, Commissioner Ivan Cătălin, Acting Chief of the Unit for EU-NATO policies and strategic partnership in the field of civil protection, Mr Mihai Lupu, Adviser for the Secretary of State Raed Arafat, Ms Raluca Erdinc, Police Commissioner, International Relations Unit, and held online meetings with the Secretary of State, Head of Office of the Department for Emergency Situations within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Dr Raed Arafat, as well as with the Counsellor of State to the Office of the Prime Minister, Ms Mădălina Turza.

⁶ [Urgent need to protect Ukrainian children in migration from the risk of exposure to sexual abuse – Children's Rights](#) and War in Ukraine: protecting women and girls.

12. In Bucharest, the SRSG exchanged views with representatives of UN Agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM) and with a large number of civil society representatives.
13. The SRSG also met with specialised lawyers from the Romanian Bar Association.
14. The RomExpo Centre, visited by the SRSG on 13 December, is a congress and exhibition centre which was transformed into an integrated multiservice hub for refugees. It is located about eight kilometres from the city centre and covers a total area of 100 000 square metres. RomExpo represents an excellent example of co-ordination and efficient co-operation between governmental entities, local authorities, international organisations and civil society. Several national and international actors, including UN agencies (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF), with the involvement of NGOs, work together to provide a wide range of services. Working in close co-operation, one part of the centre is managed by the UNHCR and the other part by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the time of the visit, between 500 and 600 people were arriving daily at the RomExpo centre.
15. At the facility, the SRSG met with Mr Toni Greblă, Prefect of Bucharest, and representatives from all UN agencies working at the hub. The assistance provided by the UNHCR and the General Inspectorate for Immigration during the visit was much appreciated.
16. The General Inspectorate for Immigration, supported by the European Union for Asylum Agency (EUAA), register people coming from Ukraine for “temporary protection status”. The registration documents and permits can be printed directly at the facility, saving a lot of time. Those considered as vulnerable persons are registered in a specific database.
17. RomExpo is the main registration centre in Romania but also serves as a one-stop-shop for all services which are available free of charge. A free supermarket has been made accessible by the municipality, which is used daily by about 1 300 refugees, and provides core-relief items e.g. clothes, childcare material and hygiene products. The UNHCR has put in place a cash assistance enrolment centre; so far more than 32 000 refugees have received a multi-purpose cash assistance. The RomExpo is also equipped with a child-friendly space.
18. A UNHCR counselling desk offers a safe and confidential space for refugees to discuss protection issues and receive appropriate information about healthcare assistance, advice on education and job opportunities. Legal counselling is also provided by the Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR) with regards to citizenship, housing, socio-economic rights, social services and benefits. Thousands of refugees have benefited from this type of legal aid thanks to the centre.
19. The Ministry of Education, with the support of the World Bank, established in August 2022 an education desk where parents can receive information on education in Romania and enrol their children in Romanian educational institutions.
20. The World Health Organisation (WHO), with the support of the Ministry of Health and through its partners, provides medical assistance including family medicine, sexual and reproductive health services and psychological counselling. Pregnancy and gynaecological consultations are available by appointment. The NGO Fundatia Sensibilu has also opened a desk to provide gender-based violence counselling and referral support and conducts awareness-raising sessions.

21. The SRSG also visited the Giurgiu Regional Centre for Procedures and Accommodation for Asylum Seekers, which is both a reception and registration centre, located very close to the Bulgarian border. The centre provides assistance in the form of information, counselling, education, cultural and social services and in-kind support, and facilitates the access of refugees and migrants to housing, healthcare and the labour market. The IOM and several NGOs support the social inclusion of third country nationals settled in several counties in the south-eastern part of Romania. On the day of the visit, persons fleeing Ukraine had been transferred to this centre by bus from Constanza in order to process their temporary protection registration.
22. The SRSG was informed that the centre hosts exclusively male asylum-seekers. It has a capacity of 100 places, divided into seven rooms. At the time of the SRSG's visit, 25 asylum seekers, mainly from Syria and Afghanistan, were hosted in Giurgiu.
23. The delegation also visited a refugee accommodation centre operated by the Child and Social Protection Authority (DGASPC) located in Bucharest. The centre is dedicated to hosting vulnerable persons, i.e. elderly persons, people with disabilities or serious diseases. At the time of the visit, it was also hosting Roma families.
24. The delegation finally visited an educational centre for refugee children from kindergarten level to Grade eight.

II. ACCESS TO PROTECTION PROCEDURES

II.1. FIGURES AND DATA

25. Romania is a neighbouring country to Ukraine and manages 2 070.6 km of the European Union external borders, including 649.4 km with Ukraine⁷. Romania had never been faced with such an influx of people crossing its borders. At the time of the visit, the number of persons fleeing Ukraine who had decided to stay in Romania exceeded 100 800 persons; 89% of them were women and children⁸. As of 5 January 2023, this figure had reached 107 241 refugees, including 47 851 children, and 4 397 Ukrainian asylum seekers⁹. The number of border crossings had reached over 3.2 million¹⁰.
26. Refugees enter Romania from Ukraine through Porubne, Dyakove, Solotvyne and a number of other checkpoints. The General Inspectorate for Immigration manages the reception and registration of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection through six regional centres and through four key border entry points. It is also possible to enter Romania via checkpoints with the Republic of Moldova: Kostesti-Stinka, Giurgiulesti-Galati and Lipcani-redeuc-Prut¹¹. 15 temporary transit centres for refugees have been established along the border with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Access to free trains and bus transfers from the borders to within Romania, as well as free public transport in numerous cities has been made available. Green corridors have also been set up through which Ukrainian refugees can travel on to other countries free of charge.

⁷ [Romania | OSCE POLIS](#).

⁸ [UNHCR Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukrainian situation](#).

⁹ https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ [Visit Ukraine – Romania: useful information for Ukrainian refugees](#).

27. On 8 March 2022, the Governments of the Republic of Moldova and Romania, with support from the IOM and the UNHCR, put in place a “fast-track transfer” for people fleeing Ukraine, including third country nationals, from the Republic of Moldova to Romania, a journey of some 230 km. The first convoy departed from Palanca Border Crossing Point on 10 March 2022, transporting 250 refugees to Husi in Romania. In 2022¹² more than 14 000 people benefited from this initiative.
28. All sources and interlocutors agree that the mobilisation and support provided by the Romanian authorities, civil society and individual citizens has been extraordinary. Within days of the onset of the aggression, a special governmental task force under the Chancellery of the Prime Minister was set up, a number of specific legal provisions were adopted, and a strategic co-ordinator of the humanitarian response was designated. Under the supervision of the Counsellor of State, Ms Madalina Turza, a comprehensive co-ordination mechanism involving the central government, local authorities, NGOs and international organisations was created. One week after the start of the aggression, phone numbers for assistance were made available in Ukrainian and a platform for resources and private donations, together with a fact-checking and anti-disinformation system, were put in place¹³.
29. Apart from the RomExpo (see Section I.3.14) there are six regional centres and 42 offices dedicated to the registration of refugees in Romania.
30. Romania’s comprehensive response to the high influx of refugees took place in two phases. The first one, the emergency response, was led by the Department for Emergency Situations, supervising the co-ordination of all services and resources provided to refugees. Along with 55 NGOs operating in Romania,¹⁴ all relevant stakeholders (see para.28) are co-ordinating and updating each other through weekly online meetings.
31. The second phase of the response is dedicated to medium- and long-term measures. A three-year specific action plan, the National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Ukrainian Refugees, a first of its kind in the EU, was adopted as part of the response for longer term inclusion, including safety measures¹⁵. Under the competent ministries, six thematic working groups have been established on labour, housing, education, health, children and youth, and vulnerable persons. More than 20 legislative measures have been adopted to support the protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. The co-ordination measures put in place constitute a promising and efficient practice in this context which could be used as inspiration for other member states hosting refugees.
32. On 22 September 2022, the Romanian Government hosted the first European forum for political dialogue and co-operation on these issues: the “Bucharest Forum –Towards a Common European Platform for Refugee Inclusion”. Chaired by the Counsellor of State and strategic co-ordinator of the humanitarian response, 23 national delegations were represented, as well as DG Reform, DG Home, the OECD and representatives from UN Agencies. Participants shared good practices, exchanged views about the challenges that lie ahead and agreed a second meeting should be held¹⁶.

¹² <https://www.iom.int/news/un-welcomes-and-supports-initiative-fast-track-transfer-people-fleeing-Ukraine>.

¹³ <https://dopomoha.ro/en>.

¹⁴ https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf.

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/national-plan-measures-protection-displaced-persons-Ukraine_en

¹⁶ <https://www.nineoclock.ro/2022/09/08/bucharest-forum-pm-ciuca-we-must-invest-in-significant-policies-to-integrate-ukrainian-refugees-president-iohannis-in-these-difficult-times-it-is-particularly-important-that-europe-remains-united/>.

II.2. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK AND ACCESS TO TEMPORARY PROTECTION

33. The main legislative act on asylum procedures, reception conditions, detention and content of international protection is Act No. 122 of May 2006 on Asylum in Romania (Asylum Act)¹⁷. It regulates asylum procedures, legal statuses of applicants and beneficiaries, reception conditions, detention and the content of international protection¹⁸.
34. The Romanian Government adopted an emergency ordinance on 27 February 2022¹⁹ on the humanitarian aid measures to be taken in Romania to support the people fleeing the Russian aggression of Ukraine. Following the decision of the Council of the European Union²⁰ to activate the EU Temporary Protection Directive²¹ on 4 March 2022, a second ordinance was adopted on 7 March 2022²².
35. In Romania, the following categories enjoy temporary protection: Ukrainian citizens, regardless of when they arrived in Romania; non-Ukrainian third country nationals or stateless persons who were beneficiaries of international protection or an equivalent form of protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 regardless of when they arrived in Romania; as well as non- Ukrainian third country nationals or stateless persons who left Ukraine on or after 24 February 2022 and who can prove that they were legally residing in Ukraine before 24 February 2022 on the basis of a valid permanent residence permit issued in accordance with Ukrainian law, and who are unable to return in safe and durable conditions to their country or region of origin.
For the first two categories, the following family members that left Ukraine after the 24th of February 2022 can register as temporary protection beneficiaries: spouse of beneficiary; unmarried minor children of the beneficiary or of the spouse of the beneficiary, regardless they were born in or out wedlock or adopted; other close relatives who lived together as part of the family unit at the time of the circumstances surrounding the mass influx of displaced persons, and who were wholly or mainly dependent on the beneficiary; other close relatives who lived together as part of the family unit at the time of the circumstances surrounding the mass influx of displaced persons, and whom the beneficiary was wholly or mainly dependent on – direct kinship until second grade and collateral kinship until third grade – if they cannot return to their country of origin in safe and durable conditions. For the third main category, if they cannot return to their country of origin in safe and durable conditions, the following family members that left Ukraine after the 24th of February can be registered: spouse of beneficiary; unmarried minor children of the beneficiary or of the spouse of the beneficiary, regardless they were born in or out wedlock or adopted; other close relatives who lived together as part of the family unit at the time of the circumstances surrounding the mass influx of displaced persons, and whom the beneficiary was wholly or mainly dependent on direct kinship until second grade and collateral kinship until third grade.
36. The second emergency ordinance introduced additional measures: the right to work in Romania for Ukrainian citizens with no work visa required; the right for all people from Ukraine to receive free primary medical assistance and to be included in national health programmes; free public transportation; provisions regarding the protection of children, disabled and elderly persons and their access to social services, as well as regarding access for children to mainstream education systems. The government also introduced

¹⁷ Country profile – Romania, European Database of Asylum Law, [Overview of the legal framework – Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#).

¹⁸ [Overview of the legal framework – Asylum Information Database | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(asylumineurope.org\)](#).

¹⁹ [ORD DE URGENTA 15 27/02/2022 – Portal Legislativ \(just.ro\)](#)(Romanian only).

²⁰ [Publications Office \(europa.eu\)](#).

²¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0055&from=EN>.

²² [Governmental Emergency Ordinance no. 20/22 from 7 March 2022](#).

tax deductions for individual citizens and companies that make donations to sustain the above measures²³.

37. In 2022, 102 729 persons fleeing from Ukraine registered for temporary protection in Romania²⁴. The duration of the temporary protection is one year, with the possibility of two successive automatic extensions for six months.
38. While praising the efforts and generosity of the Romanian authorities in providing protection for those fleeing Ukraine, regardless of their citizenship status, the SRSG was made aware by NGOs of some challenges. People hosted in private accommodation have difficulties in providing formal certificates of residence as they do not have rental contracts. Their addresses do not appear on their registration documents as there is no legal obligation in this respect. As a result, they are unable to access certain social benefits e.g. child allowances.

²³ For the amendments and their entry into force, see also [FRA's first UA Bulletin](#), Annex (p. 26).

²⁴ [UNHCR Annual report Overview 2022](#).

III. RECEPTION FACILITIES AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

III.1. ACCESS TO ACCOMMODATION

39. Romanian authorities and citizens have shown outstanding generosity in welcoming refugees from Ukraine and providing access to basic rights and services. A governmental working group for housing-related issues under the Ministry of Development, involving UN agencies and civil society representatives was rapidly established.
40. With regards to the emergency phase, between February and December 2022, 18 956 refugees from Ukraine were accommodated in transit centres²⁵. More than 55 000 accommodation places were made available in 1 537 operational reception centres.
41. Assistance is provided by the various “Regional Centres for Accommodation and Procedures for Asylum Seekers” in the counties and information can also be found on dedicated websites, such as the governmental platform “The Roof”, which is available in four languages, including Ukrainian²⁶.
42. The Romanian authorities have accommodated refugees in unused housing units owned by local and central public authorities. More units have been identified and the government is renovating 2 200 unoccupied apartments. As of 5 January 2023, 7 173 accommodation places were occupied²⁷, representing 14% of the overall accommodation capacity.
43. The CoE Development Bank (CEB) approved in 2022 €942 000 in grants to the IOM Romania to support the current Ukraine migration response.
44. The European Commission granted €450 million under the Cohesion Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) for assistance to refugees from Ukraine, to provide accommodation, food, healthcare, education or jobs²⁸. The UN launched a Regional Refugee Response Plan which also included Romania²⁹.
45. With respect to refugees’ accommodation, a state programme of reimbursement of expenses for housing and food was approved on 27 February 2022³⁰. The programme, called “50/20”, allows private hosts to receive a payment of 50 RON (Romanian Lei) per day per hosted person for housing and 20 RON per day per hosted person for food. As of 5 January 2023, the amount spent by the government under the 50/20 programme was 373 941 992 RON (more than €76 million) for housing, and 152 063 544 RON (almost €31 million) for food. The counties with the highest numbers of beneficiaries are Constanta, Bucharest-Ifov, Suceava and Brasov. Overall, €352 846 is invested every day on the 50/20 programme.
46. In partnership with AirBnB, 1 545 persons also found accommodation through the platform with the authorities’ help.

²⁵ https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf.

²⁶ [Un Acoperis \(unacoperis.ro\)](https://unacoperis.ro).

²⁷ https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf.

²⁸ [EC disburses EUR 450 mln to Romania for handling Ukrainian refugees | Romania Insider \(romania-insider.com\)](https://romania-insider.com).

²⁹ <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1103>.

³⁰ [Emergency Ordinance n.15 of Feb 27](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/romania-emergency-ordinance-provision) (Romanian only), see <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/romania-emergency-ordinance-provision>.

47. According to a UNHCR survey from December 2022, 36% of respondents reported that they did not receive the food component of the programme 50/20, neither as cash nor in kind.³¹ NGOs also underlined that this system creates a risk of extortion of the refugees, as it depends exclusively on the good will of the host who is the first recipient of public financial aid.
48. While praising the efforts made, the SRSG draws attention to the risks linked to the 50/20 programme and notes that reflections on reforming the reimbursement system are underway at governmental level.

III.2. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

49. Access to healthcare is guaranteed by the emergency ordinance no. 20/2022 on humanitarian assistance for those fleeing Ukraine³², which grants them the right to receive, free of charge, primary medical care and treatment, emergency medical care and free treatment in case of acute or chronic life-threatening illnesses.
50. The healthcare system is already under pressure, notably because of the consequences of the covid-19 crisis and struggles to cope with the large influx of people. A WHO study³³ highlighted that after six months or more in Romania, refugees reported to be better informed about how to benefit from health services thanks to the sharing of experiences among fellow refugees and the efforts made by health authorities.
51. According to the same WHO study, as well as NGOs, access to prescription medications, dentists, and vaccinations for both children and adults, as well as accessing quality mental health services remain challenges which require particular attention.
52. New mothers need particular support. Due to the language barrier refugee women often do not seek the healthcare and support they need during and after pregnancy. According to several NGOs some women prefer, if and when possible, to return to Ukraine for this care.
53. The language barrier was also mentioned by both authorities and NGOs as one of the main obstacles in accessing healthcare. Even though they are bound by law to assist refugees, some general practitioners do not want to take the responsibility of assisting a patient whose language they do not speak fluently or understand.
54. Other difficulties related to the overlapping of temporary registration numbers and social security numbers, and to delays in reimbursements of specialist consultations were also highlighted; the delegation was informed that these are being addressed by the competent ministries.
55. Some NGOs highlighted the obstacles encountered by women related to contraception, including emergency contraception, which is particularly expensive. NGOs play a crucial role in assisting them either through the public medical service or by getting them appropriate support via private clinics.
56. The CoE addresses the challenges of providing care to migrants and refugees with its "Guide to health literacy – Contributing to trust building and equitable access to healthcare"³⁴. This practical tool suggests that translators, intercultural mediators and

³¹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/97974>

³² [Romania: Emergency Ordinance no. 20/2022 on humanitarian assistance for those fleeing Ukraine.](#)

³³ [https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/17-01-2023-understanding-the-obstacles-faced-by-ukrainian-refugees-in-Romania.](https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/17-01-2023-understanding-the-obstacles-faced-by-ukrainian-refugees-in-Romania)

³⁴ [https://www.coe.int/en/web/bioethics/guide-to-health-literacy.](https://www.coe.int/en/web/bioethics/guide-to-health-literacy)

knowledge-brokers might be considered in order to “translate” between health system actors and patients. It also underlines good practices when employing refugees in the local health system for refugees. This helps with cultural sensitivities and also contributes to building resilience.

III.3. NEED FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

57. People fleeing Ukraine have been exposed to extreme violence and have experienced intolerable levels of fear and anxiety. Furthermore, women and children, elderly and disabled people forced to leave their homes and families need to adapt to a new country and learn a new language. The feeling of loneliness in handling all these emotions can increase the suffering and cause long-lasting mental health issues. The most frequent symptoms seen by psychologists are anxiety attacks, depression, aggressivity and suicidal thoughts³⁵.
58. Traumatic events induced by war, such as exposure to violence, losing a loved one, rape, separation of families, the sense of loss of belonging increase the risk of mental health conditions, such as depression, insomnia and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to the WHO, before the onset of the aggression, 30% of Ukrainians suffered from mental health conditions³⁶. The impacts of war can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions. Some estimations refer to 33% of Ukrainian refugees developing anxiety, depression or PTSD as consequences of the conflict³⁷.
59. The trauma arising from war harshly impacts children. Scientific studies show a prevalence of PTSD in young refugees, with an average of 36% of the world refugee child population reported as suffering from this³⁸. Daily lives and routines have been shattered, with added pressure to adapt to new languages and environments. A prompt return to school can help to alleviate psychological stress, by giving children a sense of stability and normality and an outlook for the future. Schools need to be equipped to identify and address mental health issues, if and when they arise.
60. The SRSG observed that one of the most critical issues concerning reception and assistance to refugees coming from Ukraine to Romania is indeed the provision of psychological support.
61. While all recognised the proactiveness of authorities and excellent and broad co-operation put in place with international organisations and NGOs, obstacles remain including scarcity of resources of qualified staff, the language barrier, as well as social stigma and lack of awareness in general about the importance of mental health care.
62. Moreover, NGO representatives assisting victims also mentioned consequences on their own staff, for instance translators, and how some of them suffer from secondary or vicarious trauma because of what they are hearing. The need for more training and more resources on the ground was highlighted.
63. The CoE can offer assistance and training to reinforce capacities and ensure a prompt detection of psychological trauma and contribute to the efforts made by health and social services staff working on psycho-social support and trauma rehabilitation. The SRSG is ready to explore co-operation opportunities with relevant stakeholders on appropriate and tailor-made capacity-building activities based on needs identified.

³⁵ <https://www.euronews.com/2022/10/10/mental-health-day-how-war-in-ukraine-is-causing-psychological-trauma-for-millions>.

³⁶ <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/mental-health/special-initiative/who-special-initiative-country-report-Ukraine>.

³⁷ [Six months on in Ukraine: Brutal mental health toll must not be overlooked, warns CARE I](#).

³⁸ [Mental Health of Refugee Children and Youth: Epidemiology, Interventions and Future Directions–PMC \(nih.gov\)](#).

III.4. ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

64. The emergency ordinance no. 20/2022 on humanitarian assistance for those fleeing Ukraine introduced the right for Ukrainian citizens to enter, stay and work in Romania for 90 days without a work visa. This includes the right to be hired by a person or a company, or to perform freelance activities, in compliance with the regulations of the profession, to get involved in educational activities, vocational training and practical work training in accordance with the law. After 90 days in Romania, Ukrainian citizens have the possibility of applying for a work permit (for temporary residence and work)³⁹. The work permit is valid for beneficiaries for the duration of the temporary protection. It gives free access to the labour market, the jobseeker registry and educational services. Beneficiaries of temporary protection in Romania can now be hired on the basis of a residence permit only⁴⁰.
65. Ukrainian citizens who have acquired international protection in Romania also have access to the unemployment insurance system and employment incentive measures under the conditions established by law for Romanian citizens. In order to benefit from these measures, it is necessary to register with the country employment agencies or the Bucharest municipality. There are free services offered by the National Agency for Employment (ANOFM), including counselling, vocational training, job-matching and information on the EU and European Economic Area member states' labour market⁴¹.
66. The employment agencies from the counties that have common borders with Ukraine regularly send representatives to the border crossing points and refugee centres to inform and advise. The ANOFM issued and distributed a leaflet in Romanian, Ukrainian and English – that can be also found online – containing a QR code with the contact details of all local agencies and job vacancies.
67. At the time of the visit, there were 5 082 labour contracts related to Ukrainian citizens. There are approximately 44 000 vacancies in Romania, 1 845 employers are using the site Jobs4Ukraine and about 2 480 jobs have been posted on the website. The site has a range of jobs that do not require a knowledge of Romanian or English. As of 13 December 2022, 325 companies had advertised jobs with a “priority lane” for Ukrainians. This will help Ukrainians to have better access to the job market.
68. For non-liberal professions, Ukrainian citizens do not need to provide the relevant documents such as diplomas or certificates if they had to flee without them. This exemption is also valid for the non-Ukrainians who were employed in Ukraine before the aggression. They can provide a statement of honour on their training or work experience and certify not to have a criminal record incompatible with the activity. A template is available in several languages. For liberal professions, official certificates or diplomas are required.
69. During her meetings with the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Education, the SRSG used the opportunity to promote the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR)⁴² as one of the tools in complementing national recognition and admission schemes, where appropriate and useful. Romania has been part of the programme since 2017, although an application has yet to be received.

³⁹ [Romania: Emergency Ordinance no. 20/2022 on humanitarian assistance for those fleeing Ukraine.](#)

⁴⁰ [Temporary Protection - Dopomoha.](#)

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/european-qualifications-passport-for-refugees-egpr>.

70. Programmes regarding the linguistic integration of adult refugees were put in place through regional education centres and financial support was given to NGOs providing language lessons and courses. Romanian authorities informed the SRSG that more than 1 000 types of educational courses for people coming from Ukraine have been introduced; however, so far the interest in these courses and trainings remains limited. The scarcity of trained professionals available to teach Romanian as a foreign language was also underlined.
71. The SRSG encourages the training of competent professionals and draws attention to the CoE's tools and pedagogical support to teach a foreign language to adult migrants and refugees, including resources dedicated to language support for refugees from Ukraine⁴³. The SRSG also calls for a wider dissemination and training regarding the EQPR in order to facilitate access to the labour market and further education for all refugees, in particular for those fleeing Ukraine.

⁴³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/new-ecml-website-offering-dedicated-support-for-the-linguistic-integration>.

IV. PERSONS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

IV.1. CHILDREN

IV.1.1. Unaccompanied and separated children

72. Children fleeing the war and seeking protection in a foreign country are particularly vulnerable and need special support and guidance. UNICEF estimates that 33% of Ukrainian refugees in Romania are children⁴⁴.
73. According to Article 5(1) of the Asylum Act, an applicant with special reception needs is a vulnerable person who needs special guarantees to enjoy his/her rights and fulfil his/her obligations under the law. Article 5(2) lists minors and unaccompanied minors as vulnerable persons⁴⁵. The General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) for each county are the institutions authorised to take care of unaccompanied minors⁴⁶. For unaccompanied minors who are asylum seekers, after registration the procedure is suspended until the appointment of a legal representative by the DGASPC, within its own personnel or from an authorised private body, who will support the child and accompany her/him through the whole asylum procedure⁴⁷. During the suspension of the procedure, the child shall benefit from all the rights recognised for asylum seekers.
74. Seven “Blue Dots” have been established with the support of UNICEF and the UNHCR, as well as local authorities and partners. “Blue Dots” are safe spaces along border crossings in Ukraine’s neighbouring countries that provide children and families with critical information and services. They also provide help in identifying and registering children travelling on their own and connect them to protection services.
75. In March 2022, the Romanian Government set up an Unaccompanied Children’s Task Force, with representatives in every county and sector of the capital. A joint order by the Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration was taken to define the steps to be taken for the registration, transit, residence and protection of minors. Unaccompanied children arriving in Romania are picked up by a mobile team from the DGASPC, who decides on the best interests of the child (placement with a social worker or foster care family, preferably Ukrainian or Russian speakers, or emergency placement)⁴⁸. The unaccompanied minor is provided with a temporary identity document and is transported to the competent structure. A personal file is assembled for each applicant⁴⁹.
76. The National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoption, together with UNICEF, has launched a database to help in the identification of the most vulnerable. This digital tool called “Primero” is an open-source software platform that helps social services, humanitarian and development workers manage protection-related data, and facilitate case management, incident monitoring and family tracing and reunification⁵⁰. At the time of the visit, authorities informed the SRSG that about 4 900 non-accompanied and separated children were registered by the DGASPC, out of a total of 15 480 children registered. They were mainly hosted in family-based or small residential care homes, or in reception centres. A new platform called “KidsUkraine” was created showing free places

⁴⁴ [UNICEF support in Romania for refugee children, women and families coming from Ukraine | UNICEF Romania.](#)

⁴⁵ <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/romania/reception-conditions/special-reception-needs-vulnerable-groups/>.

⁴⁶ <https://dopomoha.ro/en/information>.

⁴⁷ <https://iqi.mai.gov.ro/en/vulnerable-categories/>.

⁴⁸ <https://eurochild.org/uploads/2022/05/Romania-RO-country-profile-for-Alt-Care-and-UASC-for-Ukrainian-children.pdf>.

⁴⁹ <https://iqi.mai.gov.ro/en/vulnerable-categories/>.

⁵⁰ <https://www.primero.org/>.

in the protection system to place children. The counties where larger groups of children are accommodated are Prahova, Iasi, Brasov and Bucharest⁵¹ while 199 children are currently in the special protection system⁵².

77. A co-ordination mechanism between Ukrainian and Romanian authorities to identify missing children reported by Ukrainian authorities on Romanian territory has also been established⁵³. Romanian authorities underlined the constant co-operation existing with the Ukrainian Embassy in Bucharest which facilitates the exchange of information. They also praised the commitment of NGOs which they co-ordinate with.
78. A common challenge faced by hosting countries concerns children who came from institutions in Ukraine. In recent years, the majority of European countries, including Romania, have put great efforts into the deinstitutionalisation of their childcare systems, favouring family-based care or small units and other forms of alternative care in the best interests of the child. Therefore, hosting countries can encounter logistical problems in keeping children transferred together with their peers, especially children with disabilities, and in securing suitable accommodation for large groups of children. Discrepancies between national guardianship systems can also create challenges.
79. In Romania, the number of available guardians seems to be insufficient compared to the needs, even if the situation differs greatly from one county to another. Authorities reacted with great proactivity to handle the situation. They are however faced with a scarcity of guardians with appropriate language skills and the necessary training. The good practices developed in some counties could be replicated or knowledge shared and made available to other regions.
80. The CoE has always advocated for the deinstitutionalisation of children, which is beneficial to children, families and communities. The SRSG draws attention to the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on the rights of children living in residential institutions⁵⁴, on desinstitutionalisation and community living of children with disabilities⁵⁵ and to the "Guide on family-based care for unaccompanied and separated children" issued by the Steering Committee for Human Rights in February 2022⁵⁶. She also recalls the Recommendation to member States on effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration⁵⁷, the Checklist "States main obligations under the Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse"⁵⁸ and the Handbook on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in crisis and emergency situations⁵⁹. The HELP online course on Refugee and Migrant Children⁶⁰ and the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on human rights principles and guidelines on age assessment in the context of migration⁶¹ are currently being translated into Romanian.
81. The SRSG is ready to support the authorities in identifying co-operation opportunities with relevant stakeholders on tailor-made activities to address the afore-mentioned challenges.

⁵¹ [Document – Ukraine Situation: Recalibration - Regional Refugee Response Plan - March-December 2022 \(unhcr.org\).](#)

⁵² https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ CM/Rec(2005)5 <https://rm.coe.int/16805daac2>.

⁵⁵ CM/Rec(2010)2 [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=CM/Rec\(2010\)2&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864&direct=true](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?p=&Ref=CM/Rec(2010)2&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=DBDCF2&BackColorIntranet=FDC864&BackColorLogged=FDC864&direct=true).

⁵⁶ [Guidance on family-based care for unaccompanied children.](#)

⁵⁷ [Recommendation on effective guardianship for unaccompanied and separated children in the context of migration](#) (2019).

⁵⁸ [Checklist – States' main obligations under the Lanzarote Convention on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.](#)

⁵⁹ [Handbook on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse in crisis and emergency situations.](#) Also available in [Romanian](#).

⁶⁰ [COEHELP e-Desks on asylum/migration for lawyers assisting people fleeing the war in Ukraine.](#)

⁶¹ CM/Rec(2022)22 https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=0900001680a96350#showSearchBox=0.

IV.1.2. Access to education

82. Children from Ukraine benefit from the right to education in Romanian schools under the same conditions as Romanian children. This includes the right to free Romanian language courses; accommodation in boarding schools; free resources like food allocation provided by social programmes, supplies, clothing, footwear, textbooks; health examinations and free vaccinations and free transport for students with special education needs and those benefitting from a special protection measure⁶².
83. A national plan was put in place to integrate children from Ukraine, into both public and private schools. According to the information provided by the Ministry of Education, at the time of the visit 3 087 Ukrainian children were enrolled in the Romanian school system, 1 900 in the kindergarten, 1 985 in primary and secondary schools and 882 in high schools. There is the possibility for those coming from Ukraine to enter high school and university without exams, and for researchers to continue their research at universities. Specific measures were adopted to increase the number of tax-free places in Romanian universities for newly arrived Ukrainian nationals wanting to continue their studies.
84. National authorities informed the SRSG's that, at the time of the visit, out of around 10 000 children who crossed the borders, less than one third were enrolled in schools. Ukrainian children may pursue their education online as provided by the Ukrainian authorities. Romanian authorities created, in co-operation with NGOs, 22 educational hubs to offer assistance and help students to connect to e-learning platforms. In Bucharest, about 400 students are enrolled in hubs. Online schooling seems to be the preferred education system by parents, which can partly be motivated by the lack of recognition of the Romanian educational curriculum back in Ukraine.
85. The SRSG supports the authorities' intention to promote a mixed educational system. Given the uncertainty of the situation, pragmatic solutions, compliant with the best interests of the child, should be sought. Online schooling under the Ukrainian curriculum could complement Ukrainian children's official education in Romanian physical classes, which should be recognised once back in Ukraine.
86. The SRSG reminds all stakeholders involved in the educational system that they can avail themselves of relevant CoE expertise in this area, in particular the recently adopted Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture as well as tools specifically designed to assist education practitioners in supporting the linguistic integration of children⁶³. The CoE Education Department has developed a specific website offering resources dedicated to language support for refugees from Ukraine, including for children⁶⁴. The CoE can support the authorities in organising training for educators in pilot schools and communities.

⁶² [Temporary Protection – Dopomoha.](#)

⁶³ [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2022\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture \(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 2 February 2022\) Tools and guidelines adapted for children.](#)

⁶⁴ [ECML website on dedicated support for the \(linguistic\) integration of refugees from Ukraine – \(coe.int\).](#)

IV.2. NON-UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

87. As mentioned, Romania has implemented a temporary protection mechanism for people fleeing from Ukraine through the emergency ordinance no. 20/2022⁶⁵. Non-Ukrainian nationals from a third country or stateless persons who received, before 24 February 2022, a type of international protection or similar national protection or have legal residency in Ukraine and who cannot return to their country of origin, can benefit from temporary protection⁶⁶. Undocumented persons fleeing from Ukraine may also apply for asylum in Romania.
88. An asylum application may be filed by any foreigner who is in Romania or at a border crossing point. If the foreigner is a minor, the asylum application can be submitted by their legal representative from the Directorate of Child Protection. Minors who have attained the age of 14 years old can apply for asylum in their own name. The General Inspectorate for Immigration, the Border Police units with centres for custody and provisional detention and the structures of the National Administration of Penitentiaries functioning within the Ministry of Justice have the competency to receive an application for asylum⁶⁷. Six regional centres for procedures and accommodation for asylum seekers (RCPAAS) under the Asylum and Integration Directorate have the territorial competence to receive, register and process the asylum applications, including Giurgiu's regional centre which was visited by the delegation (See Section I.3.).
89. The SRSG praised the efforts and generosity of the Romanian authorities in providing protection to persons fleeing Ukraine. Most measures apply to all those fleeing the conflict in Ukraine regardless of their status – asylum seekers, persons with temporary protection or persons in transit – and irrespective of their nationality – Ukrainian citizens or stateless persons with a legal right to stay in Ukraine. However, the right to enter, stay and work for 90 days with no work visa required applies only to Ukrainian nationals, as well as the possibility for students to be enrolled in university free of charge.

IV.3. ROMA REFUGEES

90. From the information gathered, many Roma refugees coming from Ukraine are undocumented. They usually claim asylum and are granted subsidiary protection which allows them to access several social benefits (See section II.2.36). Romanian legislation does not make distinctions by ethnic origin.
91. According to NGOs, they have however faced difficulties accessing services such as accommodation. As Roma refugees are travelling in large numbers (big families and multiple generations), it might be difficult to accommodate them in a single place.
92. Other challenges are linked to illiteracy. Roma refugees might face challenges with administrative documents. Moreover, a complete overview of their situation is not available due to the lack of data.
93. The SRSG encourages the authorities to consider the specific needs of Roma refugees fleeing Ukraine and welcomes the €542 000 grant that the CoE CEB approved in September 2022 for the benefit of the international NGO Roma Education Fund, approved to establish a "one-stop-shop centre" in Bucharest where Roma coming from Ukraine can receive care and protection.

⁶⁵ [ORD DE URGENTA 20 07/03/2022 – Portal Legislativ \(just.ro\)](#).

⁶⁶ [Temporary Protection – Dopomoha](#).

⁶⁷ <https://romania.iom.int/news/information-third-country-nationals-tcns-entering-Romania-Ukraine>

IV.4. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

94. According to NGOs, 10% of people fleeing Ukraine are refugees with disabilities⁶⁸ and the NGOs claim to have identified over 900 refugees from Ukraine having disabilities or serious medical problems.
95. In the second emergency ordinance⁶⁹ (See Section II.2.) adopted by the Romanian Government to support refugees from Ukraine, specific measures have been taken for people with disabilities, who can benefit from social services provided in all types of residential centres for adults with disabilities, sheltered housing, centres for independent living and rehabilitation centres.
96. On 11 March 2022, the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities approved the “Procedure for providing social services for adults with disabilities, accompanied or unaccompanied, who entered Romania from the area of armed conflict in Ukraine and who do not require a form of protection according to law on asylum”⁷⁰. While the National Authority co-ordinates the activities of protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection provides social services for adults with disabilities.
97. People with disabilities can contact the emergency services via Short Message Service (SMS) via 113. According to the information received, about 500 children with disabilities from Ukraine are hosted in Romania. As of 5 January 2023, 287 individuals with specific needs had been provided with protection assistance⁷¹.
98. The SRSG underlines the importance of addressing the situation of refugees with disabilities as one of the most vulnerable categories.

⁶⁸ <https://www.easpd.eu/press-releases-detail/act-now-to-support-ukrainians-with-disabilities-and-their-families/>.

⁶⁹ [Governmental Emergency Ordinance no. 20/22 from 7 March 2022.](#)

⁷⁰ Information provided by the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities during the meeting.

⁷¹ https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf.

V. PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

V.1. SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF WAR CRIMES

99. Most of the refugees fleeing Ukraine are children and women and so are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. At the time of the visit no official complaints on conflict-related sexual violence had been filed to authorities though some NGOs had reported allegations of sexual violence and rape perpetrated on civilians in Ukraine, including on girls and boys.
100. Conflict-related sexual crimes are known to be under-reported by survivors due to the difficulty of speaking out, to prove the violence which is not always visible, and because of the lack of appropriate places and assistance to file a report⁷². Accessing services or support can be difficult for victims of conflict-related sexual violence, especially refugees, because of stigma or difficulties navigating the system, including linguistic ones.
101. The SRSG observed a general need for better access to sexual and reproductive healthcare for refugee women, including during and after pregnancy and in particular support for victims of sexual violence. NGOs reported difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive healthcare. Victims should also receive specific care and immediate and longer-term psychological support provided by specialists in trauma rehabilitation (see III.3).
102. Ensuring good conditions for the disclosure of testimonies by victims of conflict-related sexual violence is crucial if prosecution of perpetrators is to happen. In accordance with the principle of universal jurisdiction, Ukrainian victims of sexual war crimes perpetrated in Ukraine may file a case with the Prosecutor's Office in Romania.
103. The SRSG emphasises the importance of providing for adapted short- and long-term support to victims of war crimes, including mental, sexual and reproductive healthcare for women. The SRSG also underlines the need to ensure that the victims are appropriately assisted to be able to disclose what they have been exposed to.

V.2. PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

104. Refugees from Ukraine, particularly women and girls, face heightened risks of gender-based violence (hereinafter "GBV") and exploitation⁷³. There is an increased risk of violence against women both prior to and during travel or transit to destination countries, and subsequently during repatriation or reintegration. The SRSG observed that authorities and partners are vigilant of the dangers. At RomExpo and in the reception centres visited, information material about threats of abuse, exploitation and human trafficking was displayed, phone numbers of helplines are provided in Ukrainian and other languages, and are easily accessible to refugees.
105. In 2022, more than 30 meetings were organised by authorities at regional level to raise awareness on gender-based violence. 2500 refugees from Ukraine in the northern part of Romania and in Bucharest now have access to psychosocial support services and legal advice in situations of sexual and gender violence thanks to a partnership between the UNHCR, the Sensiblu Foundation and relevant authorities. Services are offered in

⁷² See [PACE Report "Conflict-related sexual violence"](#).

⁷³ <https://edoc.coe.int/fr/violence-l-gard-des-femmes/7862-protecting-migrant-women-refugee-women-and-women-asylum-seekers-from-gender-based-violence-istanbul-convention.html>.

Suceava and Bucharest by professionals in the field – social workers, psychotherapists and lawyers, with the support of Ukrainian, Russian and English interpreters.

106. At RomExpo, 170 refugees from Ukraine have participated in awareness-raising sessions on gender-based violence, and support groups have been organised in assistance and accommodation centres. In addition, 52 professionals from social services, public order police and border police from Bucharest, Suceava and Baia Mare participated in trainings on psychosocial intervention in cases of gender-based violence among refugees and asylum seekers.
107. As the majority of women and children are hosted in private accommodation in the framework of the 50/20 programme (See section III.1.), NGOs expressed concerns about the limited screening of private hosts. To this end, increased monitoring, vetting and screening of private hosts should assess if the safety of women and children is being ensured in the private accommodation offered.
108. Several helplines are available in Romania. The average time to answer a call to the emergency number 112 is four seconds. A specific helpline was set up by the Romanian Border Police in the Ukrainian language. A helpline for domestic violence and sexual abuse is also available from the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Authorities informed the SRSG that since the toll-free number was advertised on billboards in the streets and on buses, the number of calls increased three-fold. There is also a free national anti-human trafficking hotline and counselling for migrants who can receive calls from Ukraine (No. 527), and a national phone number for child abuse cases (No119). NGOs however mentioned that this service is available only in Romanian and that some of the helplines are available only from Monday to Friday.
109. Romanian authorities underlined their commitment to the implementation of the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (hereafter “Istanbul Convention”)⁷⁴. They estimate that since 2021 services provided concerning GBV in the country have tripled. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) noted in its 2022 Baseline Report on Romania that there was a need for improvement when it comes to the swift identification of victims of violence among asylum seeking women, with a view to ensuring adequate accommodation, access to support services and protection⁷⁵.
110. Early identification of vulnerable asylum seekers, including women who are victims of GBV, seemed to be hindered by staff turnover and the constant need for training of staff within the asylum authorities. In addition, there is a limited focus on referral and case management and a limited understanding of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as about the importance of prevention, identification of victims and provision of adequate support. According to GREVIO, issues linked to GBV were not systematically or adequately addressed. The Group of Experts also recommended to

⁷⁴ [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.](#)

⁷⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/final-report-on-romania/1680a6e439>.

ensure that gender-sensitive reception procedures and support services for asylum seekers and refugee women who experienced or may be at risk of GBV, including sexual violence, are put in place⁷⁶.

111. The SRSG encourages the Romanian authorities to provide adequate support services throughout the country, for victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and all helplines to be available 24/7.

V.3. TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

112. Romania is predominantly a country of origin for victims of trafficking in human beings (hereinafter “THB”)⁷⁷. Counsellor Turza’s report on Romania’s response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis mentions that the Ministry of Internal Affairs conducts “safety checks” to prevent cases of THB including traffic checkpoints, checking car registrations and visits to places of accommodation. It also states that on 9 March 2022 a dedicated helpline was put in place and a specific referral mechanism for potential victims was implemented at the border entry points by the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons and civil society⁷⁸.
113. At the time of the visit, authorities and UN agencies informed the SRSG that no reports of trafficking involving persons who fled Ukraine had been received, but that they were aware there could be unreported cases. For many interlocutors met on the ground, it seems unrealistic to consider that there have been no cases involving refugees from Ukraine, as the phenomena existed before the conflict.
114. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2022 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons warned of the increased risk of trafficking for Ukrainians. Prior to the aggression, Ukraine was already a significant country of origin for human trafficking. Between 2017 and 2021 victims trafficked outside Ukraine were detected in 40 countries in Europe. According to UNODC the current conflict in Ukraine could generate an unprecedented number of victims if mitigation measures are not put in place⁷⁹. As highlighted by UN Women Europe, the fact that the majority of persons fleeing Ukraine are women alone or with children increases the risks for THB⁸⁰. Among Ukraine’s neighbouring countries, Romania is the one welcoming the highest percentage of women: 55%⁸¹. The issue of detection and identification of possible victims appears therefore to be crucial in this context.
115. This risk is further amplified by the fact that traffickers are increasingly recruiting via online platforms, as highlighted by a report by the CoE Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) in 2022⁸². Europol identified suspicious online platforms and activities through a co-ordinated online joint action with 14 EU member states including Romania, which targeted criminal networks grooming Ukrainian refugees for sexual and labour exploitation via websites and social media platforms. On that occasion, law enforcement officers found a significant number of suspicious job offers targeting Ukrainian women⁸³.

⁷⁶ See Paragraph 446, <https://rm.coe.int/final-report-on-romania/1680a6e439>.

⁷⁷ See Para 11 [GRETA Evaluation Report on Romania, Third evaluation round](https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf).

⁷⁸ https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf.

⁷⁹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2022/GLOTIP_2022_web.pdf.

⁸⁰ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/trafficking-and-sexual-exploitation-of-ukrainian-refugees-on-the-rise/>.

⁸¹ [UNHCR Regional Refugee Response Plan for the Ukrainian situation](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees-response/ukraine/situation).

⁸² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/new-report-on-online-and-technology-facilitated-trafficking-in-human-beings>.

⁸³ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/human-traffickers-luring-ukrainian-refugees-web-targeted-in-eu-wide-hackathon>.

116. GRETA, in its 2021 report on Romania, noted with concern the scale of child trafficking in Romania and the need for Romanian authorities to strengthen their efforts to identify child victims, including when recruitment and/or exploitation take place online, and to provide them with specialised assistance. GRETA has recommended that the Romanian authorities intensify their efforts to prevent trafficking in children by sensitising and training child protection professionals across the country, raising awareness through education, and paying special attention to Roma communities and migrant children. GRETA also expressed concerns on the limited capacity of state-run shelters, as well as the lack of public funding for NGOs. Furthermore, GRETA has made several recommendations to improve victims' access to justice and effective remedies, and the criminal justice response to THB⁸⁴.
117. According to NGOs, local police is more focused on forced prostitution than other possible forms of trafficking and is not always aware of the complexity of the issue.
118. UN agencies in Bucharest mentioned that Romania is becoming a country of destination of migration for labour purposes. The private sector puts pressure because there is a growing need for a workforce (See Section III.4). As highlighted by the CoE, THB with the purpose of labour exploitation is on the rise in the member states and represents one of the main current challenges in Europe⁸⁵.
119. The SRSG supports Romanian authorities in their efforts to remain vigilant on all possible forms of THB, and to address the issue of THB for the purpose of labour exploitation with preventing measures and reinforcement of capacities. She draws attention to the Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)21 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation, adopted on 27 September 2022⁸⁶ and invites authorities to make use of the existing CoE standards in this regard, in particular those contained within the CoE Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, and the relevant guidance issued by its monitoring body, GRETA⁸⁷. She also encourages the authorities to continue benefiting from the HELP Course on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as the HELP e-Desks on asylum and migration providing relevant information and training for legal professionals and migration officials on the effective handling of cases involving refugees and displaced persons, with a specific focus on refugees from Ukraine, both of which are available in Romanian⁸⁸.

⁸⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/evaluation-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-council-of-europe-conve/1680a2b0f8>.

⁸⁵ See "Ready for future challenges – Reinforcing the Council of Europe - Report by the Secretary General".

⁸⁶ [CM/Rec\(2022\)21](#).

⁸⁷ [Addressing the risks of trafficking in human beings related to the war in Ukraine and the ensuing humanitarian crisis](#).

⁸⁸ [CoEHELP e-Desks on asylum/migration for lawyers assisting people fleeing the war in Ukraine](#).

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Romanian authorities, assisted by civil society and international organisations, responded to the unprecedented influx of persons fleeing Ukraine both swiftly and efficiently. Most people who fit the eligibility criteria for support receive the benefits and services associated with temporary protection status. The comprehensive co-ordination system put in place is a good practice which can be considered a model. Identification of specific vulnerabilities continues to be essential, as well as reinforcement of capacities. In the current context the SRSG offers the CoE's support to strengthen the asylum procedure in place and to improve access to protection services for persons in vulnerable situations.

This report does not aim to provide a full picture of the situation of those fleeing to Romania, nor a full analysis of all policy considerations. Its main purpose is to identify some areas in which the CoE can assist, at the request of the Romanian authorities, the country in dealing with existing challenges. Within the framework of the Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025), and in close co-operation with international organisations, know-how and expertise can be tapped to provide tailor-made and technical expertise to competent entities. The CoE suggests the following actions:

1. Supporting the national and local authorities and all relevant stakeholders in the early identification and referral of persons in a vulnerable situation, and to improve the knowledge and skills of professionals and lawyers involved in the registration process with regard to safeguards for persons with special needs. Further dissemination of free HELP online courses could also contribute to enhancing procedural safeguards for persons in vulnerable situations.
2. Bringing the CoE's expertise to raise awareness and to support all stakeholders providing psychological assistance to persons fleeing Ukraine, including through the training of psychologists, social workers and other frontline professionals, in order to better detect and address war trauma among refugees from Ukraine.
3. Supporting the relevant authorities in spreading information and knowledge about the European Qualification Passport for Refugees (EQPR) to facilitate access to the labour market and further education for all refugees.
4. Supporting competent authorities, institutions and relevant stakeholders as regards the protection of unaccompanied and separated children, including effective implementation of the CoE guardianship recommendation and training for officials and other personnel in contact with refugee children.
5. Engaging with authorities at all levels, as well as at local level, in order to facilitate the linguistic inclusion of adults and children through the implementation of existing CoE guidelines and tools and the provision of training for educators and language teachers.
6. Assisting the relevant authorities to prevent and detect human trafficking, including for the purpose of labour exploitation, as well as violence against women and children in all forms, taking into consideration the risks of recruitment and exploitation online. Specific attention shall be provided to protect victims, including through gender-sensitive trainings and in line with CoE standards and guidance, in co-ordination with other international organisations.

VII. APPENDIX: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

Monday 12 December 2022

- 10:00 – 11:00** Meeting with **NGOs**: co-ordinated by the Romanian National Council for Refugees. Participation of members of the Coalition for the Rights of Migrants and Refugees (Anais, Terre des Hommes, ECLER, AIDRom, ARCA, Asociația Novapolis, APML, Save the Children), Caritas, Jesuit refugee service (JRS)
- 13:00 – 15:00** Meeting with UN Organisations: **UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM**
- 15:00 – 18:00** Visit to the **Giurgiu Regional Center for Procedures and Accommodation for Asylum Seekers**

Tuesday 13 December 2022

- 09:45 – 10:45** Meeting with Ms Renate Weber, People's Advocate from Romania
- 13:00 – 13:50** Meeting with Ms Elena Tudor, Secretary of State, President of the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption;
Meeting with Ms Luminița Popescu, President of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities
- 14:10 – 15:00** Meetings with Mr Ionel-Florian Lixandru, Secretary of State responsible for the educational integration of Ukrainian refugee children
Ministry of Education
- 15:00 – 17:00** Visit to the **Romexpo Hub** – Meetings with Mr Toni Greblă, Prefect of Bucharest, the General Inspectorate for Immigration, International Organisations (UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, WHO, EUAA), NGOs
- 17:30 – 18:30** Visit to the accommodation centre, in charge of child protection, vulnerable groups, disabled and roma persons – Managed by Bucharest local council:
General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Sector 3
- 19:00 – 20:00** Meeting with Ms Claudia Lixandru, Director of the **Foundation Roma Education Fund Romania**

Wednesday 14 December 2022

- 09:00 – 09:45** Meeting with Ms Daniela Zaharia Mănescu, Lawyer, **Member of the Bucharest Bar Association**
- 10:00 – 10:50** Meeting with Colonel Silviu Stoian, Deputy Director of the Civil Protection General Directorate within the Civil Protection Department, Mr Mihai Lupu, Adviser, Commissioner Cătălin Ivan, Acting Chief of the Unit for EU-NATO policies and strategic partnership in the field of civil protection, Ms Raluca Erdinc, Police Commissioner, International Relations Unit, General Directorate for European Affairs, Schengen and International Relations
Ministry of Internal Affairs

- 11:00 – 11:55** Meeting with Dr Tiberius Marius Brădăţan, Secretary of State
Ministry of Health
- 12:00 – 13:00** Meeting with Mr Florin Cotosman, President of the National Employment Agency (ANOFM); Experts from ANOFM and from the Directorate of Employment Policy, Skills and Professional Mobility; Experts from the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
- 14:00 – 15:00** Meeting with Mr Traian Hristea, Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 15:30 – 16:30** Meeting with Mr George Cătălin Şerban, Secretary of State
Ministry of Justice
- 17:00 – 19:00** Visit to the educational hub for Ukrainian refugees

Online meetings

Tuesday 10 January 2023

Meeting with Dr Raed Arafat, Secretary of State, Head of Office of the Department for Emergency Situations, **Ministry of Internal Affairs**

Wednesday 18 January 2023

Meeting with Ms Mădălina Turza, Counsellor of State, **Office of the Prime Minister of the Government of Romania**