



Research on Long-term Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Europe
commissioned by Habitat for Humanity International

Housing of Ukrainian Refugees in Europe Options for Long-Term Solutions

Country case study

Romania

commissioned by Habitat for Humanity International

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Introduction

After a short post-COVID recovery year, on February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, devastating cities, destroying critical infrastructure and forcing millions of people to leave their homes. According to data provided by host governments to UNHCR, between February 24 and December 6, 2022, more than 7.8 million individuals who had fled Ukraine were registered across Europe. Due to the imposition of martial law, men between 18 and 60 are not allowed to leave Ukraine. Thus, 90% of those in need of international protection are women and children. By the beginning of December, more than 4.8 million people had registered for Temporary Protection or other legal status provided by the host countries' protection regimes in Europe. The war is still ongoing at the beginning of January 2023, and refugees' prospects of returning and starting reconstruction are increasingly delayed, and the aspirations of refugees are becoming more precarious.

This country case study is one output of a more extensive research effort commissioned by Habitat for Humanity International that was designed to examine immediate and longer-term accommodation/housing policy responses in five countries and, based on the findings, to define longer-term housing solutions that may lead to the better integration of refugees. The five countries include four neighbouring Ukraine (Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) and Germany, which was used as a benchmark for the other four countries in terms of general housing policy and refugee-related policy responses. Nevertheless, the German system was also analysed through a critical lens by comparing it to a well-functioning (ideal-type) affordable and human-rights-based housing system. The five country case studies are based on secondary data analysis, numerous interviews, document analyses, and fact collection. Their principal findings, on the one hand, are summarized in Country Fiches (one for each); on the other hand, a Comparative Report has been produced to help draw conclusions about the responses to the diverse housing needs of people fleeing the conflict of civil society, the private sector, local authorities, and humanitarian actors in the five EU countries. The Comparative Report also provides more general recommendations for Habitat for Humanity International advocacy activities regarding national and EU-level policy interventions.

The Romanian case study is structured as follows. Chapter 1 analyses the main features of the Romanian housing system and housing policy, comparing these with the situation in the other four countries. Chapter 2 summarises the results of the interviews and the fact-collection process. In doing so, it first shows the main regulatory background to the country's refugee policy and, secondly, the size and profile of refugee groups arriving from Ukraine. Then, it enumerates the forms of accommodation and housing provided for refugees, followed by a shorter description of other services. Chapter 3 concludes by specifying the main gaps (by comparing existing models for refugee housing solutions to an ideal approach). Finally, in Chapter 4, recommendations are made for developing more inclusive and longer-term housing solutions that take into account the specificities of the country's housing system and housing policy.

1 General description of the country's affordable and social housing solutions

1.1 Common features of housing systems in the examined new Member States

Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, countries of the group with post-socialist housing regimes, went through very similar processes, which can be summarized in the following way:

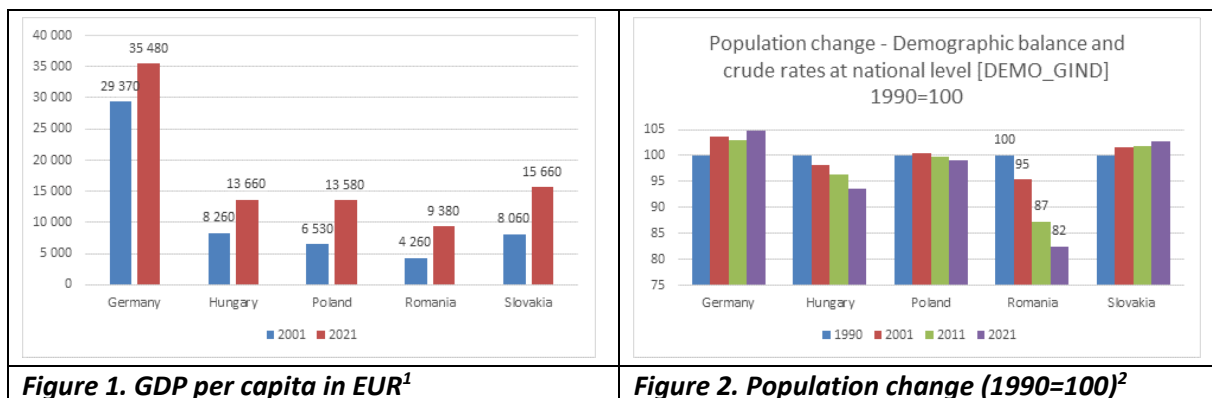
1. After the regime change, public rental housing was transferred to municipalities. The privatization of housing at a fraction of the market price radically reduced the stock of social rental housing. Rents typically do not cover operating and investment costs, so municipalities must cover the shortfall from their own revenue. Municipalities are left with smaller, poorer-quality housing, which, coupled with a lack of funds for renovation, has led to a decline in the sector.
2. A significant proportion of low-income (urban) families have been pushed out of the social rented sector and can only find solutions in the private rented sector or in settlements further from urban centers. Much of the private rental market is informal. Liberal legal regulation has created serious risks in the system both for the owners and the tenants. The supply side is dominated by casual landlords and property is increasingly becoming a desirable investment among upper-income families.
3. Housing costs have risen rapidly in all countries because of utility and energy price liberalization. To reduce the pressure on household budgets, housing subsidies have been introduced. However, subsidies (due to income measurement problems and scarce budgetary resources) cannot compensate for the increase in the housing cost burden.
4. Condominiums and multi-story buildings (including prefabricated housing estates of the socialist era) in all countries face serious problems, partly because of the quality of the housing stock (energy efficiency) and partly because of the weak financial capacity of the new owners of privatized housing to maintain the physical quality of the stock.
5. The main periods of housing policy in the former socialist countries are very similar.
 - The first period was dominated by housing privatization in the 1990s, the dismantling of socialist-era institutions (including the settlement of 'old loans' and the completion of stalled construction projects), and the building of new state and market institutions.
 - The second main period started around the 2000s, with increasing housing construction and the expansion of mortgage lending, for which countries have provided varying degrees of public support. The main priority of housing policy was to subsidize the owner-occupied sector (VAT tax credit, credit subsidies, personal income tax credit), but there were also attempts to support public housing programs (social housing, youth rental housing, etc.). Schemes are often short-term, based on political incentives, and then shut down due to budgetary constraints.
 - The 2008 GFC affected the new Member States in very different ways, depending on (i) the extent to which the stock of housing loans (including mortgage-backed consumer loans) grew between 2000 and 2008, (ii) the share of foreign currency loans and, (iii) the tightness of the loan underwriting process.

- After the 2008 GFC there was a downturn, followed by a new upturn after 3-7 years, again with the priority being to support the owner-occupied sector.

These processes have taken place in specific circumstances in different countries at different points due to the diversity of macroeconomic, political, and institutional factors.

1.2 Economic growth and population trends

Romania has the lowest GDP per capita of the five countries in the project but the latter has grown the fastest since 2012, partly due to population decline. GDP per capita grew from €4,260 in 2010 to €9,330 in 2021, an increase of more than double. In 2021, the population was 17.6% smaller than in 1990, a decrease of more than four million people.



1.3 Migration, inequalities

Romania's out-migration figures are stark, with a population decrease of 2.2 million between 2000 and 2021 due to net migration. Migration accelerated after the accession to Europe, with net migration per 1,000 inhabitants of twenty-two between 2007 and 2012, ten times the Polish figure. This is just the opposite of Germany, which has seen its population increase by almost six million people year-on-year due to net migration.

¹ Source: Hypostat 2021 https://hypo.org/app/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/HYPOSTAT-2021_vdef.pdf

² Source: EUROSTAT (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/DEMO_GIND)

Table 1. Migration data³

	Annual net migration per 1,000 inhabitants 2010-2015	Annual net migration per 1,000 inhabitants 2015-2020 (forecast)	Net migration per 1,000 inhabitants five-year period (2007-2012)	Net migration between 2000 and 2021	The net emigration rate of the population aged 15-64 in 2019 ⁴
Germany	4.8	6.6	15.14	5 984 941	n.a.
Hungary	n.a.	n.a.	3.02	330 273	4.2%
Poland	-1.7	-0.8	-1.94	-175 046	7.8%
Romania	-3	-3.8	-21.8	-2 205 003	18%
Slovakia	0.4	0.3	2.1	4 524	4.1%

Table 2. Gini coefficient between 2012 and 2020 (scale from 0 to 100)⁵

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Germany	28.3	29.7	30.7	30.1	29.5	29.1	31.1	29.7	30.5
Hungary	27.2	28.3	28.6	28.2	28.2	28.1	28.7	28	28
Poland	30.9	30.7	30.8	30.6	29.8	29.2	27.8	28.5	27.2
Romania	34	34.6	35	37.4	34.7	33.1	35.1	34.8	33.8
Slovakia	25.3	24.2	26.1	23.7	24.3	23.2	20.9	22.8	20.9

According to the Gini index that measures social inequality, Romania has the highest inequality, higher than in Germany. Between 2010 and 2021, inequalities increased in the country, more than in Germany. Slovakia and Poland's inequality indices improved between 2012 and 2020, while Hungary's remained essentially unchanged.

1.4 Housing privatization and tenure structure

In all the former socialist countries, public housing was first handed over to municipalities and then offered to sitting tenants at 10-30 % of the market price, resulting in 80-90% of public housing stock being privatized. In Romania, the privatization rate was exceptionally high: in 2021, only 2.6% of the population live in municipal housing. According to the official data, the private rented sector is negligible in the new Member States, with Romania at the extreme end of the scale, with only 1.3% of the population living in private rented accommodation. The share of the owner-occupied sector is 95%.

However, the reliability of the data for the private rented sector is questionable, as informal renting may be significant for tax reasons, but no reliable data are available. However, in reality in most of the New Member States (NMS), there is significant underreporting of the private rented sector (for example, a private real estate company estimated the size of the sector to be 3 % in 1999 in Bucharest. (<http://indeximobiliar.blogspot.com/>). "In 2020 the rental market in the six largest cities (București – Iflow, Cluj, Brașov, Timiș, Constanța, Iași) was more competitive in 2020 with prices 30% higher than in 2019. At the end of 2020, one [in] five apartments available for rent in Bucharest was occupied,

³ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_net_migration_rate; Eurostat Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level [DEMO_GIND]

⁴ Source: Hárs Ágnes (2020) Elvándorlás, visszavándorlás, bevándorlás: jelenségek és munkaerő-piaci hatások (Emigration, return migration, immigration: phenomena and labour market effects) (In.: Társadalmi Riport 2020, szerk.: Kolosi Tamás, Szelényi Iván, Tóth István György, Budapest) p 115-145)

⁵ Source: Eurostat Gini coefficient of equivalized disposable income - EU-SILC survey [ILC_DI12\$DEFAULTVIEW]

while before the pandemic outbreak, the ratio was one to six”⁶. “Unofficial estimates [are] that anywhere between 7 to 15% of the national housing stock is rented, with [higher] numbers [...] for cities like Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca (up to 20%)” (Sinea et al., 2021, p. 57).

In almost all countries, the privatization law provided for the in-kind restitution of nationalized housing after 1945, whereby tenants automatically became private tenants. However, this was not widely implemented for political reasons (except in the Czech Republic). In Romania, the new regime also essentially sabotaged the implementation of the law⁷:

The Restitution laws were accepted starting from 1995 (Act 112/1192, and later Act 10/2001), returning ownership to the former owners; the current owners in restituted property became tenants by the virtue of these laws. However, a law was also passed to protect these new tenants: they had the right to automatically renew their contract for five years, followed by newer and newer such prolongations. A final restitution law was eventually passed in April 2013, ruling that the rightful owners of formerly nationalized property must be compensated in points (with a nominal value of RON 1 each) if they cannot be compensated in kind. The compensation process – concerning 200,000 claims – is expected to be concluded by 2024; and until this date, part of the housing stock will remain exempt from free market mechanisms.⁸

Within the owner-occupied housing sector, Romania has the lowest share of people with mortgages, at only 1.3%. This indicates an underdeveloped housing finance system in which the majority of transactions are cash-based. In contrast to the NMS, Germany has a balanced tenure structure with a significant rental sector, although the share of owner-occupied housing is also increasing there.

Table 3. Tenure structure of the five examined countries in 2012 and 2020 (%)⁹

	Owner with mortgage	Own outright	Rent (private)	Rent (subsidized)	Total	Owner with mortgage	Own outright	Rent (private)	Rent (subsidized)	Total
	2012					2020				
Germany	28.0	25.2	38.7	8.1	100	31.4	19	43.3	6.3	100
Hungary	20.9	68.9	3.1	7.1	100	15.5	75.8	4.3	4.4	100
Poland	9.6	72.8	4	13.6	100	13.1	72.5	3.3	11.1	100
Romania	0.9	95.4	0.8	2.9	100	1.1	95	1.3	2.6	100
Slovakia	9.6	80.8	7.8	1.8	100	23.3	69	6.1	1.6	100

1.5 Housing stock, quality

Romania has 8.33 million housing units, and because of the population decline, the indicator of housing availability is the best among the NMS involved in this report. In 2021 Romania had 479 housing units

⁶ Deloitte. 2021 Property Index Overview of European Residential Markets 10th edition. July 2021 <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/at/Documents/real-estate/at-property-index-2021.pdf>

⁷ Dawidson, Karin EK. "Redistributing nationalized housing: Impacts on property patterns in Timișoara, Romania." Eurasian Geography and Economics 45.2 (2004): 134-156.

⁸ Hegedüs József and Horváth. Vera: TENLAW: Tenancy Law and Housing Policy in Multi-level Europe Intra-team Comparison Report for BULGARIA. HUNGARY. ROMANIA (2015) https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/fb6/fb6/Forschung/ZERP/TENLAW/IntrateamCom/BG-HU-RO_comparison_report_20150608.pdf

⁹ Source: Distribution of population by tenure status, EU-SILC survey [ILC_LVHO02__custom_3360359]

per 1,000 inhabitants, more than Hungary, while in 2011 the indicator was basically the same in the two countries (435 for Hungary, 431 for Romania).

The share of vacant homes (non-inhabited or second homes) in Romania is 16 %, the highest among the examined countries; the figure increased significantly between 2011 and 2021, from 12% to 16%.

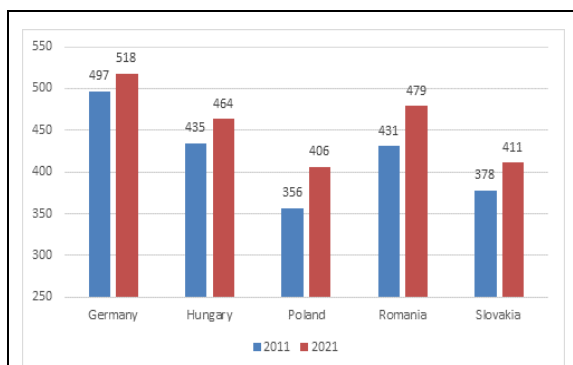


Figure 3. Number of housing units per 1,000 inhabitants 2011 and 2021¹⁰

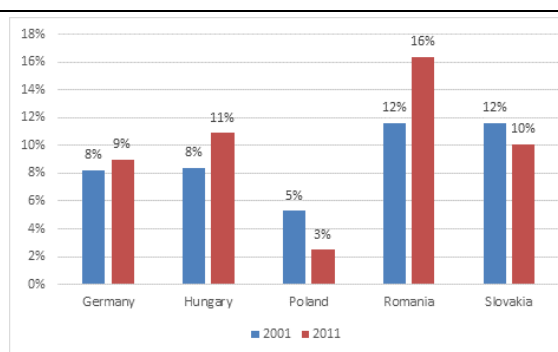


Figure 4. Share of vacant homes in 2001 and 2011 (%)¹¹

The quality of the housing stock is very poor; around one-fifth of all homes do not have a bathroom or inside toilet (See Table 4). The average floor space per person was 15 m² in 2010, much less than Hungary (31.2 m²), Poland (24.2 m²), and Slovakia (26.0 m²)¹². The same trend can be traced in the statistics of the number of people per housing unit.

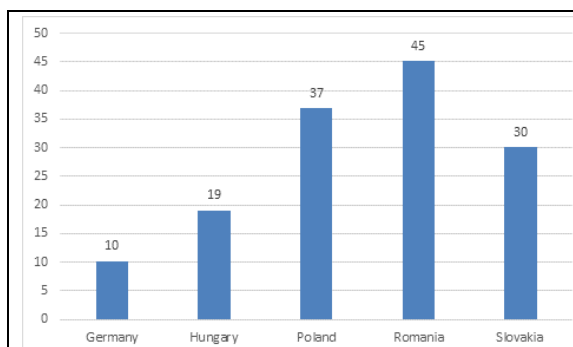


Figure 5. Overcrowding rate, 2020¹³ (%)

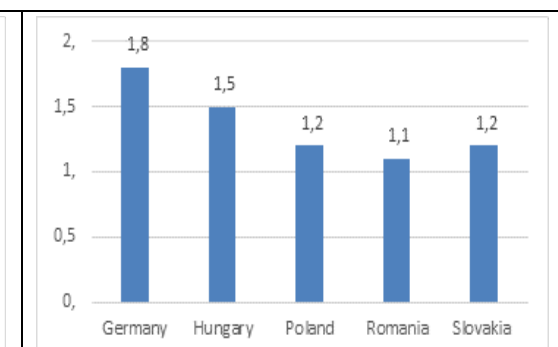


Figure 6. Average number of rooms per person, 2020¹⁴

¹⁰ Source: Housing Statistics of Europe 2014, Eurostat Population change - Demographic balance and crude rates at national level [DEMO_GIND]

¹¹ Source: Eurostat Census Hub, Census 2011. T, Housing Statistics of Europe 2014,

¹² Hegedüs at al., 2013

¹³ Source: Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status - total population - EU-SILC survey [ILC_LVHO05A_custom_3397213]

¹⁴ Source: EU-SILC survey [ILC_LVHO03_custom_1513490]

According to a Eurofond study (2016), within Romania's housing stock the proportion of dwellings that lack bathrooms and toilets is outstanding. The analysis of the Romanian housing situation (Lăzărescu et al., 2020)¹⁵ concluded:

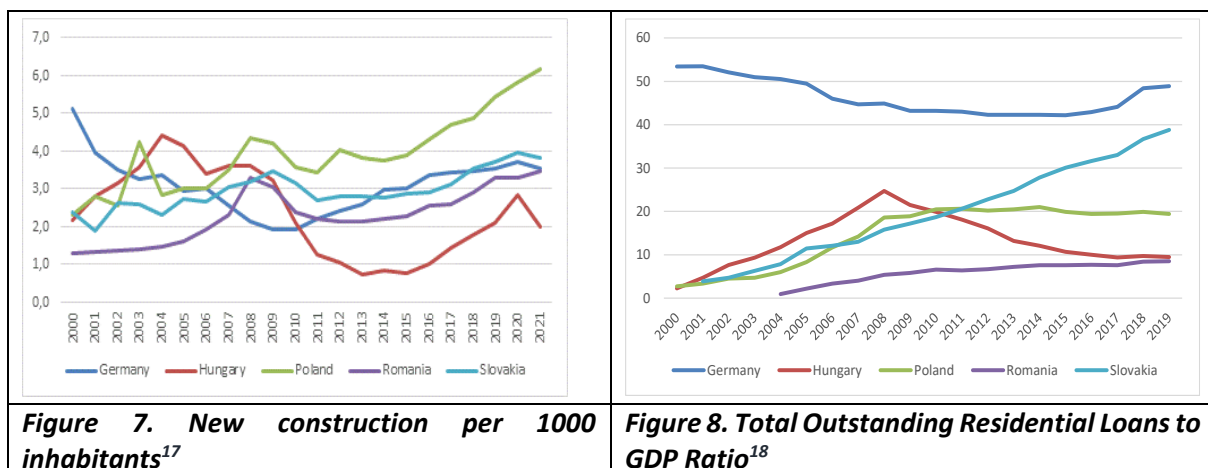
The Romanian population lives in outdated dwellings, the smallest in size, characterized by the most limited access to utilities and the highest [...] overcrowding rate within the EU. [...] The large number of vacant dwellings that deteriorate, over time, correlated with the [...] age of housing and poor endowment are realities [that] make Romania stand out within the EU [in terms of] the highest rates of severe deprivation of housing [and] overcrowding housing indicators that are responsible for reducing the accessibility of housing at the national level.

Table 4. Indicators of inadequate housing, 2015¹⁶

	Dwelling stock	Space problem	Rot problem	Damp problem	Toilet problem	Bath problem	Garden problem	Rent problem	Utility problem	Heating problem
Germany	40 545 300	12%	4%	6%	1%	2%	17%	10%	12%	6%
Hungary	2 762 444	10%	14%	12%	4%	5%	11%	11%	21%	14%
Poland	13 853 000	18%	12%	14%	6%	7%	15%	18%	23%	24%
Romania	6 384 000	10%	9%	12%	22%	22%	12%	6%	18%	17%
Slovakia	1 994 900	8%	5%	7%	3%	2%	10%	9%	11%	10%

1.6 Housing investment, housing finance, and affordability

The housing investment and housing finance system in Romania lag behind that of other NMS, although after the 2008 GFC Romania's housing market performed well. Housing construction increased and the mortgage market grew from 4.6 % of GDP to 9.1. In contrast, Hungary's performance after the 2008 GFC was very poor both in terms of construction and mortgage market development.



¹⁵ Lăzărescu. Luminita-Mirela. and Daniela Liliana Diacon. "A Comparative Analysis of the Housing Affordability in Romania and the European Union from the Perspective of the Housing Costs." LUMEN Proceedings 13 (2020): 93-104

¹⁶ Source: Eurofond (2016), Inadequate housing in Europe: Costs and consequences, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

¹⁷ Source: Hypostat 2021 https://hypo.org/app/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/HYPOSTAT-2021_vdef.pdf

¹⁸ Source: Hypostat 2021 https://hypo.org/app/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/HYPOSTAT-2021_vdef.pdf

Ninety-five percent of the inhabitants in Romania in the owner-occupied sector live without a mortgage, which is a sign of an underdeveloped housing finance system. Though there seems to be a contradiction between the SILC data, which indicate that only 1.5 % of the population live in the owner-occupied sector with a mortgage, and the 9.1 % Loan-to-GDP rate. (In Hungary 15.5 % of the population live in owner-occupied housing with a mortgage, and the Loan-to-GDP rate is 9.5%.) The housing market seems to be less volatile, and the average transaction price is the lowest among the countries involved in the project.

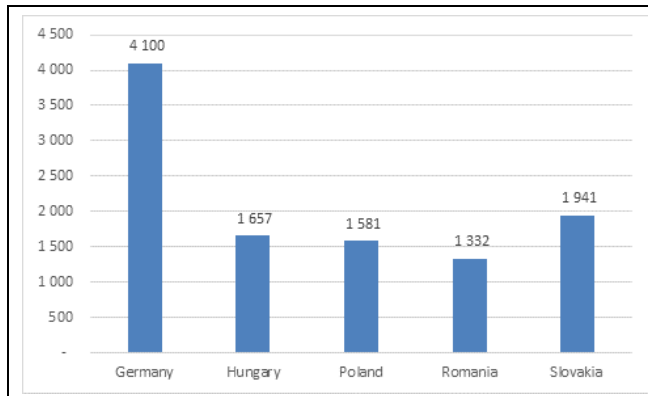


Figure 9. Average transaction price of a new dwelling, 2021 (EUR/m²)¹⁹

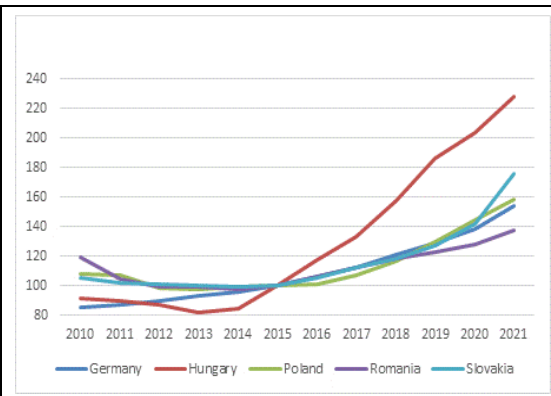


Figure 10. Nominal House Price Indices (2015=100)²⁰

There is contradictory information on house prices. Before 2010, Amman and Mundt²¹ argued that...

...market prices for condominiums in the capital of Bucharest and in other high-priced cities such as Braşov, Cluj-Napoca, Timişoara and Constanţa have developed very dynamically in the past few years. The largest increases were documented before 2005. The climax was reached at the beginning of 2008 when an average apartment cost around 1500 €/m² in Bucharest, the highest market segment reaching 3,000 €/m². The price level came close to [that of] western European cities while the incomes of the population remained much lower. At that time a modest apartment at market price cost approximately 15 times a person’s annual income. This factor is not bigger than 4 or 5 in most EU countries. Since the peak in 2008 prices have fallen considerably and the local currency has devalued. These factors [led] to a decrease in market prices of approximately one-third to a price level of 900 to 1100 €/m² in Bucharest.

After 2010, transaction prices increased, but the average price remained the lowest among the countries in this comparison.

¹⁹ Source: Property Index Overview of European Residential Markets 10th edition, July 2021

²⁰ Source: Hypostat 2021 https://hypo.org/app/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/HYPOSTAT-2021_vdef.pdf

²¹ Amann, Wolfgang, and Alexis Mundt. "Designing a new rental housing law for Romania." International Journal of Law in the Built Environment (2010).

Table 5. Price differences among cities, 2021²²

	Price of new dwelling (EUR/m ²)		Annual changes		Ratio of highest to lowest (Lowest=100)	Country	Price of new dwelling	
	Lowest	Highest	Lowest	Highest			Lowest	Highest
Germany	6 200	8 700	1.6 %	4.8%	140	Germany	Berlin	Munich
Hungary	1 281	2 207	1.2%	4.8%	172	Hungary	Debrecen	Budapest
Poland	1 426	2 233	4.9%	5.6%	157	Poland	Lodz	Warsaw
Romania	1 270	1 800	2.4%	6.5%	142	Romania	Timisoara	Cluj
Slovakia	1 720	2 805	2.2%	13.0%	163	Slovakia	Kosice	Bratislava

For 2020, in Romania, the number of dwellings delivered seems to have reached a new record, and the number of transactions [...] increased compared to 2019. At the beginning, [the] Covid-19 outbreak stalled the residential market, but the second half of 2020 brought an overall improvement in real estate transactions and prices remained relatively stable, but with a tendency to grow. The middle market segment of the residential market was more developed in 2020 due to the desire of buyers to live in larger spaces in [the] context of work[ing] from home, increased disposable household income, and low interest rates, which made housing more affordable. The lower supply and higher demand within the rental segment kept [...] pressure on [...] rental prices.²³

1.7 Housing policy and housing programs

An important milestone in housing policy in Romania was the creation of the National Housing Agency in 1999. The National Housing Agency (NHA) operates under the authority of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (MRDPA). The NHA is responsible for the technical management of public housing programs, and housing policy is the responsibility of the government, although the NHA is a financially autonomous organization. Programs existed before 1999, but they were of minor importance and were soon discontinued (e.g., credit support for youth housing). Programs after 1999 were also supported by the international donor agencies the European Investment Bank and the Council of Europe Bank. In 2015, a World Bank study mapped 22 housing programs²⁴ and three additional housing-related programs²⁵.

²² Source: Property Index Overview of European Residential Markets 10th edition, July 2021. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/at/Documents/real-estate/at-property-index-2021.pdf>

²³ Property Index Overview of European Residential Markets 10th edition, July 2021. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/at/Documents/real-estate/at-property-index-2021.pdf>

²⁴ For example: Building social homes for tenants evicted from nationalized houses (Started in 2008 Homes allotted to social cases that must be eligible according to applicable legislation); Rehabilitation of blocks of flats situated in cities from underprivileged areas (Started in 2006 for private individuals or companies owning apartments in blocks of flats in cities from underprivileged areas with severe structural degradation and major thermal system deficiencies), etc. (Bernhard, 2018).

²⁵ World Bank (2015): Housing in Romania

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/552171468585744221/pdf/106856-REVISED-WP-RomaniaHousingRASOutputFinalHousingAssessment-PUBLIC.pdf>



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“The different policy approaches and diversification of housing initiatives did not have any apparent ideological background, with each successive government implementing measures to solve urgent problems with a limited budget” (World Bank, 2015, p. 49)²⁶.

The conditions of the programs have often varied according to the size of the budgets of governments. The most relevant programs were the following:

1. Construction of social rental housing

Starting in 2001, the goal was to build social housing, with subsidized rents for selected social cases (max. rent 10% of the family's available monthly income). The cost of the program was 50 million EUR until 2011, then 4 million EUR in 2012. Municipalities were eligible for the grants but the homes were not allowed to be privatized. The average price of an apartment was 32.4 million RON. Budgeted until 2016 (Law 114/1996)²⁷.

2. Youth Housing program:

- Building rental housing for young people (under 35 years)

Managed by the NHA, started in 2001, but there was an option to sell apartments. Finally, all tenants were given the opportunity to buy the apartments (10,468 units) at a fixed price of 326 EUR/m². The cost was 434 million EUR until 2011, and 14 million EUR in 2012. Since 2004, tenants have had the option of privatization²⁸.

- Building homes through mortgage loans

Managed by NHA, started in 2011. Applicants can apply for regular mortgage loans, First Home Loans, or Bauspar loans.

“NHA's Youth Housing program has been successful in terms of scale with approximately 30,000 units delivered to date with another 6,990 planned according to a loan of EUR 175,000,000 approved in July 2015 by the Council of Europe Development Bank”²⁹.

3. “First Home” Loan

The “First Home” program is a governmental initiative introduced in 2009 that facilitates individuals' access to the purchase or construction of a dwelling by contracting state-guaranteed loans.

Conditions of the "First House" program were changed frequently. "First House 2" was introduced in 2010, and "First House 3+" in 2011, which eased the administrative burden of

²⁶ World Bank (2015): Housing in Romania
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/552171468585744221/pdf/106856-REVISED-WP-RomaniaHousingRASOutputFinalHousingAssessment-PUBLIC.pdf>

²⁷ Bernhard. Erwin (2018) Housing Situation and Housing Policy in Romania EFBS – Meeting Brussels. November 15. 2013 https://www.efbs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Housing-Programs-Romania_v5-2.pdf

²⁸ World Bank, ibid

²⁹ World Bank, ibid



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the scheme. However, "First House 4" was also introduced in 2011, which allowed people who previously had a home (maximum size of 50 m²) to participate in the scheme³⁰.

The guarantees cover 50 percent of the loan for new dwellings and 40 percent for dwellings more than five years old. The program creates several benefits for borrowers, such as preferential interest rates and LTV ratios, lower down-payments, and longer mortgage maturities. Until 9 October 2013, over 102,000 homes (value of EUR 3.948 million) were financed through the program: About 30% were newly built homes (after 2008). Program conditions: only RON loans are eligible, maximum loan amount 60 000-70000-75000 EUR (RON equivalent) for an old home, new homes, and multi-unit buildings. Minimum 5 % down-payment, 50 % of the loan guaranteed by the state. First-time buyers are eligible.

In addition, since 2004 a Bausparkasse subsidy scheme (like other countries in the region) has been in operation, which is the third largest scheme in terms of cost. The subsidy scheme is not targeted, as illustrated by the fact that the cost of a ten-year social housing program is only 20% higher than the annual expenditure of the Bausparkasse. A similarly non-targeted scheme is the VAT rebate (5% instead of 24%) that is available to buyers and builders of new homes valued at less than EUR 86,000.³¹

³⁰ Radu. Roxana. "The Romanian Housing Policy Bounds for Legal Patterns: Compulsory Insurance. Social Housing and the "First House" Program." *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques* 45 (2015): 221-232.

³¹ World Bank, *ibid*

2 Fieldwork - fact collection

2.1 Main legal regulations on migrants and refugees

The 2001 Temporary Protection Directive was transposed into the Romanian legal architecture by Law 122/2006 on asylum.³² Emergency Ordinance no. 15 on the provision of humanitarian support and assistance to foreign citizens and stateless persons in special situations arriving from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine was enacted on 27 February 2022 by the Romanian Government.³³ Following the 2022/382 Council Implementing Decision triggering the Temporary Protection Directive, Decision no. 367 concerning the establishment of conditions for ensuring temporary protection, as well as for the modification and completion of some normative acts in regard to foreign citizens, instituted the specific conditions for providing legal protection for those fleeing Russia's war on Ukraine to the territory of Romania on 18 March 2022 (Decision no. 367/2022).³⁴

Decision no. 367/2022 specifies that the following categories of persons could register for temporary protection in Romania:

1. **Ukrainian citizens who lived in Ukraine prior to 24 February 2022 no matter the date when they left Ukraine**, including their family members and other close relatives who were fully or largely dependent on the beneficiary of temporary protection³⁵

³² LEGE Nr. 122 din 4 mai 2006 privind azilul in Romania. Parlamentul Romaniei, Monitorul Oficial, nr. 428 din 18 mai 2006. [LAW No. 122 of May 4, 2006 regarding asylum in Romania. The Parliament of Romania, Official Gazette, no. 428 of May 18, 2006.] Last accessed: 17 November 2022. <http://www.lexex.ro/Lege-122-04.05.2006-70967.aspx>

³³ ORDONANȚĂ DE URGENȚĂ nr. 15 din 27 februarie 2022 privind acordarea de sprijin și asistență umanitară de către statul român cetățenilor străini sau apatrizilor aflați în situații deosebite, proveniți din zona conflictului armat din Ucraina. Guvernul Romaniei, Monitorul Oficial, nr. 193 din 27 februarie 2022. [EMERGENCY ORDINANCE no. 15 of February 27, 2022 regarding the provision of humanitarian support and assistance by the Romanian State to foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations, originating from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Government of Romania, Official Gazette, no. 193 of February 27, 2022.] Last accessed: 17 November 2022. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetailDocumentAfis/251954>

³⁴ COUNCIL IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection. Official Journal of the European Union, 4 March 2022.; HOTĂRÂRE nr. 367 din 18 martie 2022 privind stabilirea unor condiții de asigurare a protecției temporare, precum și pentru modificarea și completarea unor acte normative în domeniul străinilor. Guvernul Romaniei, Monitorul Oficial, nr. 268 din 18 martie 2022. [DECISION no. 367 of March 18, 2022 regarding the establishment of conditions for ensuring temporary protection, as well as for the modification and completion of some normative acts in the field of foreigners. Government of Romania, Official Gazette, no. 268 of March 18, 2022.] Last accessed: 17 November 2022. <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetailDocument/252745>

³⁵ HOTĂRÂRE nr. 367 din 18 martie 2022 privind stabilirea unor condiții de asigurare a protecției temporare, precum și pentru modificarea și completarea unor acte normative în domeniul străinilor. Guvernul Romaniei, Monitorul Oficial, nr. 268 din 18 martie 2022. [DECISION no. 367 of March 18, 2022 regarding the establishment of conditions for ensuring temporary protection, as well as for the modification and completion of some normative acts in the field of foreigners. Government of Romania, Official Gazette, no. 268 of March 18, 2022.] Last accessed: 17 November 2022.

Long-term accommodation

The Romanian government has scaled up its efforts to provide a wide range of humanitarian assistance and integration services for those fleeing Russia's war on Ukraine. However, the provision of long-term affordable accommodation remains a challenging issue that needs resolving.⁴¹ People in need of long-term housing can submit their request on an online platform called 'A Roof / Un Acoperiș' that aims to link accommodation offers and needs in a safe and validated manner.⁴² The website, which is available in the Ukrainian, Russian, English, and Romanian languages, was developed by the Code for Romania community and maintained by the Department for Emergency Situations of the Ministry of Interior.⁴³

Food and accommodation expenses occurred by people hosting those fleeing Russia's war on Ukraine may be reimbursed by the government upon individual claim submitted to the Social Assistance Directorate of the City Hall.⁴⁴

2.2 Needs assessment

2.2.1 *Size of groups from Ukraine: previously arrived groups and war refugees*

Romania was first and foremost a transit country for Ukrainian refugees. Compared to those registered for temporary (or other forms of) protection in the country, the number of Ukrainians crossing Romania's borders was by far higher. Between 24 February and 13 November 2022, 2.245 million people residing in Ukraine entered Romania either directly or via the Republic of Moldova.⁴⁵ The vast majority of them left the country: they applied for temporary protection elsewhere or returned to Ukraine.

Number of Ukrainians according to legal status

There are three types of legal entitlement allowing Ukrainians to stay in Romania. Anybody possessing a valid Ukrainian passport is allowed **short-term stay**, meaning a maximum of 90 days (during a half-year period). **Temporary protection** is granted for a period of one year and can be automatically extended for periods of six months, for a maximum of three years. Further, Ukrainians can also apply for refugee status through the **standard process for asylum seekers**. According to UNHCR data on the Ukrainian refugee situation, on 13 November 2022, there were 90,106 Ukrainian individual refugees registered in Romania, among whom 85,456 had registered for temporary protection.⁴⁶ According to the General Inspectorate for Immigration, on 15 August 2022 4735 Ukrainians had been accorded refugee status through the standard asylum procedure.⁴⁷

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Information on temporary protection in Romania. European Union Agency for Asylum, July 2022.

⁴³ Website of the 'A Roof / Un Acoperiș' platform. Code for Romania - Department for Emergency Situations of the Ministry of Interior in Romania: <https://unacoperis.ro/uk>

⁴⁴ Information on temporary protection in Romania. European Union Agency for Asylum, July 2022.

⁴⁵ Operational Data Portal – Ukraine Refugee Situation, Romania. UNHCR. Last accessed: 17 November 2022. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782>

⁴⁶ Operational Data Portal – Ukraine Refugee Situation, Romania. UNHCR. Last accessed: 17 November 2022. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782>

⁴⁷ Author interview with representative of the General Inspectorate for Immigration, conducted on 23 September 2022.

Table 6. Number of Ukrainian refugees in Romania according to the legal status of their stay (mid-November 2022)⁴⁸

Total number of people fleeing Ukraine*	90,106
Temporary protection*	85,456
Refugee (standard asylum process) **	~ 4391
Short-term stay ***	~ 259

In mid-November, there were approximately 259 Ukrainians in Romania who had not applied for either temporary protection or refugee status but had asked for certain services provided by Romanian authorities for Ukrainians

On 24 February 2022, there were already 6,787 individual refugees from Ukraine registered in Romania. The number rose quickly and reached 85,600 by 8 March 2022. On 18 March 2022, when the Temporary Protection Act⁴⁹ was adopted, there were 87,378 Ukrainian refugees registered in the country.⁵⁰ On 4 September, 98.8 percent of people fleeing Ukraine were Ukrainian and 1.2 percent were other third-country nationals.⁵¹ Among this ‘other’ category Russians, Moldovans, Chinese, and Belarusians were the most numerous. Foreign citizens residing in Ukraine could also apply for temporary protection, with the likelihood of success depending on their legal situation in Ukraine:

It depends on their legal situation. In the case of family members, it is quite clear. Other categories, for example, students or who have been there for work, can qualify for temporary protection if they have a long-term residence permit for the territory of Ukraine and if the situation in their country of origin makes [it] impossible to return there. If the situation in the country of origin allows this, they can go through the standard asylum procedure. If they have a form of international protection in Ukraine, they should enter temporary protection too. (Interview with representative of Romanian National Council for Refugees)

Those ‘staying for the short term’ are not registered in a unified database; however, the ability to benefit from different services requires registration. In this sense, there are three different registers:

- Those benefitting from social services at transit centers are registered in an online database⁵² administered by Code for Romania,⁵³ an NGO engaged in digitalization projects and working in partnership with the Romanian government (in the case of Ukrainian refugees with the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations).
- Those having children enrolled in the Romanian educational system or willing to be employed in Romania should ask for a short-term residence permit at the General Inspectorate for Immigration.
- Those staying in private rent should also be registered in a database, but they are apparently not. The General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations “reimburses” homeowners who host Ukrainians, without having a register of the refugees who thereby benefit. According to a

⁴⁸ Sources: *UNHCR (13 November 2022); ** General Inspectorate for Immigration (15 November 2022);

*** Authors approximation

⁴⁹ Governmental Ordinance no. 367/18 March 2022.

⁵⁰ See <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782> (accessed 17.09.2022).

⁵¹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/234?sv=54&geo=10782&secret=unhcrrestricted>

⁵² At <https://sprijindeurgenta.ro/> webpage.

⁵³ See <https://code4.ro/ro>.



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written communique of the Department of Emergency Situations, they dispose only of statistics concerning the reimbursed amounts, but they do not have statistics on the number of Ukrainian citizens who are benefitting from the program:

“We inform you that Department for Emergency Situations does not have information regarding the number of persons [...] from Ukraine for whom accommodation and food costs are reimbursed. This number is specified only in application forms submitted to local public authorities by private persons hosting Ukrainian citizens” (**Statement received by an investigative journalist of profit.ro⁵⁴**).

Those staying for the long term can apply for temporary protection or refugee status at any point in the ninety days after their entry to Romania. Theoretically (but also practically) they can receive all information and legal assistance they need for temporary protection or regular asylum process at the entry points of Romania, in transit centers, via a call-center operated by NGOs and Romanian authorities,⁵⁵ and at <https://dopomoha.ro/> webpage, respectively.

Table 7 summarizes entitlements and services available to different categories of Ukrainian refugees in Romania.

⁵⁴ See: <https://www.profit.ro/stiri/social/guvernul-decontat-pesto-100-milioane-lei-cazarea-masa-refugiatilor-ucraineni-stie-cati-zeci-milioane-lei-neimpozabili-au-ajuns-persoane-private-au-cazat-ucraineni-20785059>

⁵⁵ See <https://dopomoha.ro/en/call-center>.

Table 7. Entitlements and services provided to Ukrainian refugees according to the legal status of their stay⁵⁶

	Short stay	Temporarily protected	Refugees (through ordinary asylum application)
<i>Documents needed/issued</i>	<i>Valid Ukrainian passport</i>	<i>Residency permit</i>	<i>Temporary identity documents (for asylum applicants); residency permit (refugees)</i>
<i>Possible length of stay</i>	<i>90 days</i>	<i>1 year with the possibility to extend to a maximum of 3 years</i>	<i>Indefinite (if refugee status is obtained)</i>
<i>Social services</i>	<i>Different services at transit center (food; clothes; emergency healthcare)</i>	<i>Upon request necessary assistance for maintenance</i>	<i>Different services at Regional Reception Centers (food; clothes; emergency healthcare)</i>
<i>Labor market</i>	<i>Right to work in Romania (after receiving short-term residence)</i>	<i>Right to work in Romania</i>	<i>Right to work in Romania (after receiving refugee status and/or 3 months after the application)</i>
<i>Education</i>	<i>Right to be enrolled for free in Romanian educational system (after receiving short-term residence)</i>	<i>Right to be enrolled for free in Romanian educational system Free Romanian language courses</i>	<i>Right to be enrolled for free in Romanian educational system Free Romanian language courses</i>
<i>Medical assistance</i>	<i>Entitled to medical care like Romanian citizens covered by insurance</i>	<i>Entitled to medical care like Romanian citizens covered by insurance</i>	<i>Entitled to emergency medical care like Romanian citizens who are not insured</i>
<i>Accommodation</i>	<i>No direct subsidy but persons and legal entities hosting them benefit from "reimbursement"</i>	<i>No direct subsidy but persons and legal entities hosting them benefit from "reimbursement"</i>	<i>Possibility of being accommodated in one of the six Regional Reception Centers</i>

As one can observe, the rights of different legal categories of Ukrainian refugees are similar, the timespan of the entitlements being the major difference. The only exception is medical assistance (discussed in more detail later). Importantly, however, those with short-term stay status should ask for a residence permit if they would like to work or have their children enrolled in the Romanian education system. The procedure for obtaining a short-term residency permit is rather similar to the one for temporary protection. Ordinary asylum application takes much longer and is more complicated, although in the case of Ukrainians the standard process for asylum seekers seems smoother than in the case of previous waves of refugees.

Pre-war migrants from Ukraine

The pre-war history of immigration from Ukraine to Romania is rather specific and it is not easy to document using official statistical data. Romania is still a country of emigration (or a labor frontier of the Western European core). Nevertheless, the number of immigrants also increased considerably following 2010 and official statistics on immigration do not cover all categories of individuals that

⁵⁶ Source: <https://dopomoha.ro/en/my-rights>

effectively enter the country. The number of foreign nationals living in Romania has increased (to 145 thousand in 2021) but – as Table 8 shows – the increase in the foreign-born population is much larger. The number of those belonging to this latter category passed 700 thousand in 2020.

Table 8. Number of foreign-born and foreign citizens in Romania (2012-2021)⁵⁷

	Foreign national	Foreign born	Ukrainian citizens	Born in Ukraine
2012	73,806		1,369	
2013	70,863	182,939	1,280	8,743
2014	73,450	211,210	1,365	9,392
2015	88,799	281,048	1,504	11,900
2016	107,235	347,344	1,771	14,328
2017	114,402	419,238	1,815	17,384
2018	114,353	510,526	1,784	25,644
2019	121,276	611,627	1,619	37,600
2020	140,078	723,913	2,057	47,614
2021	144,617	688,697	2,172	No data

The growth in the foreign-born population is due to three different movements; namely, the entry of foreign nationals, a specific form of “return migration,” and the influx of ethnic Romanians who “reacquired” Romanian citizenship before entering the country. Among these movements, “return migration” might be considered a statistical artefact: this refers to the registration of newborn babies of Romanian citizenship residing abroad, which does not constitute a real migratory influx. The influx of extra-territorial Romanian citizens is a real phenomenon, however, and accelerated after 2010. In 2020, this included 302 thousand people born in Moldova and 47.7 thousand people born in Ukraine, the vast majority of them entering the country as Romanian citizens. Romanian extraterritorial citizens reside in territories that belonged to Greater Romania during the interwar period, namely Northern-Bukovina (Chernivtsi Oblast) and Southern-Bessarabia (parts of Odessa Oblast). Romanian-inhabited territories in Odessa Oblast are more severely affected by the war compared to Northern Bukovina.

The most important institutional entry point for extraterritorial Romanian citizens is secondary and tertiary education. The Romanian state has a massive project of using bursaries to sustain the education in Romania of Romanian speakers from the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. This means that many Ukrainian residents (the majority of them already with Romanian citizenship) entered Romania before the war as high school and university students. Being educated in Romania and having Romanian as their native language, they faced relatively few barriers to social integration. Alongside this well-educated and young stratum, Romania’s secondary labor market (especially construction) has also become attractive to extra-territorial citizens in Moldova and Ukraine during the last few years.⁵⁸

One should mention that (overwhelmingly bilingual or trilingual⁵⁹) students from Moldova and Ukraine have played a significant role in dealing with the Ukrainian refugee crisis: thousands of them acted as

⁵⁷ Source: Eurostat.

⁵⁸ See Toró Tibor – Kiss Tamás – Viorela Ducu. 2020. *Moldovans: insiders or outsiders. The situation of migrant workers in Romania*. Budapest: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

⁵⁹ Moldovan students are usually Romanian-Russian bilinguals, among those from Ukraine are Romanian-Russian (Odessa Oblast), Romanian-Ukrainian (Chernivtsi Oblast) bilinguals, as well as Romanian-Russian-Ukrainian trilinguals.



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translators or as operators in call centers (organized by the Federation of Young Bessarabians).⁶⁰ Currently, many are engaged in providing Romanian language classes to Ukrainian refugees.

Asylum seekers before Russia's war on Ukraine

The Ukrainian refugee crisis is unprecedented in Romania's post-World War II history. Prior to 24 February 2022, Romania was neither a major transit nor destination country for asylum seekers. During the previous decade, the number of asylum seekers rarely reached 2,000 persons, of which only one-third of asylum applications were evaluated positively (annual average). The number of asylum applicants increased considerably, however, during the COVID-19 pandemic (especially in February 2021) when the Balkan route of Middle Eastern and Asian migrants was disrupted and Romania temporarily became a transit (and also destination) country:

In 2015, the so-called refugee crisis in Europe was not really present in Romania. The number of asylum-seekers [did not grow] at all in our country. At that moment the Balkan routes [did not cross] Romania. But even in this context, we saw that Romania was not ready to accept the redistribution of refugees and to [maintain] solidarity with other European countries. The COVID-19 pandemic period, however, was much more interesting. Due to COVID-related restrictions and other factors, there was a slight modification of the migratory routes and one of the routes was through Serbia, the Western part of Romania and Hungary. The situation has become sensitive. In the context of COVID, it was not clear to local authorities who should quarantine these people. It was not allowed [for them] to be taken to IGI regional centers for asylum seekers, which would have been the solution under normal circumstances. Authorities played a kind of ping-pong with asylum seekers. This took some time and we saw an increase [in the number of] asylum seekers in 2020 and 2021. But these numbers cannot be compared with the numbers [related to] the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

(Interview with the representative of the Romanian National Council for Refugees)

⁶⁰ In Romanian: Federația Tinerilor Basarabeni (FTB). Author interview with FTB representative on 23 September 2022.

Table 9. Asylum applicants and positive decisions according to country, 2012-2021⁶¹

Country	Number of applicants	Positive decisions	
		Number	%
Total	18,540	7370	39.8
Syria	5135	4435	86.4
Afghanistan	2815	440	15.6
Iraq	2390	1105	46.2
Pakistan	1085	45	4.1
Algeria	875	0	0.0
Bangladesh	745	10	1.3
Morocco	655	0	0.0
India	470	0	0.0
Iran	465	120	25.8
Somalia	450	340	75.6
Turkey	420	45	10.7
Tunisia	285	0	0.0
Palestine	220	90	40.9
Eritrea	185	140	75.7
Egypt	175	30	17.1
Cameroon	175	10	5.7
Sri Lanka	160	0	0.0
Nigeria	120	0	0.0
Ukraine	120	45	37.5
Moldova	115	0	0.0
Yemen	110	90	81.8
Other countries or stateless	1370	425	31.0

In 2021 the number of asylum seekers reached 4100, the most numerous groups coming from Afghanistan (1375), Syria (605), Bangladesh (395), India (305), Pakistan (280), Somalia (190) and Morocco (100). Refugees were concentrated in the Western town of Timișoara and NGOs engaged in human rights advocacy for immigrants and refugees reported very harsh treatment of them and difficult conditions of accommodation.⁶²

⁶¹ Source: Eurostat

⁶² Author interview with a representative of National Council for Refugees in Romania (*Consiliul Național Român pentru Refugiați*). See also: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/unchr-romania-refugiații-fără-adăpost-adunați-la-timișoara-se-plâng-de-agresiuni/31115295.html>, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/unchr-romania-refugiații-fără-adăpost-adunați-la-timișoara-se-plâng-de-agresiuni/31115295.html>

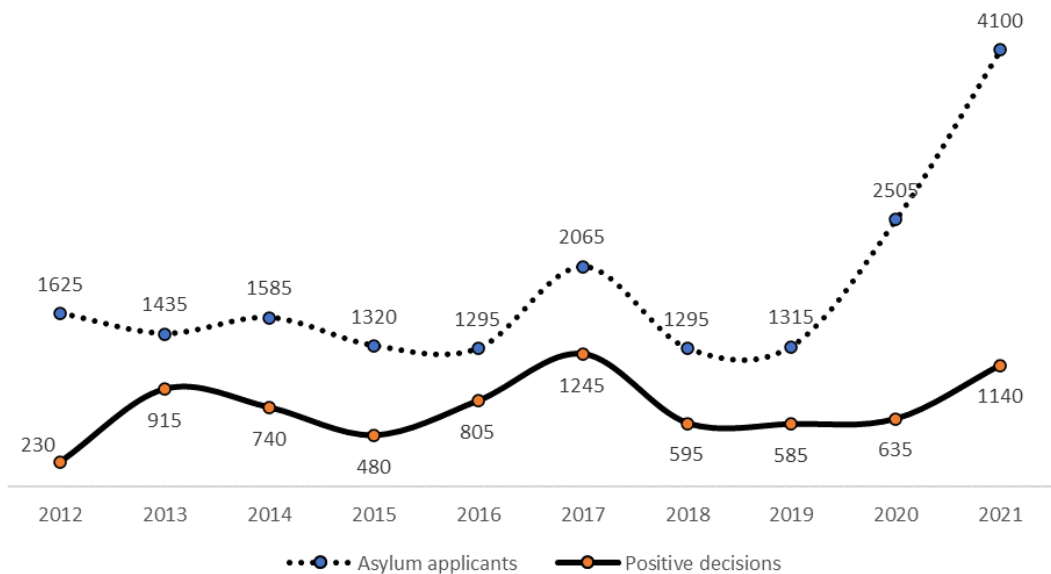


Figure 11. Asylum applicants and positive decisions in Romania between 2012 and 2021⁶³

The majority of asylum applications associated with this wave were ultimately rejected, especially of those individuals from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Morocco. It is true for the whole 2012-2021 period that applicants from countries considered war zones (Syria, Somalia, Eritrea, Yemen) had a chance of being awarded refugee status. One might emphasize that people applying for temporary protection go through a far simpler process compared to the standard asylum process. This is understandable, as temporary protection is a measure applied in situations of urgency when an extraordinarily high number of asylum seekers enter the country. Nevertheless, the standard asylum process is far too rigid and mirrors the lack of solidarity with asylum seekers from outside Europe.

Xenophobia is anyway much [less] in the case of Ukrainian citizens. No one would welcome other refugees at home, no one would pick them up from the border. My personal theory and experience is that this depends on religion. If a person is from Africa but is a Christian, it's ok. He is a good boy, a Christian, we welcome him. Although [he] is not Orthodox, [he] is still ours. If he is Muslim, this is a problem. Ukrainians are also Orthodox, and they are [there are many] women with children. This also counts. Additionally, they are victims of Russian aggression, and we viscerally hate Russians. (Interview with IOM representative)

2.2.2 Profiles of the different types of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine

In describing the demographic composition and profiles of Ukrainian refugees we rely on three data sources:

- (1) Statistical data provided by the General Inspectorate for Immigration;
- (2) Ongoing quantitative (survey-type) data collection carried out by UNHCR, REACH and their Romanian partner, the Romanian National Council for Refugees (CNRR);
- (3) Qualitative data extracted from interviews conducted with organizations in contact with Ukrainian refugees

⁶³ Source: Eurostat

Statistical data on temporarily protected persons

We received official data on the sex and age of beneficiaries of temporary protection from the General Inspectorate for Immigration. The same data, however, were also publicly available at Eurostat and could be compared with the data referring to asylum seekers between 2012 and 2021.⁶⁴ Based on this comparison, Ukrainian refugees are associated with specific characteristics. Thirty-eight percent of them were less than 18 years old, and 64 percent of them were women. In the case of previously displaced asylum seekers, men (81 percent) and those aged 18-35 (60 percent) were significantly overrepresented.

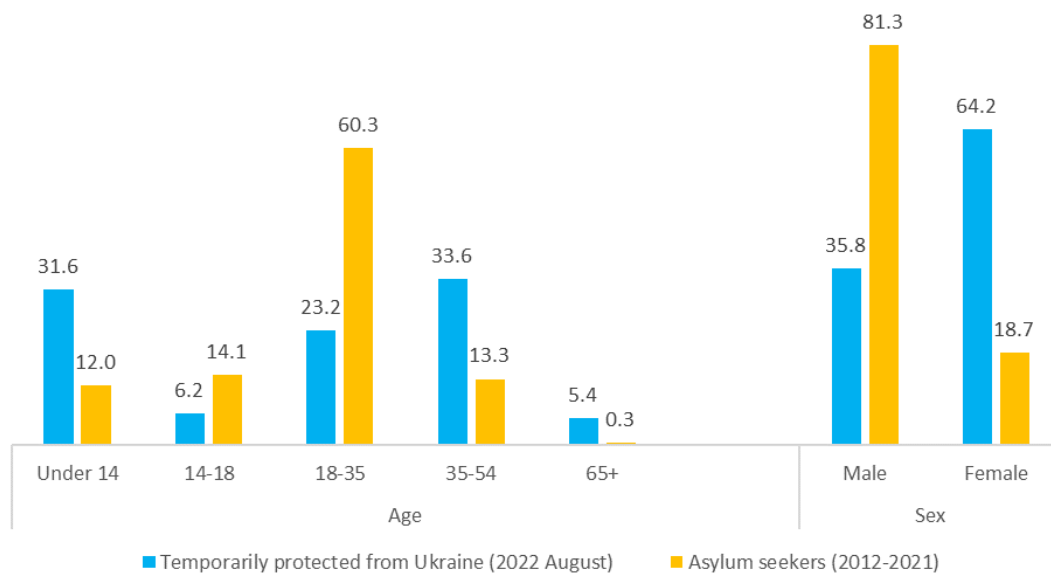


Figure 12. Distribution according to age and sex of beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine (in August 2022) and asylum seekers (between 2012 and 2021), (%)⁶⁵

Territorially, almost one-third of the beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine were residing in the capital city. Further, there were three areas of the country where Ukrainians were concentrated: namely, at the Eastern border (Constanța, Galați, Iași and Tulcea counties), at the Northern border (Maramureș and Suceava counties) and in Transylvania (Brașov, Cluj, Sibiu, Timiș and Covasna counties). There is a clear tendency for Ukrainians to reside in larger urban centers.

⁶⁴ These data are also publicly available at Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/data/database?p_p_id=NavTreeportletprod_WAR_NavTreeportletprod_INSTANCE_nPqeVbPXRmWQ&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view. Last accessed 27 September 2022.

⁶⁵ Source: General Inspectorate for Immigration; Eurostat.

Table 10. Temporarily protected persons (TP) from Ukraine according to county⁶⁶

City	County	No. of TP	% in total TP	City	County	No. of TP	% of total TP
Bucharest	Capital city	19 683	30.5	Cluj	Transylvania	1901	2.9
Constanța	Eastern border	6533	10.1	Iași	Eastern border	1868	2.9
Maramureș	Northern border	6387	9.9	Sibiu	Transylvania	1764	2.7
Galați	Eastern border	5822	9.0	Timiș	Transylvania	1560	2.4
Suceava	Northern border	3385	5.2	Covasna	Transylvania	1473	2.3
Brașov	Transylvania	2786	4.3	Tulcea	Eastern border	1431	2.2

Characteristics according to the UNCHR-CNRR survey

Another important data source should be mentioned – namely, the survey carried out by UNHCR, REACH, and their Romanian partner, the Romanian National Council for Refugees. This is a regular quantitative process of data collection that began in March 2022, focusing on the general social background, displacement characteristics, host country situation and intentions of Ukrainian refugees arriving in Romania. The last available version of this data collection⁶⁷ referred to the May-August 2022 period and was based on 3240 completed questionnaires. The interviews were conducted at border points, transit centers, collective and private sites of accommodation, community centers and other points in major cities. Data were collected randomly at these points; nevertheless, due to the characteristics of the research sites the investigated population represent neither the total population of Ukrainians entering the country (because those who remain for a longer period are clearly overrepresented) nor people applying for temporary protection in Romania (because transit migrants/refugees are also questioned at border points). The questionnaire referred to the adult population but also asked about minor-aged refugees. According to the survey (and similarly to official data), 63 percent of the refugees were female, and 39 percent were children.

⁶⁶ Source: General Inspectorate for Immigration.

⁶⁷ See <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782> (accessed 17.09.2022).

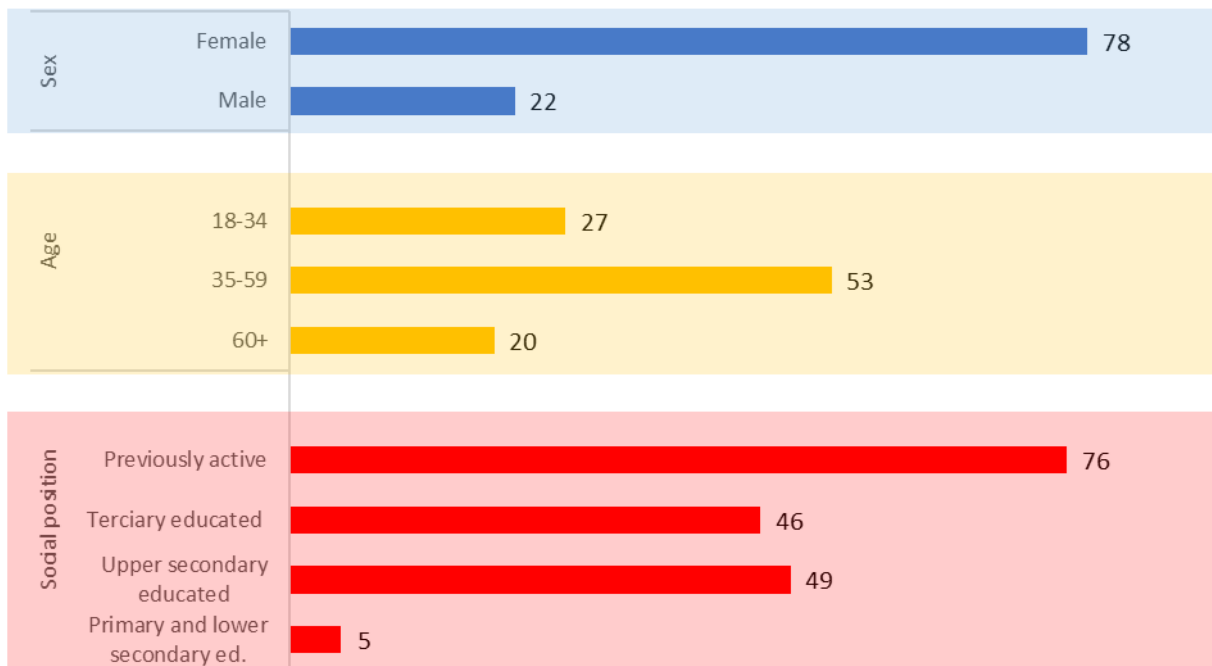


Figure 13. Ukrainian refugees according to sex, age, and social position (18+) (%)⁶⁸

According to the survey, 78 percent of adults fleeing Ukraine were females, 27 percent were between 18 and 34, 53 percent were between 35 and 59 years of age, and 20 percent were above 60 years. People with higher social status and the economically active were hugely overrepresented among refugees: 46 percent had completed tertiary education, 49 percent secondary education, and only 6 percent had only a primary or lower secondary education; while 76 percent of them were previously employed.

Generally speaking, they are well-off. But this has also changed [over] time. In the first period came the richest. There were people who could afford to pay for [a] hotel. Some of them didn't even accept being admitted for free. They paid maybe 50 percent, or they paid for the accommodation and we gave them [meals] for free. Then came more ordinary people but generally, they are well-off. For example, here in Cluj, there are many from Odessa. Some of them arrived here and then they called their friends and said that they can come to Cluj because it's a beautiful city and they found someone reliable to help them. And many people from Odessa came. For example, sailors' wives came to Cluj. The husbands were at sea and told their wives that they must leave. They are at sea for three months and then the next three months at home. And after the war, they came directly to Cluj, spent the three months here and went back to the sea from here. And now they are [going back and forth to] Romania. Otherwise, they could not leave Ukraine because they are under 50. (Interview with the representative of Phoneo Association)

It should be emphasized that well-off Ukrainians are hugely overrepresented among refugees, their (initial) social status generally being higher than the host society average. This is important because – as we will see – Romanian authorities and even practitioners in the field of migration tend to perceive such refugees as socially marginal, requiring projects designed for individuals from lower social strata.

⁶⁸ Source: UNHCR-CNRR survey (May-August 2022 dataset)



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Seventy-eight percent of the refugees were separated from other household/family members, the majority of them due to military conscription of male family members. Seventeen percent travelled alone. Among those accompanied by somebody, 83 percent travelled with close family members, 11 percent with extended family members and 21 percent with friends or neighbors (some people belong to more than one of these categories). Five percent of the refugees were accompanied by children not related to them.⁶⁹

Thirty-five percent left Ukraine during the first two months of the war, February and March 2022, representing the peak of arrivals. After these months, the flow became relatively even. Those coming from the southern part of Ukraine were overrepresented: 28 percent came from Odessa, 11 percent from Mykolaiv, and 4 percent from Kherson Oblast, while 15 percent came from Kyiv and its surroundings and only 11 percent from oblasts bordering Romania from the north (8 percent from Zakarpattia and 3 percent from Chernivtsi). There are no data to confirm this, but most probably those coming from Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi are overrepresented in the northern border counties of Maramureş and Suceava, while those coming from Odessa Oblast are overrepresented in the southeastern counties of Galaţi, Constanţa and Tulcea.

Qualitative and quantitative data on typical strategies of refugees

The UNHCR-CNRR survey investigated the *near future* intentions of Ukrainian refugees. According to the results, 53 percent of the investigated refugees wanted to stay in Romania, 23 percent planned to return to Ukraine, and 14 percent intended to move to another host country, while 10 percent were undecided. Those who wanted to stay in Romania were attracted by the safety of the country (50 percent), by easy asylum procedures (21 percent), and by the welcoming community, they found in Romania (6 percent). Employment and education possibilities were less frequently mentioned. Among those planning to return to Ukraine, family ties (the fact that the majority of them were separated from male household members) and the improvement of the situation in Ukraine were mentioned (38 and 15 percent). In most cases, however, the intended timeframe for returning remained uncertain. Those who planned to move to another country were motivated by existing family ties (26 percent), safety concerns in Romania (24 percent), and employment opportunities (24 percent). The latter were far more decisive about the timeframe: 75 percent of them wanted to move during the month the interview took place, Germany, Canada, and Poland being the most desired destination countries.

⁶⁹ Concerns about child protection are raised by children accompanied by adults who are not their relations.

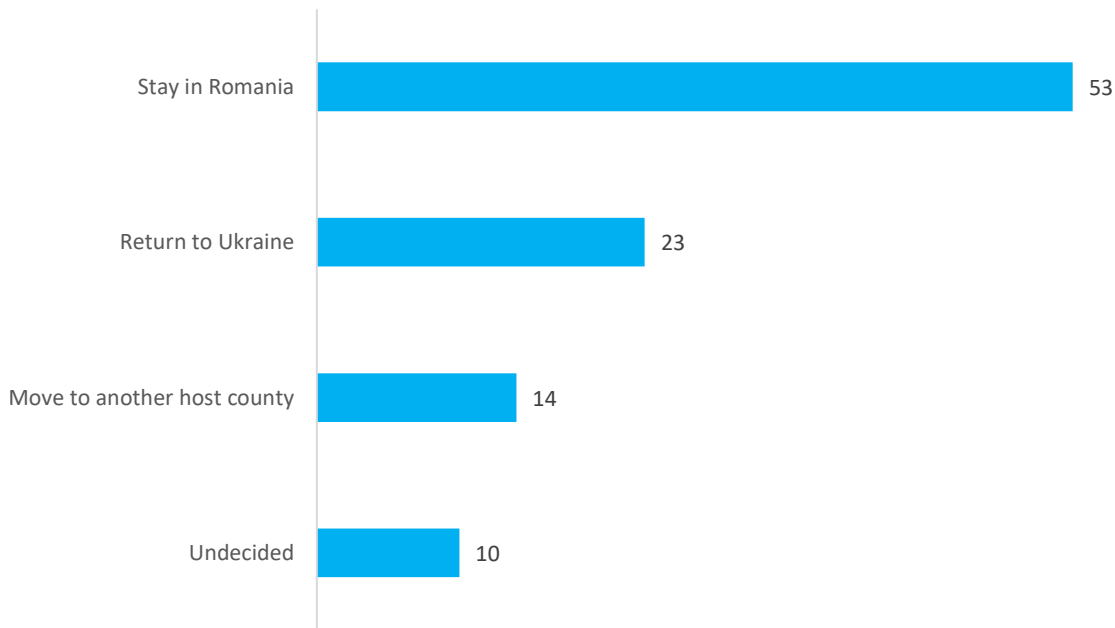


Figure 14. Near-future intentions of Ukrainian refugees (%)⁷⁰

Longer-term intentions are more complicated to measure due to high levels of uncertainty not only concerning the outcome of the war but also long-term prospects in Romania. The typology provided by the Lead Partner might be useful here. This typology distinguishes between four general strategies.

1. *Refugees who lack vision about the long term (do not know how long (s)he will stay, relying on ad hoc humanitarian services, mainly consider the period spent beyond the borders of Ukraine as a short-term temporary crisis situation);*
2. *Staying near the border waiting to return, often with frequent commuting across the border to look after kinship, housing, business;*
3. *Building up a dual lifestyle in both countries – e.g. entering jobs/education of kids, but open to returning anytime;*
4. *Left Ukraine for the long-term and using the ‘plug-in’ options that exist in the country.*

According to qualitative interviews, the third category is the most widespread. The majority of refugees are not completely undecided but are willing to build up a life in Romania in the mid-term. The majority are willing to be employed and earn a living and are interested in obtaining longer-term solutions for accommodation. Some of them enroll their children in the Romanian educational system, although this is a minority option and – also due to imperfect regulation – the vast majority opt to continue in the Ukrainian system online. Nevertheless, according to our interviewees, the overwhelming majority of refugees want to return and will most probably leave Romania. Linguistic and cultural barriers (compared, for instance, with those in other post-Soviet countries like Moldova) and the lack of opportunities (compared especially with Western countries) are mentioned.

Commuting strategies are less frequent, at least in larger urban centers far from Ukraine.

⁷⁰ Source: UNHCR-CNRR survey (May-August 2022 dataset)

“We still see many secondary movements in the case of our people. When it becomes safer in the region where they come from, they go there to fix some things. Or [they evaluate] whether it's safe to return. But these are generally short visits.” (Interview with representative of Anaid Association)

Such strategies are present, however, in the border region of Romania – in Sighetu-Marmației for example.⁷¹ It is well-known that large numbers of Ukrainians from the central and eastern parts of the country found refuge in Zakarpattia (a Ukrainian region bordering Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania), some of them in Solotvyno, a Ukrainian town next to the Romanian border. It happens that some members of the same family stay in Solotvyno, while others in Sighetu-Marmației maintain contact across the border. Such strategies may also occur in the also relatively safe Chernivtsi region (Ukraine).

2.3 Solutions for providing immediate and longer-term help for refugees

In order to understand Romanian policies for dealing with the refugee crisis, we start by reviewing the so-called “**National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine**” (referred to as the National Plan or NP in what follows). According to our interviews,⁷² this document was already drafted in mid-April but due to bureaucratic barriers, it was adopted as Governmental Ordinance only on 29 June.⁷³ The NP is a good starting point for our analysis, as it:

- (1) distinguishes between short- and long-term measures for protecting and integrating displaced persons;
- (2) enumerates policy domains of intervention;
- (3) specifies institutional actors responsible for short-term and long-term intervention in the case of each domain.

According to the National Plan, the measures of state authorities are coordinated by the **Department for Emergency Situations (DSU)**, a permanent body under the Ministry of Interior. One should mention that the DSU was also in charge of coordinating emergency measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that state reactions to the Ukrainian refugee crisis were developed on an institutional basis that had already been established. This is also true at the county level, where activities are coordinated by the so-called **County Committees for Emergency Situations (CJSU)**, activated during the COVID-19 pandemic and headed by the prefect (the county representative of the central government). At the municipality level, **Social Departments of Mayor’s Offices** are engaged in dealing with the situation of refugees and in several cases (most importantly, in larger urban centers) municipalities play an important role, although in general, it is prefects that effectively coordinate emergency activities.

One should mention an important general characteristic of the Romanian institutional system in terms of dealing with the refugee crisis. On the one hand, the system is highly centralized. Local elected bodies play a limited role, while local branches of central bodies coordinate county-level activities based on putatively uniform rules. On the other hand, however, institutional mechanisms and measures are loosely regulated, leaving large room for different local-level solutions.

In this respect, Iași County on the eastern border of Romania, which has received a relatively large number of Ukrainian refugees, is a telling example. In this country, a so-called Center for Social

⁷¹ Interview with representative of Caritas Satu Mare.

⁷² Autor interview with representative of the Romanian National Council for Refugees.

⁷³ See Governmental Ordinance No. 100/29 June 2022.



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Emergency was established during the COVID-19 pandemic with the active role of FONSS (*Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations in Social Services*). This was turned into a large community center for Ukrainians run by FONSS based on partnership with the Prefect's Office and the Mayor's Office of Iași. The role Mayor's Office was decisive as it put to use FONSS's 4000 m² floor-area former office building, which was renewed and transformed to accommodate Ukrainians and integrate social services provided for them. The Office of the Prefect does not support financially these efforts, but it agreed to leave crisis intervention at the responsibility of FONSS, effectively outsourcing related activities to an NGO. The Center for Social Emergency serving Ukrainian refugees opened on 24 March 2022 and has constantly accommodated 270 people since then. The center also provides meals, facilitates access to medical care, distributes cash, offers psychological assistance, and provides non-formal (not authorized) educational services for Ukrainian children that opt to continue their studies online in the Ukrainian system. The center has 50 employees, nine of whom were transferred from the Mayor's Office, and 41 who are paid by FONSS based on financing provided by international organizations (OXFAM, UNICEF, UNHCR, World Vision, Refugee Council, CRC). This means that in Iași the needs of Ukrainian refugees are served through a quite unique regime that is not replicated elsewhere in the county. This happened despite the theoretically quite centralized character of the coordinating mechanism.

Another interesting aspect is that international organizations (most importantly, UNCHR) are playing an important role by coordinating the efforts of Romanian state authorities and NGOs. According to the law, it is the Department for Emergency Situations which coordinates emergency activities. In reality, however, regular thematic sectorial meetings are organized by UNCHR, which effectively coordinates activities, at least at the national level. At the territorial (county) level, international organizations are not present (as they lack infrastructure and personnel), except for in several highlighted locations such as Bucharest and the above-mentioned Iași, Suceava, Galați, and Brașov. This also weakens effective coordination and leads to the feeling expressed by the Prefect of Cluj during an interview:

“Things are happening here, at the level of the county, without much interference from central authorities.”

The table below refers to sectorial policies according to the seven domains of intervention described in the National Plan. It also shows the responsibilities of institutions in relation to short- and long-term responses by domain.

Table 11. Domains of intervention associated with the National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine⁷⁴

Domain of intervention	Responsible institution	
	Short-term	Long term
“Transversal domain” (providing information for preventing human trafficking and abuse)	Prime Minister’s Office, Special Telecommunication Service (part of the intelligence agencies)	
Housing	County Committees for Emergency Situations	Ministry for Development, Public Work and Administration
Employment	National Labor Force Agency	
Education	Ministry of Education	
Health care	Ministry of Health, Department for	National Health Insurance House
Vulnerable groups	National Authority for the Protection of Rights of Disabled People	
Children and youth	National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights	

2.3.1 Immediate programs for providing accommodation and housing for refugees

The month following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine was the most intensive period of the refugee crisis in Romania. Many Ukrainians left for Western countries, using Romania only as a transit country. State authorities reacted relatively late. The first mobile camp was installed on 28 February, four days after the official outbreak of the war and weeks after the first refugees crossed the Romanian border. Nevertheless, NGOs, religious denominations, and many private individuals mobilized themselves remarkably, spontaneously helping with accommodating Ukrainian asylum seekers. State reactions were organized according to Governmental Ordinance 15/27 February 2022. It was this ordinance that specified that dealing with the refugee crisis is the responsibility of the Department for Emergency Situations and of County Committees for Emergency Situations. Following this, authorities created shared accommodation centers in public spaces (sports halls, cultural institutions, and dormitories of schools and universities). According to interviews, County Committees disposed of 30,000 such places at the country level in mid-March. According to Article 3 of GO 15/2022 *“in situations where persons included in Art 1. [e.g., Ukrainian refugees] are accommodated in other locations than those established by County Committees or the Committee of Bucharest Municipality for Emergency Situations, expenses related to accommodation and utilities can be reimbursed by the Department of Emergency Situations or its subordinated units.”* This meant practically that the Romanian state paid 230 lei for a night in a hotel, 80 lei for one in a private house, and 50 lei for one in a community center established by a Mayor’s Office.

The next important legislative act was Governmental Decision 336/11 March 2022 and Governmental Ordinance 20/23 March 2022. These laid down the legal bases of the so-called **“50/20 program,”** which has been of central importance concerning the accommodation of Ukrainians. Based on this program, homeowners hosting Ukrainians receive 50 lei per day per person for accommodation and utilities and 20 lei per person per day for meals. The total amount receivable for hosting one Ukrainian is 70 lei (or approximately 15 euros). In the case of a family or group of four, the daily payment is 280 lei (or 60 euros). The monthly amount is 2100 lei (more than 400 euros) for one person and 8400 lei (or 1700 euros) for a group of four. These payments are tax-free and need not be declared to fiscal authorities.

⁷⁴ Source: Governmental Ordinance No. 100/29 June 2022

Under the 50/20 project accommodating Ukrainians is more profitable for private persons than any other form of rent, including perhaps Airbnb. Another important factor is that NGOs and even local governments are eligible for reimbursement under similar conditions.

Reimbursements are transferred by local public authorities (social departments of Mayor’s Offices) without any standardized form of control. Consequently, there is no clear evidence of how payments are correlated with the eventual exit of beneficiaries from the country.

According to data provided by the Department for Emergency Situations, 87 million lei (or 18 million euros) was transferred to private persons between March and June, and an additional 20 million lei (or 4 million euros) to public institutions, NGOs, and economic actors. In June, the approximate number of beneficiaries accommodated through this renting scheme was 21 thousand. The number has certainly increased further by now.

Table 12. Payments made to private homeowners through the 50/20 program⁷⁵

	March-June	March	May	June	Estimated number (June)
Total	87,305,825	5,158,540	37,978,638	44,168,447	21,033
București-Ilfov	18,385,920	905,120	7,379,160	10,101,640	4810
Constanța	10,554,020	525,080	4,422,460	5,606,480	2670
Suceava	6,848,990	804,400	2,66,4590	3,380,000	1610
Cluj	5,61,1310	154,240	2,846,910	2,610,160	1243
Sibiu	4,909,730	331,120	2,068,650	2,509,960	1195
Brașov	4473900	195,400	1,584,688	2,693,812	1283
Maramureș	3542880	219,470	1,693,420	1,629,990	776
Iași	3368940	172,760	1,446,780	1,749,400	833
Prahova	3050390	146,400	1,524,910	1,379,080	657
Timiș	2288590	59,260	850,240	1,379,090	657
Tulcea	1808030	200,320	752,800	854,910	407

Our interviewees agreed that the 50/20 program was required, although they were also quite critical of it, mainly due to the lack of adequate control and large room for abuse by private homeowners:

*I don't think we could abolish this program without getting into a pretty bad housing crisis. The vast majority of Ukrainians stay at private rents through the 50/20 program. But what worries us is the lack of any mechanism [for monitoring] the housing conditions on the one hand, and how the hosts [spend] those 20 lei for food on the other. We quite frequently see situations when we are told that the host does not give anything for food and says that the 20 lei is actually for utilities. Or that Ukrainians are asked for a deposit of 800 euros, or that they have to sign [agreeing to not leave within] 6 months. **It's a program [through which] mildly abusive hosts receive some 'steroids'**. Unfortunately, the complaint and verification mechanisms are not clear either for the beneficiaries or for a good part of civil society. (Interview with Romanian National Council for Refugees representative)*

It is good that this money is given to Romanian citizens, because otherwise it would have been a much bigger scandal. A xenophobic scandal. This [xenophobia] is anyway much lower in the case of Ukrainian citizens. No one would welcome other refugees at home, no one would pick

⁷⁵ Source: Department for Emergency Situations (transmitted to profit.ro)

them up from the border. It's good that we also give them money for food and provide financial support. But the fact that money is given per person makes owners look for large families or groups. There was a case where there were six beds in one room. [...] Terrible! Some owners overcrowd them. At the same time, the 50/20 program disadvantages other renters. The owners want Ukrainians, and the rents have risen enormously. Okay, not only because of the 50/20 program, but that's one of the factors. (Interview with IOM representative)

Although the 50/20 program is the most important solution concerning short-term accommodation, several other schemes also exist. An increasing number of them have been included in the 50/20 program, as happened with the Social Emergency Centre run by FONSS in Iași. In this case, the Mayor's Office (the owner of the former office building transformed into a community center) receives the reimbursement.

Another project, independent of the 50/20 program, is the joint **IOM-Airbnb initiative**. This project covers Romania, Poland, Slovakia and the Republic of Moldova. Through it, Airbnb offered financing for accommodating Ukrainian refugees. Alongside Airbnb, IOM cooperates with other firms that offer accommodation in hotels or privately rented apartments. This is completed by another possibility – namely, “cash for rent”, whereby rental accommodation found by refugees is paid for by IOM. The project aims to accommodate Ukrainians for the short term (a maximum of 30 days). This period might be prolonged for three months in exceptional cases – for instance, in the case of people with disabilities, or elderly people. In Romania, approximately 1,500 people have been accommodated through the project. This method is safer than the 50/20 project, as private owners are registered by Airbnb and there are ratings for their services. Only owners with “good” and “very good” ratings are allowed to enter the program. The program was promoted through the Department for Emergency Situations too. During August, the demand for Airbnb rented apartments increased considerably. Since then, IOM has re-focused on accommodating vulnerable categories of refugees (single mothers with children, pregnant women, disabled, elderly, and traumatized persons who are victims of violence) through this project. They offer accommodation for several weeks until the beneficiaries find other forms of housing and/or employment. Among our interviewees, Caritas Satu Mare, the Cluj Committee for Emergency Situations, and Phoneo Association also ran smaller programs for temporary accommodation.

It is also worth mentioning the results of the UNHCR-CNRR survey. According to these data, half of the refugees were staying at state or civil society-provided accommodation sites (21 percent at collective sites; 20 percent at reception centers, 5 percent at transit centers and 4 percent at planned sites), and another half at privately owned dwellings (35 percent in hosting accommodation and 13 percent in rented accommodation). One percent answered that they did not have anywhere to stay (perhaps because they were interviewed immediately on arrival). However, we do not know exactly which of these forms of accommodation were included in the 50/20 program.

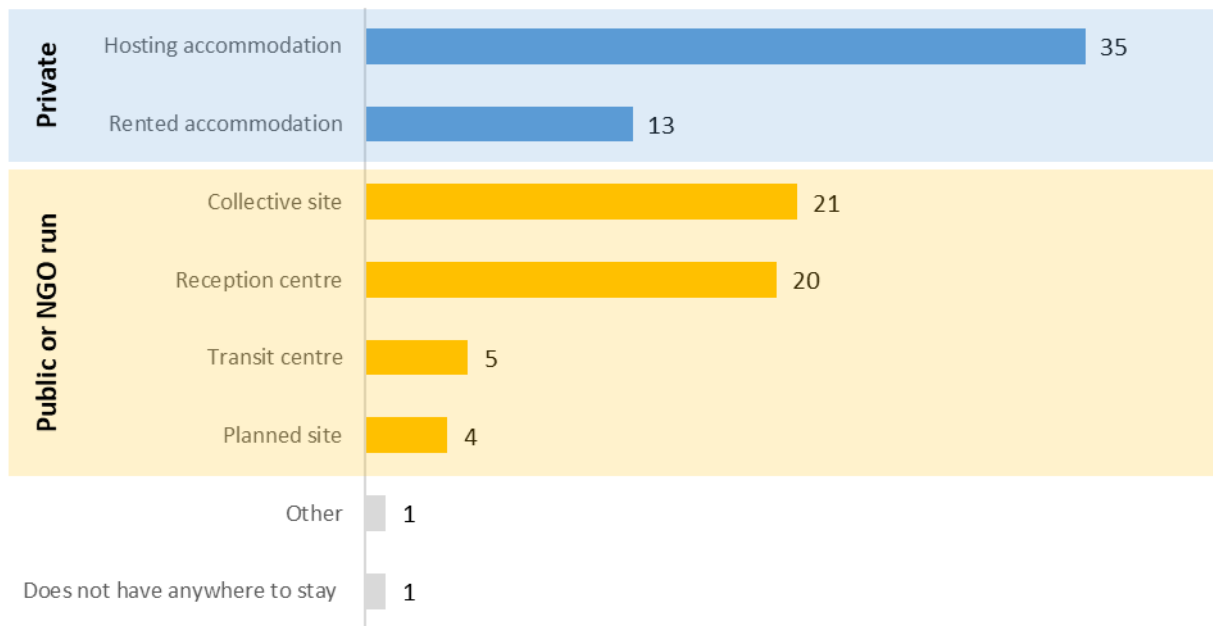


Figure 15. Current accommodation of Ukrainian refugees, as identified through the UNCHR-CNRR survey (%)⁷⁶

2.3.2 Longer-term, more permanent accommodation and housing solutions for refugees

Deficiencies of housing solutions envisioned by the National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine

Based on secondary analysis and interviews, one might argue that elaborating long- or even mid-term term housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees is in a rather incipient phase in Romania. In this sense, the National Plan distinguishes between four sets of measures, all of which revolves around the allocation of real estate owned by the state or by local governments. The four sets of measures are as follows:

1. Ensuring access to unallocated housing, built into the framework of the National Housing Agency's (NHA) Youth Housing Program, and Social- and Necessity Housing programs. This measure would involve as a first step the identification of houses and apartments built in the framework of the above-mentioned programs (financed directly by the state budget) that have been finalized but not yet allocated to beneficiaries. Second, a legal framework is ought to be created in order to make possible the allocation of these houses to Ukrainian beneficiaries, including the financial schema through which they are allocated (rents, rules concerning utility costs, etc.) and the criteria of allocation for persons from Ukraine. Third, a methodology that facilitates the occupation of state-owned houses should be created.
2. The second set of measures refers to ensuring access to unallocated housing owned by local public authorities and deconcentrated branches of central authorities and, additionally, of available private housing units. This set of measures includes the same steps as the previous one: e.g., identifying existing empty housing structures (both publicly and privately owned);

⁷⁶ Source: UNHCR-CNRR survey (May-August dataset)

creating the legal framework to make possible the access of Ukrainians to these housing structures; elaborating the rules of allocation.

3. Rehabilitation and reconstruction of unused buildings in public property. This includes the creation of a financial mechanism and the identification of unfinished or degraded buildings owned by the state.
4. The construction of necessity housing through the Social Housing program, according to Law 144/1996 and the methodology of the above-mentioned law (Governmental Decision 1275/2000).

The Ministry of Development, Public Work and Administration is responsible for all these measures. As for financing, European Union Funds have been specified and it is mentioned that the Romanian state budget (through the Ministry of Development, Public Work and Administration) might be used only if the spending is eligible for EU reimbursement.

Long-term visions of housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees as they figure in the National Plan are not only roughly sketched but are problematic and unrealistic in many respects:

First, unlike the majority of other domains of intervention, proposed housing solutions lack quantitative target indicators. One cannot find out how many empty housing units for each category are expected to be identified, or how many will be allocated. Similarly, we do not know until when the legislative framework and methodologies of allocation should be elaborated and adopted. The only tangible target indicator refers to the construction of necessity houses: it is mentioned that 1,000 such houses/apartments will be built.

Second, the National Plan admits that Ukrainians do not have access to the mainstream housing solutions that it enumerates (NHA Youth Housing, Necessity Housing and Social Housing). We know well from the interviews that the legislative framework for ensuring access to these housing solutions has not been created yet and it is unrealistic to think that it will be created in the near future.

Third, the National Plan revolves around publicly owned housing units. According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, however, in 2021 there were only slightly more than 118 thousand publicly owned housing units representing no more than 1.2 percent of the total stock. This included social housing units, necessity houses, and housing units built in the framework of the NHA Youth Housing project that were not privatized (yet) for the tenants.

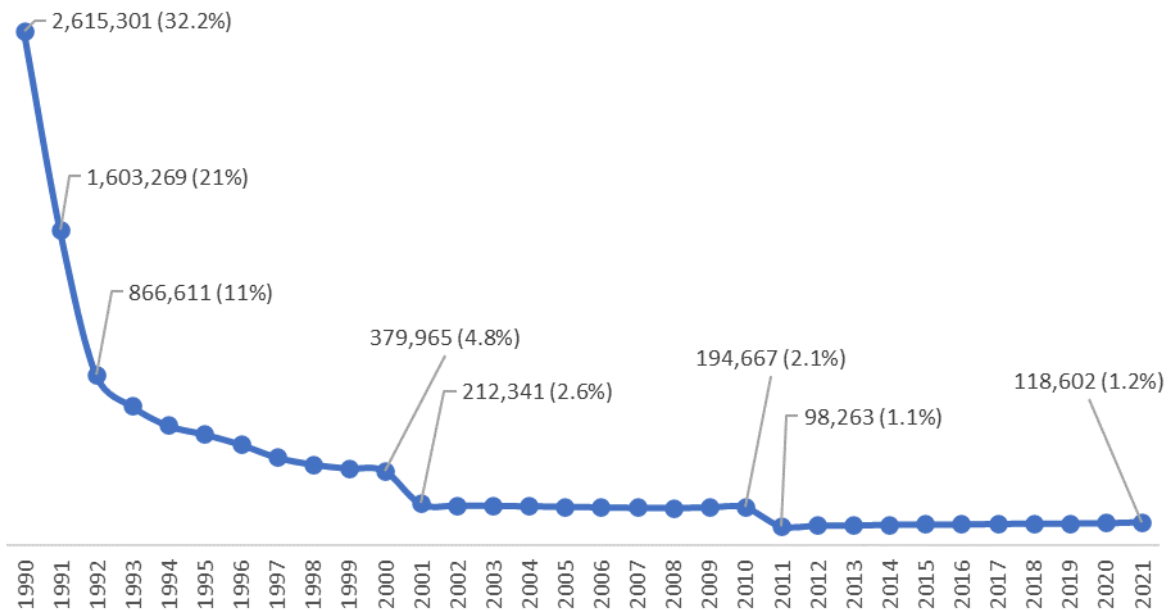


Figure 16. Number and proportion of publicly owned housing units between 1990 and 2021⁷⁷

The rather narrow public housing sector cannot meet the huge demand of Romanian citizens: there are rather long waiting lists for social, necessity or youth houses and under these circumstances it is highly unlikely that authorities would be able to allocate such accommodation to Ukrainians:

As for the Center for Social Emergency, we generated the maximum formula that we could generate from an office building, whereby we did some compartmentalization and improvement of conditions. But this is officially a transit camp. This is what I can say about this formula. As a long-term solution, community housing is probably not the best solution. Social housing would be the solution, probably. But that would mean a huge investment that I don't see who would make. There are many categories of Romanian citizens who do not benefit from social housing. When there is no social housing for Romanians either, it is unlikely that there will be for Ukrainians. (Interview with representative of FONSS)

Fourth, the NHA Youth Housing program is mentioned among the possible solutions. Nevertheless, there is an overemphasis on social- and necessity housing solutions. In Romania, this type of housing is of rather low prestige. Social and necessity houses are usually located in deteriorating and marginal areas of towns or in rare cases, villages. In many cases, they are actually located next to or inside compact Roma communities. As we saw, however, Ukrainians are mostly better off and of middle-class background, the vast majority of them with at least a secondary education. Including them in existing social housing schemes would barely be an adequate measure of inclusion, as it would mean for them a dramatic loss of social status and prestige.

Fifth, the National Strategy seems to be misplaced as mainstream housing programs are too loosely integrated into it. This is connected to the perception that Ukrainians (as newcomers and refugees) should be integrated through measures that target individuals of lower social strata. According to a

⁷⁷ Source: National Institute of Statistics (Tempo online)

2015 Report on Housing elaborated by the World Bank,⁷⁸ however, publicly financed mainstream housing solutions focus primarily on the middle and upper-middle strata. This is indirectly proved by the fact that the income threshold applied in the social housing program allows for the majority of Romanian citizens (except for the richest 10 percent) to apply for social housing.⁷⁹ Other schemes that finance housing target explicitly middle- or higher-income households. These include the Youth Housing program run by NHA (the only program that targets the middle classes mentioned in the National Plan), the Prima Casa (First House) loan guarantee, and the BauSpar a loan subsidy. Our argument is that due to the implicit perception of Ukrainians as being marginal, the National Plan insists on housing schemes that target the lower strata and does not consider those that target middle-income households.

The following table summarizes relevant mainstream housing schemes and indicates whether they might be of value in the case of Ukrainians. The table enumerates them according to the budget allocated to each of them in decreasing order.

Table 13. Mainstream Housing schemes to be considered in the case of Ukrainians⁸⁰

	Households targeted	When did it start?	Relevant for Ukrainians?	Mentioned in NP?
Prima Casa	Middle-income, Young	2009	Yes	No
NHA Youth Housing	Middle-income, Young	2005	Yes	Yes, marginally
BauSpar	Middle-income	2005	Yes	No
Social Housing	Lower-income	-	Yes	Yes
Evicted tenants	Mixed but mostly lower-income	2008	No	No
Combating marginalization through housing	Lower-income	2008	No	No
Roma housing	Lower-income	2010	No	No
Necessity Housing	Lower-income	2005	Yes	Yes

Prima Case is a loan guarantee that serves to help lower-income but creditworthy and longer-term solvent households, especially young ones. One should mention that the situation of middle-class Ukrainians who decide to integrate into Romanian society is quite similar to that of young people at the beginning of their careers. They still earn below the medium income but this might improve rapidly, especially if their housing problems are solved through a mortgage guarantee program under favorable conditions. The Prima Casa program was modified several times, but in essence, it made possible the buying of lower-priced apartments. An additional (or maybe the main) goal of the project was to revitalize the mortgage and housing market after its collapse in 2008. Making it possible for Ukrainians to buy such apartments may lead to them being located outside major urban centers (prices in large cities are much higher now than in 2009 when the project started). BauSpar was a mortgage subsidy

⁷⁸ World Bank. 2015: *Housing in Romania. Toward a National Strategy*. Bucharest: World Bank – Romania Regional Development Program.

⁷⁹ The income threshold in 1866 lei (380 euro) per person. See *ibid*: 169.

⁸⁰ Source: National Institute of Statistics (Tempo online); World Bank 2015: 170

program that also distributed significant funds in the form of subsidies to savers. This also targeted middle-income families.⁸¹

The NHA Youth Housing Construction targets people younger than 35 years. Unlike the social housing program, this project is not income targeted. In this project, blocks of flats were constructed on plots provided free of charge by local authorities. Apartments were rented to tenants selected by local authorities according to some (mostly non-social) criteria of selection for below-market rent. No time limit for staying in these apartments was introduced, which disincentivized tenants from moving in, especially in larger urban centers where rents were high.⁸² Another problem is that ultimately the rental stock that was for the benefit of actual tenants was sold, but this did not help further generations with resolving their housing problems.

Social and necessity housing programs might also be a solution for certain categories of Ukrainian refugees. Social housing conditions should be improved, however, and they do not constitute an ideal solution in the case of families with a middle-class background.

Housing solutions suggested by our interviewees

So-called long-term solutions suggested during the interviews were even more decoupled from mainstream housing schemes available for Romanian citizens. In the case of state authorities, some NGOs and even in the interview with an IOM representative, the perspective was not to integrate Ukrainians using the options available to Romanian citizens but to channel them toward housing solutions and integration projects available for asylum seekers in general.

In this respect, the subsidized mid-term renting program for refugees was presented as a “long-term solution” for Ukrainians. Asylum-seekers and refugees are allowed to stay in one of the six refugee centers run by the General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI) for 12 months after they have received refugee or subsidiary protection status. Such centers are located in Bucharest, Timișoara (Timiș County), Giurgiu (Giurgiu County), Galați (Galați County), Rădăuți (Suceava County) and Șomcuta Mare (Maramureș County). On 20 September 2022, the number of places available at these centers was 876, 35 percent of which were occupied. In these regional centers, only four Ukrainian citizens were accommodated on 19 September 2022, as they could be accommodated in the centers only if they had opted for the standard asylum procedure. If more than 90 percent of the places available in regional centers are occupied (and this would be the case if Ukrainians were massively channeled toward the centers) IGI will provide the necessary material resources required for refugees to rent an apartment. Refugee housing and other types of assistance is conditioned on attending social integration programs, where the Romanian language is taught and other activities are carried out. According to the following interview fragment, such measures conditioned by integration programs could be a “long-term solution”:

Concerning accommodation, I would think in terms of integration. Social assistance and accommodation should be conditioned for integration. Generally speaking, it does not sound good to condition social assistance in relation to integration, but in this case, they have already been with us a long time – almost one year, half a year. They should be pushed, like other

⁸¹ World Bank. 2015: *Housing in Romania. Toward a National Strategy*. Bucharest: World Bank – Romania Regional Development Program.

⁸² Ibid.



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immigrants, to participate in integration programs. [Learning] the Romanian language would be of utmost importance. They should become aware that they should integrate and they have to find courage. They lack the courage to interact with Romanian citizens precisely because of the language barrier. Anyway, they should be pressured to integrate a little. The existing programs do not really pressure them to integrate, to do something. Many are employed but they do not really bother to learn the Romanian language. They don't really send their kids to Romanian schools but they stay in the Ukrainian system. (Interview with IOM representative)

Others do not consider the asylum procedure and refugee integration to be a desirable framework but they also think that some kind of improved and supported rental program could be a long-term (or at least a mid-term) solution as – realistically – social- and necessity housing is not available and schemes that target the middle classes are not considered:

A sustainable option would be something similar to the 50/20 program but with the amendment of the government ordinance because there are several problems regarding the lack of standards for private accommodation. If you have standards for public institutions and NGOs, you must also have accommodation standards for private owners too. The present situation makes room for tricksters who want to earn money in this situation. Human standards should be [defined]. Some normal conditions should be created. Additionally, a signed commitment should be introduced that gives the Ukrainians these 20 lei. It's great that you give food, but what kind of food, when and in what quantity. If this is not written down, the Ukrainians will be not in a position of power to bargain with the owner about these issues. If the Ukrainian does not agree, she can leave. The delays [in] the subsidies constitute another problem. The owner should provide meals before the transfers. This means that he should credit the Ukrainians. So, I see the solution as follows: imposing minimum standards for accommodation, [checks] should be made by authorities in cases when many people stay at the same address, and, additionally, the Ukrainians should receive the amount of money for food in the form of cash. It remains a discussion whether these subsidies should be conditional on learning the Romanian language and taking steps toward integration, and whether they should be conditional on the situation of the beneficiaries. These remain discussions to which we need to find some answers. (Interview with FONSS representative)

Another suggestion is to accommodate them outside the major urban centers. This was a recurrent issue that appeared both in interviews undertaken in Bucharest and Cluj.

When we received requests for accommodation, we tried to accommodate them outside Bucharest. [But] the vast majority stay in Bucharest. This is what they want and we were not able to convince them. We tried to disperse them throughout the countryside. That's just how they would be able to integrate. In Bucharest, they stay and form their own networks of Ukrainians. I admit that they must have the support of their own community. But in Bucharest can happen what happened in Colentina, where we have a concentration of Syrians and Arabs. They stay there, they speak Arabic among themselves. (Interview with IOM representative)

2.4 Other services to ensure integration

We start our discussion about access to other services using the relevant results of the UNHCR-CNRR survey which asked Ukrainian refugees about the information they would need and about their most immediate needs.

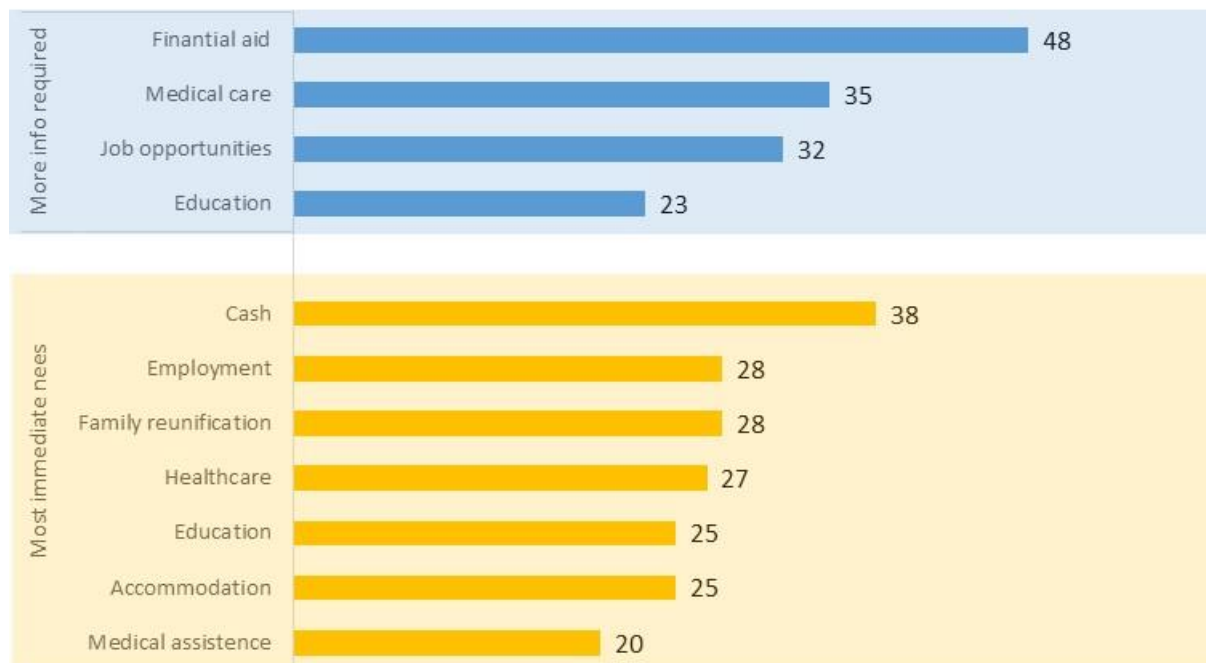


Figure 17. Lack of information by domain and most immediate needs of Ukrainian refugees (%)⁸³

According to the results, lack of financial aid (cash) seemed to be the most urgent problem: 38 percent declared that cash is their most important need, and 48 percent claimed that they lack information concerning the opportunity to obtain financial aid. Healthcare and medical assistance, employment and education also seemed to be more problematic domains than accommodation both concerning the accessibility of information and satisfaction of urgent needs. Twenty-eight percent declared that their most immediate need is employment, 27 percent healthcare, and 25 percent education. They required more information concerning medical care (35 percent), job opportunities (32 percent) and education (23 percent). Accommodation was an urgent need for 25 percent but only 10 percent required more information concerning this domain.

As already mentioned (see Table 7), the beneficiaries of temporary protection can receive food, clothes, hygiene and other products at reception centers. Their accommodation is covered by the governmental budget indirectly through reimbursement for the private homeowners or institutions that host them (for an unspecified period). However, they do not have taken-for-granted access to cash provided by public authorities. Unlike asylum seekers and refugees during the first 12 months following the recognition of their status, they do not receive any direct social benefits in cash. Additionally, identity documents provided for temporarily protected people do not contain addresses (also unlike in the case of asylum seekers and refugees). This means that this group of refugees cannot

⁸³ Source: UNHCR-CNRR survey (May-August 2022 dataset)

access the minimum guaranteed wage or any other social benefit distributed by local municipalities (for those having residence in the given administrative unit).

Several NGOs, such as the Romanian Red Cross and FONSS, distribute cash to their Ukrainian clients. Additionally, a larger-scale cash-distribution program is run by UNCHR. This is short-term financial cash assistance for meeting the basic needs of eligible Ukrainian refugees. Eligible recipients receive 568 RON per person⁸⁴ per month for a period of three months. The project primarily targets temporarily protected persons but those who stay for a short term (with a valid Ukrainian passport) are also eligible. Cash assistance is not automatically granted to everyone. Only families with disabled members, single parents with children, families headed by persons above 60 years, pregnant women and single women can receive financing through this project. Another problem is that in order to enter the program, a personal appointment is needed at one of the five UNCHR regional offices (based in Bucharest, Iași, Galați, Suceava and Brașov), meaning that vast areas of the country are not covered.

In the case of medical services, there is a difference in access among Ukrainians with different legal statuses. One should emphasize that in Romania there is no universal medical insurance or access to health care services. Medical insurance is mandatory for those formally employed, while minors, students, pensioners, people receiving a minimum guaranteed wage, and the registered unemployed also receive automatic access to free-of-charge medical services. Large categories of Romanian citizens (those engaged in the large subsistence agricultural sector, the informally employed, migrant workers, home workers, the unregistered unemployed and other inactive categories), however, are not medically insured and have much more limited access to healthcare services. They receive only emergency medical assistance in hospitals and treatment for acute/chronic illnesses that put their lives at immediate risk.

Table 14. Forms of medical assistance for displaced Ukrainians according to their legal status

	Medical insurance	Without medical insurance
Form of access	Free-of-charge access to large-scale medical services	Limited access: emergency assistance, treatment for chronic/acute illness in case of immediate risk
Categories of Romanian citizens	Formally employed, minors, students, pensioners, registered unemployed, recipients of minimum wage	Subsistent agricultural sector, informally employed, migrant workers, home workers, unregistered unemployed, other inactive
Categories of Ukrainian refugees	Temporary protection, short-term stay	Standard asylum applicants and refugees

Paradoxically (but fitting with the logic of Romanian legislation), different categories of Ukrainian refugees receive different types of medical assistance. Those staying for the short-term or receiving temporary protection are eligible – at least theoretically – for the same medical assistance as Romanian citizens with medical insurance. For asylum seekers and refugees, however, only limited access is granted to medical services, similar to Romanian citizens without medical insurance. In other words, neither the status of asylum seekers nor that of refugees grants automatic medical insurance, while the status of temporary protection does.⁸⁵ Refugees may receive medical insurance only if they belong to one of the categories provided with insurance, as in the case of Romanian citizens (e.g., they become

⁸⁴ 120 euros, according to the exchange rate of the Romanian National Bank on 15 September 2022.

⁸⁵ Although refugee status means stronger legal status than having Temporary Protection.

employed, are of minor age, are students, registered as unemployed, or receiving the minimum guaranteed wage).

Besides formal inequalities of access, several practical problems were emphasized by our interviewees. First, the National House of Health Insurance has created a separate register for temporarily protected Ukrainians which can be accessed by general practitioners, pharmacists and hospitals through a separate platform. To access this platform, specific software should be installed on the computers of the medical personnel who are often not willing or able to deal with such technical issues. This creates severe practical barriers to accessing healthcare services for many Ukrainian citizens.

Another problem is that certain sectors of the Romanian healthcare system are hugely overloaded and in strong demand. Especially in the case of those categories requiring permanent assistance (the disabled, elderly people, those with mental health problems), there are long waiting lists. The Romanian system is practically unable to receive and serve the Ukrainian citizens in these categories:

There are two systemic problems that exist and affect Romanian citizens too. First of all, the healthcare system faces serious difficulties. Romanians also face severe difficulties [obtaining] services in certain areas. Second, there are even more serious problems [with] accommodating certain categories [of people] requiring long-term treatment or care. For instance, elderly people, people with serious mental health issues, and people with disabilities [can] hardly find accommodation and reception in existing centers. The system is unable to provide even for Romanian citizens. It is overloaded. With the refugees from Ukraine, the situation became even worse. Some senior centers were closed down to be turned into shelters for Ukrainians, for Ukrainians with disabilities. This puts a strain on services that were not good anyway. There are certain NGOs that are helping Ukrainians, but this is not enough because there are many people with disabilities. The system cannot receive them. (Interview with IOM representative)

After some time, needy people began to arrive. We had to receive people whom we could not help. I accommodated them for one night, but I could not do this forever because they were people with disabilities who needed 24-hour assistance per day. There is a large Pentecostal church in Chernivtsi and they received lots of people in the basement of the church. Then they sent the worst ones here. I didn't say no to anyone. But I saw that I could not cope with this. I announced [this to] the authorities but they did not want to take them over. They asked me why I [had] brought such people here. It was shocking for me. It's a war for God's sake and there was a man [whose both legs were cut]. He did not lose his legs during the war but earlier. And people in very difficult situations who needed care. I, [being in charge of a hotel], could not offer such a thing. I do not have staff for this. I took them to a refugee reception center. They did not want to receive them there. [Why], I asked!? You must receive them! It's a reception center! I requested social protection, I talked to the director, and they finally found some places in Mărăști [a neighborhood in Cluj] in an elderly people's home. [...] But the problem of disabled people is not solved at a systemic level. The director told me that they do not have places even for Romanians. There is a long waiting list. Refugees with disabilities might end up in the streets. But I think this cannot happen. It is a war zone! Something should be done! But there is no institutional solution for them. (Interview with Phoneo Association representative)

3 Evaluation of the “gap” between the needs of refugees and housing solutions (complemented with social services)

On the one hand, the so-called “**National Plan of Measures for the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine**” (National Plan or NP) is a good starting point for mapping the Romanian system of protection applicable to refugees from Ukraine. The document lists policy domains, distinguishes between short- and long-term measures in each domain, and specifies the institutional actors responsible for intervention. On the other hand, field research (interviews with officials and practitioners) provided the needed insight into the real functioning of different measures. Based on these factors, we have tried to identify gaps in service provision for Ukrainians protected by the Romanian state and to identify conflicts between their needs and the services they receive.

Coordination of measures targeting Ukrainian refugees

- Measures of state authorities are coordinated by the **Department for Emergency Situations (DSU)**, a permanent body under the Ministry of Interior. At the county level, activities are coordinated by County **Committees for Emergency Situations (CJSU)**, headed by the prefect (the county representative of the central government). On the one hand, DSU (and CJSUs) proved to be a good organizational choice. These bodies coordinated emergency measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that state reactions to the Ukrainian refugee crisis were developed on an institutional basis that had already been established. On the other hand, this structure replicated the general ill-functioning and anomalies of the Romanian administrative system. This system is, at the same time, highly centralized and loosely regulated. Centralization means that local elected bodies play a limited role while local branches of central bodies coordinate county-level activities based on putatively uniform rules. Institutional mechanisms and measures are, however, loosely regulated, leaving ample room for different local-level solutions that are ad hoc and unaccountable. Consequently, Ukrainians who find accommodation in other parts of the country receive quite different housing services. Iași was a telling example in this respect. While the general rule is that refugees are accommodated by private owners in Iași, a large accommodation and community centre was established. The center provides meals, facilitates access to medical care, distributes cash, offers psychological assistance, and provides non-formal (non-authorized) educational services for Ukrainian children who have opted to continue their studies online in the Ukrainian system. This happens despite the theoretically relatively centralized character of the coordinating mechanism.
- The role of international organizations, such as IOM and UNCHR, is also rather controversial. They play an important role in coordinating the efforts of Romanian state authorities and NGOs, in some cases even superseding state actors. According to the law, it is the DSU that coordinates emergency activities. In reality, however, regular thematic sectorial meetings are organized by UNCHR, which effectively coordinates activities. However, international organizations are not present at the territorial (county) level (as they lack infrastructure and personnel), except in several highlighted locations, such as Bucharest, or Iași, as mentioned above. This weakens coordination and (together with loose coordination of activities) leads to the feeling that county-level authorities are left alone in dealing with the situation on the ground.

Accommodation and housing provided for Ukrainian refugees

Although state authorities reacted relatively late, they proved to be relatively effective at finding a short-term solution to the problem of accommodating and housing Ukrainian refugees. However, the provision of long-term affordable accommodation remains a challenging issue to be resolved.

- The so-called **“50/20 program”** is of central importance concerning the short-term accommodation of Ukrainians. Based on this program, house owners who host Ukrainians receive 50 lei per day per person for accommodation and utilities and 20 lei per person per day for meals. The total amount received for one hosted Ukrainian is 70 lei (or approximately 15 euros). These incomes are tax-free and need not be declared to fiscal authorities. Consequently, accommodating Ukrainians under the 50/20 program is more profitable for private persons than earning income from any other form of rent, including Airbnb.
- The 50/20 program was a needed solution. However, it lacks adequate control and leaves ample room for abuse by private homeowners. Adequate control mechanisms are required to monitor housing conditions. In many cases, the 20 lei that is awarded for food is not spent for this purpose. A better solution would be to transfer it directly to the refugees instead of the host. Complaint and verification mechanisms should also be clarified.
- Another problem is that the 50/20 program is hardly sustainable in the long term. Homeowners are overpaid. According to data provided by the Department for Emergency Situations, 87 million lei (or 18 million euros) was transferred to private persons between March and June, and an additional 20 million lei (or 4 million euros) to public institutions, NGOs, and economic actors. In June, the approximate number of beneficiaries accommodated through this rental scheme was 21,000. Their number has undoubtedly increased since then.
- The current system allows Ukrainians to reside in large urban centres. Almost one-third of the beneficiaries of temporary protection from Ukraine reside in the capital city. Additionally, Ukrainians were concentrated in three areas of the country: namely, near the Eastern border (Constanța, Galați, Iași, and Tulcea counties), the Northern border (Maramureș and Suceava counties) and in Transylvania (Brașov, Cluj, Sibiu, Timiș, and Covasna counties). In the long term, their accommodation in smaller towns or rural areas would be less expensive. Nevertheless (given the deficiencies of public transportation in Romania), such a solution would create barriers to their access to the labor market and, consequently, their long-term prospects of integration into Romanian society.
- The elaboration of long- or even mid-term term housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees is at a rather incipient phase in Romania. The National Strategy revolves around the allocation of real estate owned by the state or local governments, including houses built within the framework of the National Housing Agency’s (NHA) Youth Housing Program and Social- and Necessity Housing programs. It also prescribes the construction of necessity houses. This vision is problematic and unrealistic in the following respects:
 - The proposed solutions lack quantitative target indicators. One cannot determine how many empty housing units for each category are expected to be identified or how many will be allocated. We lack information concerning the methodology and timespan of allocation.
 - In reality, Ukrainians do not have access to housing solutions enumerated by the NP. For instance, NHA Youth Housing, Necessity Housing, and Social Housing programs require ID cards with an address that beneficiaries of temporary protection lack.

Consequently, access to this housing solution has not been organized yet, and it is unrealistic to think that it will occur soon.

- Publicly owned housing units represent no more than 1.2 percent of the total housing stock (including social housing, necessity houses, and housing units built within the framework of the NHA Youth Housing project mentioned in the NP). Demand for participation in the relatively small public housing sector by Romanian citizens outstrips supply, and it is highly unlikely that authorities will be able to allocate such accommodation to Ukrainians.
- There is an overemphasis on social- and necessity housing solutions, while this type of housing is of relatively low prestige in Romania. Social and necessity houses are usually located in deteriorating and marginal areas of towns, in many cases located next to or inside compact Roma communities. This solution is culturally and socially inadequate for Ukrainians. It should be emphasized that well-off Ukrainians are hugely overrepresented among refugees, with their (initial) social status generally higher than the average of the host society. This is important because Romanian authorities and even practitioners in the field of migration tend to perceive them as socially marginal, requiring projects designed for lower social strata.
- The National Strategy is also misplaced from the perspective of mainstream housing programs and loosely integrated into them. Publicly financed mainstream housing solutions focus primarily on middle and upper-middle strata. Prima Case, for instance, is a loan guarantee that serves to help lower-income but creditworthy and longer-term solvent households, especially young ones. Middle-class Ukrainians who decide to integrate into Romanian society are quite similar from this perspective to young people at the beginning of their careers. They still receive below the median income, but this might improve rapidly, especially if their housing problems are solved through a mortgage-guarantee program under favorable conditions.

Other services

- One immediate problem is that the identity documents provided for temporarily protected people do not contain an address. Lacking an address, the latter do not have access to social benefits (such as the Minimum Guaranteed Wage) and several housing solutions, such as the Youth Housing Program and the social and necessity houses mentioned in the NP.
- Beneficiaries of temporary protection can receive food, clothes, hygiene products, and other equipment at reception centres. In addition, the cost of their accommodation is indirectly covered by the government budget through reimbursements for the private house owners or institutions that host them. However, they do not have taken-for-granted access to cash provided by public authorities.
- In Romania, there is no universal medical insurance, and those without it have limited access to medical services (only emergency services and treatment of chronic illnesses in the case of immediate risk). Different categories of Ukrainian refugees receive various types of medical assistance. Those staying for short term or receiving temporary protection are eligible for – at least theoretically – the same medical assistance as Romanian citizens with medical insurance. However, asylum seekers and refugees have only limited access to medical services, similar to Romanian citizens without medical insurance. In other words, neither the status of asylum



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seeker nor that of refugee grants automatic medical insurance, while the status of temporary protection does.

- Several practical problems characterize the situation of those receiving temporary protection too. The National Health Insurance House created a separate register for temporarily protected Ukrainians which general practitioners can access. To access this platform, however, specific software should be installed on the computers of the medical personnel. This creates severe practical barriers to healthcare access for many Ukrainian citizens. Further, particular sectors of the Romanian healthcare system are hugely overloaded and demand outstrips supply. There are long waiting lists, especially for individuals who require permanent assistance (the disabled, elderly people, and those with mental health problems). As a result, the Romanian system cannot receive and serve Ukrainian citizens in these categories.

4 Main lessons and recommendations

Coordination of measures that target Ukrainian refugees

- If the centralized structure for coordination, composed of the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) and County Committees for Emergency Situations (CJSU), remain in charge of services provided for Ukrainians, their functioning should be more tightly regulated.
- The role of international organizations should be rethought. Although they play an important and innovative role in coordinating the efforts of Romanian state-territorial (county) level and national-level authorities, the same services could be provided to each Ukrainian citizen that benefits from temporary protection irrespective of their place of accommodation.

Accommodation and housing provided for Ukrainian refugees

Short-term solutions for accommodation should be better monitored and regulated, and, in parallel, Romania should work on delivering long-term solutions for accommodation for Ukrainian refugees.

- The **“50/20 program”** should be adequately monitored to prevent abuses by private homeowners. Adequate mechanisms should be put in place to monitor housing conditions, while compensation payment for food should be transferred directly to Ukrainians. Complaint and verification mechanisms should also be clarified.
- More sustainable solutions should be found, even for the short-term accommodation of Ukrainian citizens.
- Long-term housing solutions should be elaborated more realistically, taking into account pre-existing mainstream housing solutions.
 - The proposed solutions should include measurable target indicators, a description of the methodology, and the timespan of allocation.
 - Access to the proposed housing solutions should be ensured. For instance, ID cards with an address should first be issued to facilitate access to NHA Youth Housing, Necessity Housing, and Social Housing programs.
 - More emphasis should be put on culturally and socially adequate housing solutions, mainly those targeting the middle and upper-middle strata. Prima Case, for instance, could be a good solution for some Ukrainian families.

Other services

- Identity documents with an address should be provided to facilitate access to social benefits such as the Minimum Guaranteed Wage and several housing solutions, such as the Youth Housing Program and social and necessity houses mentioned in the NP.
- Cash provided by public authorities and not (only) by NGOs and international organizations presently lacks a nationwide distribution network.
- Practical problems that hinder access to medical care should be solved. For example, Ukrainians might be integrated into the general health insurance register, facilitating real access to healthcare services.