



Rapid Gender Analysis Brief Ukrainian Refugees in Romania



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Introduction

Since the escalation of the war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, there has been an outpouring of kindness, solidarity and support in the form of basic goods and services from the Government and people of Romania to Ukrainian refugees.

As of 1 June 2022, 1,098,326 Ukrainians refugees have arrived in Romania. Of these, only 84,470 (7.7 per cent) have remained in Romania.¹ Of those arriving in Romania, 54 per cent are adult women, 32 per cent are children and 14 per cent are adult men. The top five counties hosting refugees are Bucharest, Constanta, Brasov, Galati and Iasi.

This Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) brief highlights the most significant gender and protection issues for refugees from Ukraine in Romania and sets out key recommendations to address them. The RGA brief was conducted jointly by **CARE/SERA, the Federation for Child Protection, the Federation for Social Services and Plan International in Romania.**

Methodology

This RGA brief was developed using secondary and primary data including²:

- Secondary data resources (pre-crisis and between 24 February and 13 May 2022)
- Interviews with 16 key informants (14 women and two men) from local authorities, international and national non-governmental organisations (I/NGOs) and local organisations supporting the response both in and outside Romania. Key informant interviews (KIIs) took place online or in person in Bucharest, Isaccea and Tulcea.
- Some data gathering was observational, as well as through 15 informal discussions with staff and volunteers (12 women and three men) with I/NGOs and local organisations. The sites visited included Bucharest accommodation centres, ROMEXPO and main train station, Isaccea border crossing point and short- and medium-term accommodation centres in Tulcea.
- Informal individual and small group discussions were held with 23 Ukrainian refugees (21 women, two men).

Due to the mix of remote and in-person methods, primary data collection took place between 20 April and 12 May 2022 with site visits within Romania taking place between 2 and 6 May 2022. This RGA is the first of a two-phased approach. In the first phase, the focus was on capturing the experiences and voices of national actors responding to the crisis and collecting data from existing assessments and analysis. This approach recognised the need to understand what evidence is already available and identify gaps and limitations, before embarking on more in-depth primary data collection with affected communities. This is important to avoid “assessment fatigue” and asking affected communities the same questions twice, which may cause unintentional harm. We therefore intend to conduct the second phase of the RGA at a later date. The next RGA will involve consultations with the affected population to understand the distinct needs of women, men, boys and girls from diverse groups to build on existing evidence and filling gaps in our current understanding, including more thematic focus, if required.

Considerations when reading this report: Current secondary data generally lacks disaggregated data and gender and intersectional analysis. Further, to date, there is a lack of information about the specific access and safety issues of third country nationals (TCNs), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) individuals, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV and Roma or other ethnic minority groups. Due to the profile of the refugee population, most of the consultations with refugees that took place were with women and, therefore, it was not always possible to understand the distinct experiences of women and men and where they differed. Finally, due to the rapid nature of the RGA, no consultations were conducted with individuals under 18 years.

The findings are organised under the pre-determined areas of enquiry: Access to Information; Access to Services; and Safety and Protection.

¹ UNHCR, Ukraine Refugee Situation Operations Update, [Romania](#), 16-31 May 2022, citing the Border Police, Department of Emergency Situations and Immigration Inspectorate

² With thanks to all those who contributed to the data collection process through sharing assessments, data, taking part in interviews and/or organising site visits and consultations. This includes the Office of the Prime Minister, Anais, Eliberare, the Social Incubator, National Authority for Child Protection (ANPDCA), Local Authority for Child Protection and Social Services, Bucharest (DGASPC), Action Aid, IOM, UNHCR, VOICE and WHO Romania.

Key Findings

Overall, specific groups were seen to be particularly at risk, with the analysis showing that adult women and men with a disability, older women and men and persons with complex medical needs were particularly at risk of not receiving the assistance they require. A Rapid Needs Assessments by World Vision also found respondents in transit centres and shelters in Bucharest considered older women, pregnant women and girls aged 0-17 years to be amongst the most vulnerable.³

Access to information

Efforts to make information available to refugees are ongoing through several initiatives. Key emergency numbers such as 112 and 119 are displayed on leaflets and posters in transit locations and accommodation centres. In Bucharest train station, posters with information related to specific services are available and include contact information and/or QR codes. [Dopamoha](#) is one mobile application with large amounts of information on registration and access to services, including education, accommodation, health and transport as well as information on safety.

However, gaps remain in information and who can access it. An assessment by World Vision in Bucharest found that 39 per cent of respondents lacked information about available services, 30 per cent about their legal rights, 29 per cent about health care and 23 per cent about how to register for asylum.⁴ While 86 per cent of respondents in this assessment were women, the data was not disaggregated, and therefore there is no analysis of how information access challenges may have impacted women or men in different ways.

The level of access to information seems to be dependent on a variety of factors including location, host of the centre or accommodation, individuals' access to technology, as well as language. These factors have also been noted in other assessments.⁵ Refugees who were able to access central points, such as the ROMEXPO centre and Bucharest train station, had greater access to information than those in transit shelters or short-medium term accommodation. Women refugees spoke of the specific areas where they needed clearer information, including registering for free government services and employment opportunities. Men and women staying in centres and shelters said that most information comes to them through the centre administrator and staff, as well as digitally through their personal networks. Refugees who do not have access to laptops and phones are more likely to miss out on key information. There is also the issue of unverified information or rumours that are being shared through social media.

Overall, there was a lack of data on the preferred and trusted communication channels for women and men, including those from diverse groups e.g. Roma, women and men with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as children and adolescents.⁶

The analysis showed that there is currently no coordinated mechanism to support feedback and complaints, including regarding sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). Currently, if refugees have a concern, their main point of contact is volunteers in the transit and border sites or their hosts or administrators within private or public accommodation, who may or not have received training on addressing feedback and complaints and/or have knowledge of referral services and pathways. Hosts may also lack access to key information and some staff and volunteers noted that it is difficult to understand the needs of the refugees staying with them due to the language barrier and lack of translators. There are also unequal power dynamics that may make it difficult for refugees to provide feedback directly to hosts if they believe they have no other option for accommodation or support. Mobile applications have supported translation, but this may be less effective for more sensitive requests or concerns. In addition, with limited vetting of volunteers and private accommodation hosts in place, refugees may be exposed to heightened protection risks.

The RGA found that there is no specific information available regarding child- or adolescent-friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms, exposing a significant gap that needs to be addressed. Access to information and channels to raise concerns may be especially challenging for young children and unaccompanied or separated children, particularly those without mobile telephones and awareness of who to contact.

Consultations with men and women volunteers (both Ukrainian and Romanian) highlighted **the importance of**

³ World Vision. Rapid Needs Assessment in Bucharest, Romania. March 28 to April 1 2022.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Rapid%20Needs%20Assessment%20in%20Bucharest%2C%20Romania%20final.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Plan International, Ukraine Response. Rapid Needs Assessment Report. Joint report for Moldova, Poland and Romania. March 2022. Link not available.

⁶ An assessment by World Vision, in March 2022, highlighted generalised data showing preferences for families to submit general feedback/complaints is through WhatsApp (31 per cent) and speaking face to face (27 per cent), and to submit sensitive feedback is through speaking face to face (35 per cent) and WhatsApp (31 per cent).

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Rapid%20Needs%20Assessment%20in%20Bucharest%2C%20Romania%20final.pdf>

having multiple channels for feedback. For example, older people indicated to volunteers that they prefer in-person communications.

Access to services

Temporary Protection allows refugees access to the same services as people living in Romania. All refugees can register with the General Directorate for Immigration for Temporary Protection. This provides refugees with an ID and a number that helps them access various services including health and education. Figures, at the time of writing, show that 32,522 Ukrainian refugees have registered for Temporary Protection in Romania⁷, however this information is not disaggregated by sex, age or other diversity factors, so it is not possible to know who is and is not accessing this support.

Our assessment found that **refugees face challenges in accessing temporary protection, that were highlighted by** respondents from I/NGOs. They include lack of access to information on how and where to register and what the status means for them, in particular whether they would be able to return home once granted temporary protection. Other barriers identified by the RGA related to the eligibility for parents to apply for child allowance under Temporary Protection,⁸ and lack of awareness among services providers and authorities (e.g. health workers, family doctors, teachers etc.) of the Temporary Protection scheme and refugees' entitlements under it. It will be important to understand if specific barriers exist for women or men, as well as for certain groups such as the Roma population, LGBTQIA+ individuals, or women and men with disabilities. Clarity on the overall process is needed and better dissemination strategies to diverse groups of Ukrainian refugees and TCNs in formats, languages, channels and locations are important to make sure that information is accessible to all.

Transport and accommodation

The Government has granted free transport to Ukrainian refugees. This reduces barriers such as costs to access services and to move within and beyond the country. Men, women and families are staying in transit centres, short- and medium-term private and public accommodation spaces. For some, there is an anxiousness over how long private hosts will offer them accommodation, what will happen when they can or no longer want to do so. This was due either to the host's own financial situation or the need for some centres – e.g. community centres, schools and hotels - to return to their original function. This calls for medium- and longer-term solutions to prevent an accommodation crisis. Rising costs of rent will also make it particularly challenging for those with fewer resources and networks should they need to move.

In addition, if there is a greater influx of refugees, there are concerns that the current resources will be further stretched.

Basic food and non-food items

Availability of basic food and non-food items depends on the refugees' location and type of host. At central points, such as the ROMEXPO site⁹, food and basic non-food items are made available to refugees every 10 days. Rations include items such as baby formula, nappies, clothes and menstrual hygiene items for women and girls. In some government-run shelters, basic items are also provided. However, in private accommodation, some hosts are only able to provide shelter and do not have access to basic goods for refugees. If women and girls do not have access to income or cash assistance, there needs to be a way to ensure that essential items, including hygiene and sanitary products are available for free.

Cash

The roll out of cash programming is of critical importance and is a priority for refugees. Currently, the government is supporting host families with cash for hosting refugees. In addition, UNHCR and other organisations are distributing cash and vouchers directly to refugees. Consultations with women refugees highlighted questions around where to register for cash payments, and, once registered, when payments would be received, reinforcing the critical need for more information dissemination campaigns, as highlighted in the 'Access to Information' section above. There was uncertainty over the criteria for cash assistance as well as the amounts. In some cases, staff and

⁷ UNHCR, Ukraine Refugee Situation Operations Update, Romania, 16-31 May 2022, citing the Border Police, Department of Emergency Situations and Immigration Inspectorate

⁸ Europa Libera Romania. Andreea Officer & Ovidiu Cornea. Why Ukrainian children do not receive an allowance in Romania: They are not residents, not all of them have both parents here. 11 May 2022. <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/alocatii-copii-refugiati-ucraina/31836049.html>

⁹ There was an agreement, between ROMEXPO and City Hall, to establish a refugee center within ROMEXPO.

volunteers note, that there have been perceived differences in the social assistance from the government for Romanian citizens compared to the cash assistance for refugees from Ukraine. Noting that the majority of refugees are women and children, it is essential that cash programming does not put refugees at further risks.¹⁰ Lack of clarity over the process, rights and entitlement, can increase the risk of exploitation, particularly for women and girls, and in some cases, may lead to women resorting to negative coping mechanisms in order to provide for their families.

Employment

Many women and men refugees indicated a strong desire to work, even if their stay in Romania is temporary, as many expect and wish to return to Ukraine. Women refugees we spoke to noted barriers to accessing employment, including language, lack of information about employment opportunities and, particularly for those outside of main cities, the location of the job that would require relocation and the search for new accommodation. Informal consultations with local authorities, I/NGOs and local organisations highlight the risks for women, in particular, associated with being unable to earn an income. A lack of clear information about opportunities places women in vulnerable situations, which has the potential to lead to negative consequences. Women may be more likely to accept informal job offers that come with little or no employee protection and/or the higher risk of exploitative working conditions and even trafficking.

Some mothers have become their family's breadwinner for the first time while, at the same time, retaining their role as full-time caregiver of children and sick or older family members. A report by Impact in April 2022 noted that single mothers raised the need for child-care arrangements/school as an immediate concern.¹¹ During the consultations, two caregivers (male and female) who had children with disabilities noted the need for specialised and trusted care for their children, so that they could work. Ukrainian refugees can apply for specialised support for children with disabilities in Romania; however, the application and assessment process is lengthy, which deter refugees expecting to return to Ukraine from applying.

Health, including Sexual and Reproductive Health

People at greater health risks include men and women with chronic illnesses, diabetes, hypertension, those needing dialysis, and adolescents. For many refugees, health was not seen as a high priority. The first priority is finding a safe place and basic needs such as food. However, for those with chronic conditions that require long-term management, it is essential that they receive their required medication and/or treatment. Barriers exist for refugees with medical conditions that require treatment which is not available for free. For example, one elderly woman required an eye intervention but could not afford the treatment.

Pregnant women can access free services in the same way as Romanian citizens. However, **registering births is challenging** as it requires the parents' marriage certificate. Discussions with local organisations noted the challenges this presents including but not limited to: requiring parents to bring proof of marriage with them from Ukraine, if they are unmarried and where the mother does not wish to name the father on the birth certificate.

Safe abortion care is not provided for free for both Romanians and refugees from Ukraine. While abortion up to 14 weeks is legal in Romania, reports show that practitioners will often refuse to carry out an abortion or refer the woman to a private practice where costs are higher.¹² Due to concerning reports of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine¹³, there is an urgency to ensure that women and girls coming from Ukraine have information about their rights to abortion care and how to access such care in Romania.

As noted above, information in general was identified as the biggest barrier to accessing available services and this was repeated in relation to health services, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Key informants identified three key areas in this regard: a) If services are available, some refugee women and men may not know their entitlements or how to access them; b) For those who know about services, language is a challenge, with a lack of service providers who speak Ukrainian and Russian and a shortage of translators, specifically female translators; and, c) Health workers and volunteers often do not know the law and policy as it relates to refugees and, therefore, refugees' entitlements to healthcare.

¹⁰ UNFPA. GBV considerations for women and girls – cash in Ukraine and the regional refugee response. 27 April 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/gbv-considerations-women-and-girls-cash-ukraine-and-regional-refugee-response-0>

¹¹ IMPACT Bulletin. Displaced, two weeks on: What next? 1 April 2022. https://www.impact-repository.org/document/impact/e111ec71/IMPACT_GLO_UKR_Displaced-two-weeks-on_what-next_01april2022.pdf

¹² The Wire. Rosa Schwartzburg. In Romania, hard-won abortion rights are being systematically undermined. 20 January 2022. <https://thewire.in/women/romania-abortion-rights-right-wing-reproductive-rights>

¹³ CARE and UN Women. Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine. 4 May 2022. <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-4-May-2022.pdf>

Education

The Romanian Ministry of Education has guaranteed that Ukrainian children and students have free admission to schools and universities.¹⁴ Many refugee children are still accessing online schooling established as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some schools are providing learning spaces for refugee children, which has had the added benefit of social integration. Language is however an obstacle to integration into the national education system for refugee teachers and children. While schools at the border usually have Ukrainian language classes, their capacity is limited.

There is a lack of sex-, age- and disability disaggregated data on refugee children as well as discrepancies across the education inspectorate and the central Ministry of Education on the required information to register Ukrainian refugee children. There is currently no information on how many refugee children require access to school in Romania and their education needs. There is also no information on Romanian schools' capacity to absorb and integrate refugee children.

At the border points, UNICEF Blue Dot Points function as Child-Friendly Spaces with some information-sharing, including on education opportunities for refugees in Romania. However, there are still gaps and inconsistencies in the information available to refugees and CSOs supporting them on how to enrol refugee children in Romanian public schools.

The Romanian Ministry of Education has requested support to put a tracking system in place to ensure all school-aged children remaining in Romania are enrolled in public schools. At the same time, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine has launched an online kindergarten featuring educational and developmental videos for children aged 3-6 years. These materials aim to help parents engage their children in educational and developmental activities, providing them with a semblance of normality during the war. The Ministry has also established the online school platform *All-Ukrainian*, a platform for distance and blended learning of students in grades 5-11 and methodological support for teachers.

Safety and protection

In an initial assessment within Bucharest, 57 per cent of refugee respondents reported they were staying in refugee centres. Of the 43 per cent who are not living in centres, 41 per cent are hosted by individuals they did not know prior to coming to Bucharest.¹⁵ There is a lack of disaggregated data about living situations, as 86 per cent of the respondents were women.

GBV actors working across the response, highlighted that each transit centre varies in terms of risks and safety concerns, as well as measures put in place to mitigate risks. **In private accommodation, the lack of vetting of accommodation and hosts and the power imbalances between the host and the refugee can create additional protection risks**, particularly for single women, those who do not have other social support or networks in Romania, and refugees who have limited resources.

Moving into the next phase of the response, it is important to mitigate any emerging tensions. Discussions with staff and volunteers at accommodation centres highlighted a lack of clarity over the support being provided to refugees and how this differs or aligns with the services and support available to the Romanian population. This has caused some tensions between the two groups. While the tensions are not significant at this time, it is worth noting as the crisis continues.

Gender-based violence (GBV)

In 2014, Romania signed and in 2016 ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.¹⁶ It is estimated that 30 per cent of women in Romania have experienced GBV. However, violence against women continues to be underreported and stigmatised.¹⁷ According to a 2019 study, 75 per cent of women in Ukraine said that they had experienced violence since age 15, of whom

¹⁴ Plan International, Ukraine Response. Rapid Needs Assessment Report. Joint report for Moldova, Poland and Romania. March 2022. Link not available

¹⁵ World Vision. Rapid Needs Assessment in Bucharest, Romania. March 28 to April 1 2022.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Rapid%20Needs%20Assessment%20in%20Bucharest%2C%20Romania%20final.pdf>

¹⁶ Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Status as of 23 May 2022.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treatynum=210>

¹⁷ European Institute for Gender Equality. Combating violence against women. Romania. 25 November 2016.

<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/combating-violence-against-women-romania>

one in three had experienced physical or sexual violence.¹⁸ Since the escalation of the war, an increase in domestic violence has been noted, and there is mounting evidence of conflict-related sexual violence.¹⁹ At the same time, access to response services in Ukraine have been restricted as a result of the crisis.²⁰ With barriers to access GBV services in Ukraine, there will be women and girls arriving in Romania who need immediate access to GBV support services. One GBV actor noted that some women fleeing Ukraine may also have left their abusers and therefore would need longer term access to support on arrival in Romania.

It is unclear what services and support for GBV survivors are available for free under the Temporary Protection status. However, it was noted by key informants that if services are free, the waitlist could be lengthy due to the needs for services pre-crisis. Further, there is a lack of service providers available who speak Russian, Ukrainian as well as other languages spoken by the refugee population. The barriers specific to male and LGBTQIA+ survivors of violence are even less understood.

Local organisations are working on referral pathways to ensure women have the information required to seek services. However, it is important that all agencies coordinate around this to ensure location-specific GBV referral pathways across the response. The Protection Working Group is currently developing referral pathways, as volunteers or hosts do not have this information to share with refugees when they arrive or in the accommodation spaces.

Trafficking

Existing trafficking risks are being exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis, especially for women and girls who constitute the majority (75 per cent) of human trafficking victims in Eastern and Central Europe.²¹ While Romania has a number of mechanisms and commitments in place to combat trafficking in persons²², according to the 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report, Romania was rated under the Tier 2 watch list.²³ In April 2022, UNHCR made a statement calling the Ukrainian refugee crisis a protection crisis. Two months later, on 6 June at the UN Security Council, Pramila Patten, the United Nations Special Representative on Sexual Violence, called the humanitarian crisis a trafficking crisis. Risks of GBV, trafficking, abuse and psychological distress increase in times of conflict and displacement.²⁴ Given the distinct gendered impacts of the conflict in Ukraine and associated displacement, it is important to assess how protection risks impact women, girls, boys and men from diverse backgrounds.

Now with a high influx of refugees, a large majority of women and girls, trafficking risks are greatly increased. GBV actors within the response noted that prior to the Ukraine crisis, the main risks were linked to labour exploitation. While this is still a risk, with the number of people on the move, recruitment tactics have changed and there are emerging concerns of abductions. **Trafficking risks are further exacerbated due to lack of opportunity and lack of choices.** Risks included the openness of key transit points such as the Bucharest train station, lack of employment opportunities and knowledge of where to find employment.

At the start of the Ukraine crisis, there were concerns over drivers and hosts not being registered or vetted. As the response has continued, there are mechanisms in place to register drivers at border locations and hosts are legally required to register online. However, I/NGO respondents noted during the consultations that this is not a fully coordinated system. For example, if a driver is 'blacklisted' on one system or in one location, the same individual may not appear on another. Further, any transport and accommodation offered independently by volunteers may be unsupervised and unregulated, causing safeguarding concerns and protection risks.²⁵

18 OSCE (2019). Wellbeing and safety of Women cited in CARE & UN Women. Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine: Secondary Data Review 29 March 2022. https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/CARE-and-UN-Women-Ukraine-Rapid-Gender-Analysis_April-2022.pdf

19 CARE and UN Women. Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine. 4 May 2022. <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-4-May-2022.pdf>

20 CARE and UN Women. Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine. 4 May 2022. <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-4-May-2022.pdf>

21 UNODC, 2020 Global Report Trafficking in Persons, March 2021, cited in Plan International, Ukraine Response. Rapid Needs Assessment Report. Joint report for Moldova, Poland and Romania. March 2022. Link not available.

22 European Commission. Migration and Home Affairs. Romania. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/policies/internal-security/organised-crime-and-human-trafficking/together-against-trafficking-human-beings/eu-countries/romania_en#national-action-plan

23 Tier 2 Watch List: In countries within the definition of Tier 2, the government is failing to take appropriate actions or provide significant evidence towards their efforts to combat increasing numbers of severe forms of trafficking. If a country is on the Tier 2 Watch List for over two years and has not shown signs of improvement, they are downgraded to a Tier 3. Sourced from U.S. Department of State. 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Romania. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/romania/>

24 UNHCR. Statement on risks of trafficking and exploitation facing refugees from Ukraine attributed to UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. 12 April 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/4/6255a6964/statement-risks-trafficking-exploitation-facing-refugees-ukraine-attributed.html>

25 Plan International, Ukraine Response. Rapid Needs Assessment Report. Joint report for Moldova, Poland and Romania. March 2022. Link not available.

In this response, the [Dopamoha app](#) has information on where to report suspicions of human trafficking but the language of the call handler is Romanian. There is also advice on what to look out for to keep safe and to spot the signs of exploitation. However, volunteers and hosts have not been trained or provided information on the risks of trafficking and how to spot the indicators. Local organisations are working on initiatives to develop safety plans for refugees, to support them on their journey, but the organisations note that there are limitations to this once people cross borders, and therefore a joint cross-border response is required.

Child protection

Data shared at the Child Protection Working Group meeting in Romania on the 19 May 2022 noted that, between 24 February and 18 May 2022, 2,883 unaccompanied children entered Romania from Ukraine. There is a nationwide mechanism for registering unaccompanied and separated children (UASCs), including through the Blue Dot sites, which are currently located at seven hubs throughout Romania.²⁶ Once registered, the children are included in the Romanian Social Protection System. Child protection challenges include the difference in age of minority between Ukraine (16 years of age) and Romania (18 years of age). Child Protection actors noted that 17-year old boys are crossing the border to avoid conscription in Ukraine, which happens at 18 years of age. However, on arrival in Romania, they are registered as unaccompanied minors, impacting their ability to access services as an adult, travel overseas without a guardian(s) and seek employment. It is further understood that unaccompanied minors are not allowed to leave the border without a guardian.

There were some reports that it has **become harder to reach and meet the specific needs of accompanied girls and boys** staying in private accommodation within the community where they were not registered on arrival. The registration of all children refugees from Ukraine is part of the next phase of the response.

There are programmes, including CARE programmes, that bring Ukrainian refugees together, as well as mobile teams to facilitate outreach to refugees in more isolated locations. The purpose is to consult with the refugees to identify and meet their stated needs.

With the movement of large numbers of people in or passing through Romania, many travelling back and forth from Ukraine and many not anticipating that they will stay outside Ukraine for long, there is a risk of families becoming separated and/or not being registered. Where children get lost in the system, there are heightened protection risks, an issue that was highlighted by some Child Protection actors.

Volunteers supporting the response raised concerns over a lack of guidelines or protocols, with the media taking photographs of refugees, including children, at transit sites and border locations.

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)

The mental health of the refugee population is of paramount concern. An RGA conducted by CARE and UN Women in Ukraine (May 2022) found, of those consulted, 49 per cent of women and 50 per cent of men identified mental health as an area of their life most affect by the war, yet mental health services were seen as less of a priority need (21 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men).²⁷ Similarly, refugees prioritise basic needs such as food, medical care and material items²⁸, with mental health being an issue to address at a later stage. There is also little or no culture of seeking mental health support in Ukraine, particularly among men.²⁹ This means that some refugees will have pre-existing conditions that may become compounded with the distress of the current context.

There are a number of barriers to accessing mental health services for refugees in Romania. There is a lack of MHPSS services at border points, transit and accommodation centres. At the time of writing, existing service providers have limited or no Ukrainian speaking staff.³⁰ Language is also a barrier for TCNs who remain in Romania. Efforts are being made to mitigate these barriers, scale up and adapt MHPSS services to the refugees' needs.

²⁶ UNICEF. Romania. Blue Dot – Providing Critical Support to Refugees from Ukraine. <https://www.unicef.org/romania/blue-dot-providing-critical-support-refugees-ukraine>. Last accessed 23.05.22.

²⁷ CARE and UN Women. Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine. 4 May 2022. <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-4-May-2022.pdf>

²⁸ World Vision. Rapid Needs Assessment in Bucharest, Romania. March 28 to April 1 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Rapid%20Needs%20Assessment%20in%20Bucharest%2C%20Romania%20final.pdf>

²⁹ CARE and UN Women. Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine. 4 May 2022. <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-4-May-2022.pdf>

³⁰ Plan International, Ukraine Response. Rapid Needs Assessment Report. Joint report for Moldova, Poland and Romania. March 2022. Link not available.

The mental health of children and adolescents is a critical concern. Discussions with child protection actors noted that very young children are showing signs of distress. Observations, as well as discussions with young women refugees particularly in transit shelters outside of cities and in more remote locations, highlighted a lack of social network and supports for adolescents and young women. There is also a lack of recreational activities and language barriers create challenges for integration.

Impact of displacement on specific groups

Assistance for persons with disabilities and mobility restrictions is ad hoc and exists within an already stretched system. Availability and provision of wheelchairs and other assistive devices varies by location and accommodation type. Some organisations and volunteers reported being able to identify and respond to the need for mobility aids on an ad hoc basis. However, a more coordinated support is required to ensure refugees with mobility constraints and disabilities can maintain their independence. The current system in Romania for persons with disabilities is already challenging with approximately 30,000 adults³¹ with disabilities living in institutions, and the process of de-institutionalisation a slow process. Local authorities noted that there are not enough services nor specialised personnel to scale up the services for refugees with disabilities.

Information on minority groups is lacking. There are anecdotal reports that transgender refugees are unable to cross the border into Romania because of issues with their documentation and gender expression.³² Further, there were anecdotal reports of Romani women and men facing discrimination at the border, as well as discrimination by other refugees when in Romania. The Roma population experiences significant discrimination in Ukraine³³ but there is little information on the barriers they face to access services or the safety issues they encounter in Romania.

Impacts on those responding to the crisis

Mental health support for local actors responding to the crisis is a priority. Many people spoke to the emotional toll the crisis is having on those supporting the response efforts.

Staff and volunteers are working long hours. Many are volunteering in addition to their regular jobs or taking on additional roles within their organisation. As a result, burnout and the impact of vicarious trauma is a real concern. This is compounded by local organisations' lack of human resources, as they have no additional staff/volunteers to cover those who have been working since the Ukraine crisis began. Positions have become very competitive with smaller organisations potentially struggling to offer competitive salaries. There is a lack of professionals in specialist fields, such as psychologists, who speak the required languages. There is a need for more translators, particularly female translators, at the borders, in shelters, and transit sites to ensure refugees are able to communicate their needs and are comfortable in doing so.

A strength of the response has been the commitment and solidarity of volunteers. However, there needs to be structured, co-ordinated and systematic on-boarding and safeguarding processes across locations in Romania. The efforts and speed at which volunteers and the local communities responded was widely praised, both by those living in Romania and by the refugees themselves. But there are risks present and gaps highlighted for attention. Understandably, given the scale and pace of the displacement and of the response, many volunteers have not been vetted and have not received any on-boarding orientation or training. There is no coordinated information provided to volunteers to relay to the refugees, with many learning on the job. With volunteers being the frontline responders, awareness raising on protection risks such as human trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as skills such as psychological first aid (PFA) and survivor-centred approaches to disclosures of GBV are essential. Many volunteers have not signed Codes of Conduct.

³¹ Figure provided through consultations

³² Plan International, Ukraine Response. Rapid Needs Assessment Report. Joint report for Moldova, Poland and Romania. March 2022. Link not available.

³³ CARE and UN Women. Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine. 4 May 2022. <https://careevaluations.org/wp-content/uploads/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-4-May-2022.pdf>

Recommendations

These recommendations are aimed at all actors within the refugee response in Romania, including national and local authorities, donors, local and international humanitarian actors, and volunteers.

Overall recommendations

- **Current data and analysis do not provide a comprehensive overview of the gender and intersectional dimensions of the Ukraine crisis.** As such, it is important that the government, UNHCR and all relevant authorities and organisations collect and analyse **sex, age, disability and diversity disaggregated data** throughout the response. Analysis is required on the specific situation of women, girls, boys and men and at-risk groups such as the Roma women, girls, boys and men, women, girls, boys and men with disabilities, noting different impairments, such as physical, sensory, psychological and intellectual, TCN women, girls, boys and men, and LGBTQIA+.
- **International humanitarian organisations must work together with the national authorities and local organisations** to support, complement and scale up **existing social protection structures in Romania and the work of** civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations and organisations working with at-risk or marginalised groups. This will ensure equitable access to safe services, being mindful that resources are not directed only to support the crisis, and avoid duplicative and parallel systems being developed. This is especially critical for services that are not fully accessible to Romanians such as GBV and SRH services.
- All actors should **ensure information on refugees' rights and available response services is disseminated and communicated** through multiple channels and in accessible formats to take into account language barriers, access and mobility constraints, access to and level of comfort with technology as well as preferences to receiving information. In the same way, feedback and complaints mechanisms should also allow for multiple channels that are gender- and age-appropriate. The issue of the lack of access to information recurs in many sectors included in the recommendations below.

Immediate recommendations

Protection and SRHR

- Finalise and disseminate **GBV referral pathways widely**. These should be accessible to Ukrainian and Russian speakers as well as TCNs. In addition, their use should be monitored and updated regularly. Provide training on PFA and survivor-centred approaches to staff and volunteers, particularly where no GBV services are available.
- Finalise **Child Protection standard operating procedures and referral pathways**, translate them into all relevant languages, disseminate them widely across locations in Romania and update them regularly as new services become available or are enhanced. Ensure the provision of services for child survivors of GBV.
- Provide **human and financial resources to existing national GBV services** to ensure that people living in Romania and refugees from Ukraine have access to free comprehensive GBV support.
- Provide **child protection and GBV capacity building** to key actors in the response, including teachers, health workers and others directly supporting children and adolescents affected by the conflict.
- Identify **adolescent girl, boy and child-friendly activities** within temporary and longer-term accommodation to facilitate play, learning, social integration, as well as to contribute to a sense of normality.
- Prioritise **GBV risk mitigation** in all border locations, transit sites and accommodation centres. Develop guidance that supports accommodation administrations and hosts to identify and mitigate GBV risks for those in their care. As part of this, identify female security guards and police officers to provide balance in a male dominated field and provide entry points for women and girls to report concerns and safety risks.
- Support **access to GBV and SRH services** in line with the **Minimum Initial Service Package** by reviewing relevant policies around access to free contraception and safe abortion care to ensure these services are fully available to people living in Romania as well as refugees coming from Ukraine.
- Support the **coordination of local authorities, local and international organisations' efforts to reduce the risks of and respond to trafficking**. As many people are transiting through Romania, cross border coordination to support refugees during their full journey is required. Awareness-raising messaging on trafficking risks should be made available in places hosting refugees. Volunteers and staff should be trained to understand risks and why mitigations such as vetting and registration of drivers is in place.

Availability of and access to information

- Increase the **availability of and access to information** in transit locations, border sites, and accommodation centres, particularly those in harder to reach locations. Support hosts by providing service mapping, leaflets, posters detailing all the services and support available.
- Increase refugee women and men's **awareness of the temporary protection scheme**. This should include where to register, what registration means, and what it does not mean in terms of their rights and ability to return to Ukraine. Multiple channels of communications are recommended including through mobile applications, leaflets and face to face.
- **Implement and disseminate information on feedback and accountability mechanisms** so that refugees can provide feedback, share complaints and register concerns independently from their hosts or volunteer staff.

Cash Programming

- **Roll out cash programming as a priority to meet the immediate needs of refugees**. Cash amounts should be in line with the social assistance being offered to those living in Romania, it should be coordinated between actors, and information on cash assistance needs to be transparent and accessible; ensuring it is shared through a variety of channels. Cash programming needs to include GBV and Child Protection risk assessment and mitigation strategies to ensure adequate and effective protection and safeguarding.

Persons with Disabilities

- Support service providers to **identify adults and children with physical, sensory, psychological and intellectual disabilities and their caregivers and map relevant available services**. This includes but is not limited to specialised day care, mobility aids, access to physiotherapy and other therapies to support quality of life. This is particularly needed for those who wish to return to Ukraine and are therefore not entering the Romanian system for such specialised care.

Employment

- Conduct consultations to understand **employment preferences and identify alternative employment opportunities** that can be accessed for refugees from Ukraine, including making the application process accessible. This information should be shared through key digital apps, as well as in transit centres and shelters.

Safeguarding

- Ensure the **systematic on-boarding, training and safeguarding procedures for all humanitarian staff and volunteers**, including but not limited to service mapping, PFA, GBV referral pathways and survivor-centred approaches and obligations under the protection against sexual exploitation and abuse. All volunteers and staff should sign a Code of Conduct. Regular supervision and support for volunteers is required to ensure co-ordination, feedback loops, as well as self-care.

Medium-term recommendations

- Through a series of consultations, exchange learnings from countries hosting refugees or responding to the crisis. This would provide a space to identify strategies, policies and practices that work well and to share lessons learned to support and help inform the next phases of the response and medium- and long-term solutions.
- Review and update these current recommendations as more information on intersectional gender becomes available.