

# AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RECEPTION AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN ROMANIA

*Edina Lilla MÉSZÁROS\**

**Abstract.** *In February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, causing one of the biggest humanitarian crises on the European continent since the end of the Cold War. The mass displacement of people has demanded swift solutions from decision-makers at all levels, from supranational to regional, national, and local. Given its neighboring country status, Romania had to come up with swift solutions for both the early management of the influx of people and their long-term integration due to the prolonged conflict. Therefore, this research aims to evaluate the reception and labor market integration of the Ukrainian displaced persons in Romania in the February 2022–July 2024 timeframe. Despite the numerous policy measures implemented at the national level, Romania primarily functioned as a transit country. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainian nationals chose to move to neighboring countries like Poland because of the close ties and friendly relations that existed between the two countries prior to the conflict, or to more Western states like Germany, the Netherlands, or the United Kingdom due to the higher quality of the provided services, better economic conditions, and employment opportunities. The paper primarily employs qualitative methods, conducting a qualitative assessment of the most significant legislative acts that were developed during the first and second phases of the national emergency response. Simultaneously, it analyzes the unique scheme that was developed to provide assistance in covering accommodation and food expenses. While the interpretation of data compiled from surveys and polls provided valuable insights into Romanian citizens' opinions regarding the reception and labor market integration of Ukrainian refugees in the country, the National Agency for Employment's database gave a clear picture of the number and type of available employment opportunities and jobs filled by Ukrainian refugees.*

**Keywords:** *Ukraine, war, refugees, labour market integration, transit country*

## 1. Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, precipitating one of the most significant humanitarian crises in Europe since the conclusion of the Cold War and resulting in the mass displacement of millions of Ukrainian residents. Due to its neighbouring country status, Romania has been transited by millions of Ukrainian forced migrants since the start of the conflict. As regards bilateral relations, Romania and Ukraine do not only share a 649.4 km long border at land, sea and river, but also a common history. As graph no. 1 reveals, according to census data, Ukrainians represent the third biggest ethnic minority in Romania, following the Hungarians and the Roma, northern counties, such as Suceava and Maramureş hosting the largest number of ethnic

---

\* PhD Lecturer, University of Oradea, Romania, E-mail: meszaros.edina@uoradea.ro

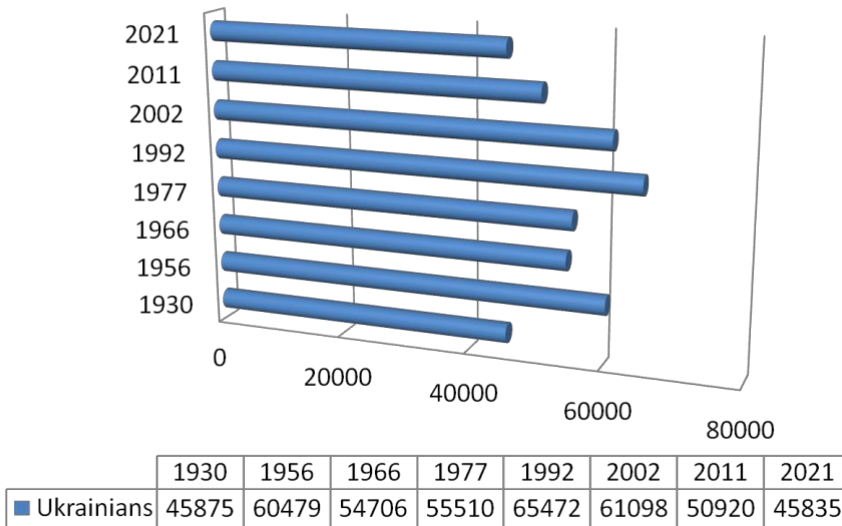
Ukrainians in the country (INS, 2022). In the current study, it is being argued that spatial closeness and shared history have had a great impact on Romania's position towards the forced migrants from Ukraine, hence shaping their reception and level of integration within the country. Both the decision-makers and the broad Romanian society have been more welcoming to Ukrainian displaced persons than to immigrants and asylum seekers from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, who entered the country following the Arab Spring or the 2015 migration crisis. Multiple surveys and polls compiled at national level following the eruption of the war reflect this positive stance towards the Ukrainian displaced persons. Concerning the management of the humanitarian crisis prompted by the war in Ukraine, all the measures taken at the level of Romania were in accordance with the Community legislation, the country implementing the temporary protection directive of the European Union. One of the first responses at supranational level to the emerging crisis constituted the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2022. This emergency mechanism adopted in 2001 is activated only in extraordinary situations, in case of a mass influx of people, with the purpose of assisting displaced people and reducing the burden on the national asylum systems (Council of the European Union, 2024). Refugees from Ukraine are granted access to housing, the labour market, social and medical assistance through this directive. Due to the prolongation of the military conflict in Ukraine, in June 2024, the ministers of the 27 Member States decided to extend the temporary protection mechanism until the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 2026. As regards the number of the displaced persons, by the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registered 6.168.100 Ukrainian refugees living in Europe, with 571.300 residing outside the continent. According to the UNHCR portal, since the start of the war by the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2024, 5.052.538 border crossings from Ukraine were recorded at the border between Ukraine and Romania, and 1.848.341 from the Republic of Moldova with 4.325.226 border crossings to Ukraine. As of this date, 177.220 Ukrainian nationals applied for asylum, temporary protection or some other form of protection in Romania (Ukraine Refugee Situation, 2024). Moreover, the government in its official report on the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Romania from the end of June 2024 recorded the entry of 8.134.244 Ukrainian citizens on Romanian territory since the debut of the conflict (Government of Romania, 2024b). Comparing data from Romania with those from neighbouring countries shows that despite the geographic proximity, Romania is not among the main country preferences for a long term settlement and labour market integration. Other EU countries that are bordering Ukraine, such as Poland, have registered a bigger influx, 23.184.590 Ukrainians crossing the borders with Poland since the beginning of the war, 1.802.670 applying for asylum or some form of international protection. Likewise, a considerably higher number of Ukrainian citizens with refugee status were recorded at the end of July 2024 in Poland, 957.505 displaced persons. Among the states featured in the UNHCR's Refugee Response Plan for Ukraine, following Poland, the Czech Republic has registered the highest number of asylum lodges, 615.235, at the beginning of August recording 370.980 Ukrainian refugees living in the country (UNHCR, 2024). Outside the Refugee Response Plan, Germany received the highest number of asylum applications, 1.113.560 requested by Ukrainian citizens, 1.190.255 being registered staying in the country as of the end of July 2024. This information is relevant not only for providing a situational picture on the movement, whereabouts or country preferences of the Ukrainian refugees fleeing war, but also for validating the main hypothesis of the research, according to which Romania hasn't been a destination but mostly a transit country for the Ukrainian

displaced persons, the vast majority choosing not to stay or work in the country over an extended period. Accordingly, the present research is aimed at briefly assessing the reception and labour market integration of the Ukrainian displaced persons in Romania in the 2022 February-2024 July timeframe.

## **2. Methodology**

As highlighted in the introductory part, the paper is preoccupied with analysing how Romania responded to the mass displacement of people following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, also evaluating their level of integration in the national labour market. Based on the available information, it is being argued that despite the velocity with which Romania responded to the crisis and the implemented policy measures facilitating their short term reception and housing, long-term accommodation, schooling, medical assistance and labour market integration etc., ultimately, only a small number of Ukrainian forced migrants have opted to settle and pursue employment in Romania for the long term. Consequently, we assert that Romania primarily functioned as a transit country for Ukrainian displaced individuals, the majority of whom preferred to relocate to more Western states, such as Germany or the United Kingdom, which offered superior financial prospects and improved working conditions, or opted for neighbouring countries like Poland, owing to the strong ties and amicable relations that existed between the two nations prior to the conflict. We emphasize that, although the language barrier is a significant impediment to the integration of Ukrainian refugees into the labour market, their condition of being adult moms with ill relatives, elderly dependents, or children to care for also poses a substantial hurdle to employment. Moreover, as revealed by surveys, in many cases, neither the type, nor the quality of the available jobs or the employment conditions were attractive enough in order to persuade them to stay, Ukrainian refugees expressing dissatisfaction with the vacant employment opportunities, which on many occasions did not meet their level of studies and/or qualifications.

With respect to its structure, the paper consists of three main parts, the first chapter putting forward a qualitative assessment of the most important legislative acts elaborated in the first and second phase of the emergency response at national level, in the same time unfolding the unique scheme that was developed in order to provide assistance for the covering of accommodation and food expenses. In order to identify the type of Ukrainian refugees coming to Romania, their profiling was deemed appropriate in the second chapter, followed by the disclosure of the perception of the public, which, in our opinion has greatly influenced their reception and current level of integration. For this purpose, several public opinion surveys were consulted, revealing the favourable perspective of the average Romanian citizen, in contrast with the unwelcoming position adopted a few years ago with respect to asylum seekers originating from outside Europe. In the last part of paper, the data provided by the National Agency for Employment were used in order to assess the current level of integration of the Ukrainian refugees in the Romanian labour market, but also the fields in which they have found employment, in the same time examining surveys in order to unfold their perception about the labour conditions in the country and their intention of not wishing to remain in Romania over an extended period of time.



**Graph 1.** The evolution of the number of Ukrainian ethnic minorities in Romania according to census data from 1930-2021. Source: Own elaboration based on the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics

### 3. Romania's initial response to the humanitarian crisis and the analysis of the legislative framework

#### 3.1. The qualitative assessment of the main legislative acts

Immediately following the outbreak of the war, the Romanian government has responded quickly, implementing a two-phased response mechanism in order to manage the humanitarian crisis: the emergency and the protection response. The emergency response was coordinated by the Department for Emergency Situations (DES) and included the urgent assistance provided by Romania to all refugees entering from Ukraine. This included the allocation of resources and services at primary border crossing points, humanitarian transport, and the provision of emergency shelter, sustenance, and fundamental medical aid. The medium- and longer-term actions implemented for the protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees who choose to reside in Romania are referred to as the second phase protection and inclusion response. As one of the first measures taken at country level consisted in implementing a transparent decision-making and coordination framework that enabled agencies with varying legal and functional responsibilities at all levels of government to effectively plan, coordinate, and interact at the policy and ground levels. In order to have an efficient institutional coordination, a high-level decision-making Task-Force was established under the direct administration of the Prime Minister. Additionally, the Chief of Prime Minister's Chancellery put the basis of an operational Task-force, called "Ukraine Commission," mandated with supervising the activities of the ministries engaged in the management of the refugees' flux in all areas of intervention (health, education, labour, housing, assisting vulnerable

groups and children). A Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Coordination Group was established at the Prime Minister's Chancellery, under the leadership of a Counsellor of State, in order to oversee strategic framework of the humanitarian response and to enhance cooperation among different national, European, and international partners (Prime Minister's Chancellery, 2023:6-7).

The qualitative assessment of the main legislative acts elaborated in this early response phase is essential in order to evaluate the early response capacity at national level. As highlighted in the documents issued by the Prime Minister's Chancellery, during the first months following the eruption of the war more than 20 legislative acts were developed, including government decisions, government emergency ordinances and Ministry of Education orders. In the long list of emergency legislative acts, Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 15/2022 was the first, published in the Official Gazette of Romania on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 (OUG nr. 15/2022). GEO no. 15/2022 made reference to the creation of a government task force and to provisions related to the support mechanisms that were put at the disposal of foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations fleeing war in Ukraine. In particular, this legislative act enumerated the entitlements and provisions available to displaced individuals who did not seek asylum in Romania. These provisions included lodging in temporary camps established by the government and/or alternative accommodation establishments operated by private hosts. Furthermore, it enabled access to food, clothing, hygiene items, health services and emergency medical treatment. In accordance with the GEO, minors were granted the same protection measures and the opportunity to enrol in the national education system just as Romanian children. GEO no. 20/2022 adopted on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 augmented the provisions stipulated in the previous legislative act, establishing the criteria for the provision of temporary protection for all individuals forced to leave Ukraine as a result of the armed conflict, in addition to identifying the funding source for the required provisions (OUG nr. 20/2022). The document is of an utmost importance, since it granted direct access to the labour market for the Ukrainian displaced persons without the necessity of issuing a work permit. Additionally, it enabled obtaining a single permit for work and temporary residence after a 90 days stay in the country. While Government Decision no. 337/2022 granted foreign nationals or stateless persons in special situations from Ukraine the right to use transport facilities free of charge, Government Decision no. 336/2022 published on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2022 implemented a settlement mechanism using funds from the emergency situations budgets of county inspectorates and the Bucharest-Ilfov Emergency Situations Inspectorate to cover the costs of food and lodging for foreign nationals or stateless individuals in exceptional circumstances who were being hosted by natural persons (Hotărâre nr. 336/2022).

### *3.2. Assistance for the covering of accommodation and food expenses*

As underlined earlier, the legal framework and a settlement mechanism were established by Government Decision no. 336/2022, which authorized the use of funds from the emergency situation budgets of county inspectorates and the Bucharest-Ilfov Emergency Situations Inspectorate to pay for the accommodation and food expenses of foreign nationals or stateless persons fleeing war who were being hosted by a natural person. Once arrived at the border crossing points, Blue Dot Centres jointly developed by the UNICEF, UNHCR and national authorities were put at the disposal of the displaced persons from Ukraine. These safe reception centres gave Ukrainian citizens relevant information related to the support they were being provided at country level,

starting with psychological to legal support, education, health care, housing etc. Even an online platform available in Ukrainian language called DOPOMOHA.RO (Dopomoha, 2024) was created at governmental level, where refugees could find all the necessary information related to their stay in the country, emergency support, accommodation, education and labour market integration. However, it must be noted that with respect to housing, the civil society was the first that mobilized when the war broke out and the refugees started to arrive. Moreover, on many occasions average citizens used their own vehicles for the transportation of Ukrainian displaced persons who only transited Romania to the border crossing points. Natural persons were the first sharing their homes with refugees, at the beginning hosting them free of charge. In the same time, several hotel owners from the country put their rooms at the disposal of people fleeing war. When it became clear that the war was going to prolong, the Romanian government came to aid those Romanian citizens who were willing to provide accommodation for the displaced persons, with a program that commonly was referred to as the 50/20 program. Monthly budgetary cash payments were made to Romanian natural persons or entities hosting Ukrainian citizens fleeing the armed conflict in accordance with the state program: 50 lei per person per day for housing and 20 lei per person per day for meals. Besides the 50/20 programme, on the arrival of displaced persons from Ukraine in 2022, six centres were operational in the country, where free housing and meals were provided. The centres were located in the cities of Timis, Suceava, Tulcea, and Maramures, and in the capital, Bucharest. As per the Annual Status Report released in early 2023, hosts were reimbursed a total of 373.941.992 lei (€76.004.469) for housing and 152.063.544 lei (€30.907.224) for food during the period of March to December 2022. This signifies that an average of 1.735.991 lei (€352.846) per day was being spent on the program (Prime Minister's Chancellery, 2023). For meals and lodging, hosts from the counties of Suceava, Brasov, Bucharest-Ilfov, and Constanța received the largest reimbursements (OUG nr. 28/2022). Sadly, the program was not without flaws, firstly, because of delays in the reimbursement procedure, secondly, due to allegations related to fraud, several hosts from Romania being accused of illegally obtaining money for the accommodation of Ukrainians. In Maramures County, for instance, more than two million Euros were fraudulently reimbursed to cover the accommodation and food expenses of a number of Ukrainian nationals. Over two hundred individuals, including town hall employees, were charged with unlawfully acquiring funds and forging documents bearing a private signature (Euronews Romania, 2023).

The delays in the reimbursement of the housing and meal expenses due to bureaucratic blockages, coupled with the fraud attempts led to the reconsideration of the 50/20 program<sup>1</sup> in February 2023 under the provisions of GEO no. 15/2023 (OUG nr. 15/2023). The new program was officially launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2023 and was in vigour until December 2023. Due to the continuation of the military hostilities in Ukraine, in October 2023 under the provisions of GEO no. 80, the Romanian government decided to extend the duration of the humanitarian aid program for refugees from the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2024 (OUG nr. 80/2023). OUG nr. 27 of March 2024 extended the period of assistance until the 30<sup>th</sup> of June (OUG nr. 27/2024). As per the recently implemented regulations, Ukrainian refugees were eligible to receive a monthly stipend of 2000 lei per family for housing expenses for the initial four consecutive months; for individual accommodation expenses, the allowance was 750 lei per person

---

<sup>1</sup> Regulated by Government Decision no. 368/2023.

per month; and for food expenses, it was 600 lei per person per month. Starting with the fifth month until the end of 2023, the amount was reduced, refugees from Ukraine benefitting only of the payment for their accommodation without the meal expenses. With respect to lodging costs, the scheme had remained the same, 2000 lei being allocated in case of a family and 750 lei in case of a single person. However, a conditionality principle was implemented already from the second month of the new program, requesting Ukrainian citizens to be legally employed or to be registered as jobseekers in the unemployment insurance system at a Regional Employment Agency if they wanted to benefit from the financial assistance. Additionally, if they had children, it was mandatory to enrol them in the national education system. From the fifth month of the program, the closure of an individual work contract attesting to the employed status was necessary for continuing to receive governmental aid (Programul 50/20). The biggest difference between the old and the new program was that while during the first scheme the money for accommodation was received by the host (landlord), in order to prevent fraud, under the provisions of the new scheme the lump sum was paid directly to the Ukrainian beneficiaries. Nevertheless, just as its predecessor, the new program was also subject to severe criticism, mainly due to the lengthy delays in Ukrainian refugees receiving the promised amount covering their accommodation and food expenses. As even acknowledged by the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations at the beginning of 2024, many Ukrainian refugees already working or studying in the country, haven't received their allowances since July 2023. Only on February 15, 2024, the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations commenced to transfer the funds necessary for the full settlement of the outstanding expenses for 2023 (Amariei C, 2024). The rules of the game have changed again in June 2024, OUG nr. 96/2024 stipulating the entitlement of foreign nationals or stateless individuals from the armed conflict zone in Ukraine to a range of social benefits as outlined in the Romanian legislation, contingent upon the renewal of their temporary residence permit and fulfilment of legal eligibility criteria. The listed social benefits include the child allowance provided by the state, minimum income for inclusion, unemployment benefits, disability allowances, and monthly allowances for child raising. Furthermore, the emergency ordinance stipulates that Ukrainian citizens granted temporary protection after July 1<sup>st</sup> 2024 are eligible to receive a single monthly lump amount once during a span of three consecutive months (OUG nr. 90/2024).

#### **4. The profile of the Ukrainian refugees and their reception in the country: a quantitative assessment**

Before assessing the labour market integration of Ukrainian nationals in Romania, it is imperative to set up their profile, taking into consideration various information concerning their gender, level of education, employment status in the country of origin, household type, spoken languages etc. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) already, in the first months of the military conflict, examined the demographic, socio-economic profile and skills of Ukrainian refugees coming to Europe, also evaluating their impact on the labour market in the host countries. According to the early projections made by the OECD, a 0.5% increase in the labour force was anticipated at the level of all European countries by the end of 2022. In case of Romania, projections showed an increase between 1% and 1.5% (OECD, 2022). A sharp contrast could be detected as regards the reception and access to employment of Ukrainian refugees compared to third-country nationals coming to Europe and implicitly

Romania during past refugee inflows, with Ukrainian displaced persons receiving free accommodation and facilitated access to the labour market in the host countries upon their arrival. Due to the martial law in vigour preventing Ukrainian men aged between 18 to 60 years to leave the country, adult women make up the vast majority, around 70% of the Ukrainian refugees, the rest 1/3 being children in almost all of the host countries. According to the demographic profile elaborated by the OECD, the bulk of Ukrainian refugees coming to European and EU countries are adult women with children, who in the absence of their partners and the existing linguistic barriers from the host societies, have encountered difficulties while seeking employment (OECD, 2023). In order to better understand the needs of the Ukrainian displaced persons, the UNHCR together with partners from several countries<sup>2</sup> have used non-probability sampling method in order to collect data from Ukrainian refugees arriving in European countries. Between October 2022 and the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, a total number of 45.073 of questionnaires were rolled out and interviews conducted by trained surveyors in these countries, digitally collecting and analyzing data, thus creating the regional protection profiling and monitoring of Ukrainian refugees. During this period, in Romania, 3204 respondents participated in the survey, 80% of the household members being women and children. 85% of participants in the survey were women with an average age of 42 years, 63% of households with children aged 5-17 reporting the non-enrolment of at least one child in the national education system. With respect to their level of education, 84% have claimed completing a higher education and university (8% Master or higher, 49% specialists, 9% Bachelor, 18% vocational, 14% secondary, 2% with primary education). 48% declared having a job, 19% being in family care, 11% retired, 10% self-employed, 7% unemployed, 2% having students' status before fleeing Ukraine. In terms of spoken languages, the first was Ukrainian with 98% of respondents speaking it, Russian being on the second place with 85%, while 32% of the interviewees declared speaking English and 15% Romanian. Only a small percentage declared speaking other languages besides the aforesaid, 1% having fluency in the German and 1% in the French languages (UNHCR, 2023).

#### *4.3. Public perceptions related to the reception and labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees in Romania*

Just like the steps taken to facilitate Ukrainian citizens' access to accommodation and the labour market, their reception was much more positive among the citizens compared to that of third country nationals who arrived in the country after the migration crisis of 2015 (Mészáros, 2019)... This favourable attitude is also reflected in the public opinion surveys from Romania. For example, in the Security Barometer of Romania, 73.9% of respondents to a survey conducted on 1001 people between September 29, 2022 and October 10, 2022, using the computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) method supported Romania's continued reception of Ukrainian refugees if circumstances warranted it. In the survey compiled by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) a year after the breakout of the war, in February 2023, 1353 respondents selected from all the counties and the capital city, Bucharest when asked what Romania did since the eruption of the war, an overwhelming majority, 97% replied that it assisted refugees, 95% emphasizing providing humanitarian aid, from food, medicine to products

---

<sup>2</sup> Belarus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

of immediate necessity. When interrogated about the type of assistance our country should provide to Ukraine, the vast majority 92%, respectively 91% prioritized humanitarian aid and helping refugees, while 72% agreed with sending experts in different fields, only 42% consenting with Romania sending armament to Ukraine. But only 62% of respondents said they agreed with Romania's continued assistance to Ukraine, while 36% disagreed (IRES, 2023). Similar results could be found in the surveys conducted by Avangarde in March 2023, with 64% of the interview subjects arguing in favour of Romania continuing to provide assistance to the Ukrainian refugees and 31% being against (News.ro, 2023).

In another CATI based survey carried out by INSCOP Research between September and October 2023, 1550 respondents were asked about their greatest fear regarding the war in Ukraine. While 37.9% cited the rise in prices and the cost of living, 30% were afraid of a possible Russian military attack against a NATO country, 20.3% expressed no fear and 7.5% said that an increase in the number of refugees represented their biggest concern (INSCOP, 2023). As highlighted in the Eurobarometer no. 98 2022/2023 edition, despite the vast majority of Romanian citizens, 71% agreed with the EU providing humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, our country was at the bottom of the ranking, lagging behind every other EU Member State. Concerning support for measures taken by the Community for assisting refugees, Romania was in the same track with the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, only 72 respectively 73% of those interviewed from these countries having a favourable opinion (Eurobarometer 98, 2022/2023).

With respect to public perceptions related to the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees, according to a survey carried out by BestJobs in April 2022, only 47% of the Romanian citizens agreed having Ukrainian refugees as their co-workers, 36% opposing the idea. Given the existence of a great labour shortage in the country due to the mass emigration of citizens, 45% of the respondents were of the opinion that the labour market integration of the Ukrainian nationals will not solve this deficit, 16% having a more favourable opinion, 31% arguing that hiring refugees can only partially resolve the lack of manpower. As regards job security, the bulk of respondents, 70% were not concerned about the prospect of losing their job to Ukrainians, only 25% expressing a certain fear. 47% of those participating in the survey considered that hiring Ukrainian refugees might represent a good opportunity for their company, 36% thinking the opposite. Almost half of the interviewees, 41% emphasised the importance of attending Romanian and/or English language courses for a better integration, 31% raising their voice against any type of discrimination during the recruiting process. From among the employers participating in the survey, 40% were in favour of hiring Ukrainian refugees, as, in their opinion, multicultural teams might contribute to an increase in productivity, with 20% of them claiming that diversity might lead to innovation and different perspectives (BestJobs, 2022a)

## **5. Perceptions of Ukrainian refugees about the conditions at national level and their labour market integration**

### *5.1. The labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees in Romania*

For Ukrainian citizens who legally entered the territory of Romania, both those who requested and were granted temporary protection as well as those who did not request a form of protection, exceptional conditions were implemented for access to the labour market, including measures derogating from the usual applicable rules for third

country nationals' access to work. For instance, a Ukrainian displaced person who legally entered Romania and did not apply for protection has the right to work without a work permit and may ask for an extension of his/her stay for work-related reasons without the need to apply for a long-stay visa. On the other hand, if a Ukrainian citizen has legally entered the territory of Romania and requested/received temporary protection, he/she is entitled to be employed by natural or legal persons to carry out independent activities, respecting the rules applicable to the profession, as well as to benefit from educational opportunities for adults, vocational training, and practical work experience, in accordance with the law (Work in Romania, 2022).

GEO no. 20/2022 enabled the access to the labour market of Ukrainian displaced persons without the necessity of elaborating a work permit, initially for a period of one year with the possibility of extension. They have benefited from the same employment conditions, rights and obligations as Romanian citizens according to the provisions of the national legislation in vigour; however, registering in the databases of the territorial agencies for employment was mandatory. National authorities have even accepted the submission of an affidavit<sup>3</sup> regarding the fulfilment of the conditions of professional qualification and work experience necessary for employment if Ukrainians were not in the possession of documents/certificates attesting their professional skills and work experience. However, a clean criminal record was a requirement for employment. Furthermore, in order to facilitate even more their access to the labour market, free services were offered to Ukrainian citizens registered in the national database by the National Agency for Employment and its territorial structures, such as: vocational information and counselling, job matching<sup>4</sup>, access to vocational training programmes, evaluation and acknowledgment of professional skills acquired in casual and non-formal settings and EURES<sup>5</sup> support services (Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and National Agency for Employment: 2023; CDMiR, 2023). Just as the Romanian citizens, they also have the right to receive unemployment benefits while searching for job. However, learning the official state language is essential for a long-term stay and successful labour market integration, Ukrainian nationals being entitled to benefit from free Romanian language courses organized by the regional employment agencies.

Several platforms were created in order to facilitate the access to information and the job searching process. The National Agency for Employment together with its regional structures, the County Employment Agencies (located in each county and in the capital city, Bucharest) provide the most relevant information for Ukrainian displaced persons searching for a job in Romania, every month publishing the list of available jobs and the qualifications needed in order to fill those positions. In addition, registration at the County Employment Agency where Ukrainian refugees reside is mandatory, as it was previously mentioned. Besides the national agency and its territorial structures, several online platforms were developed, such as Jobs4Ukraine or Adecco, where Ukrainian nationals seeking a job can create an account and post their CVs, also making possible

---

<sup>3</sup> In case employment in the following fields (medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, architecture or any liberal profession) being in the possession of documents/certificates/diplomas attesting studies and qualifications was compulsory.

<sup>4</sup> Connecting job seekers and employers in an effort to develop a working relationship or service relationship.

<sup>5</sup> Providing Ukrainian refugees with information, counseling, and mediation related to available jobs in the European Union and the European Economic Area.

the posting of recruitment ads by employers. For instance, one of the most significant online recruitment platforms in the country, BestJobs has even marked jobs with the tag ‘Ukrainian friendly jobs’, supporting the Ukrainian nationals in their job finding process. Telecommunications, technical and engineering, sales, accounting and the hospitality industry were the main fields in which employers marked jobs suitable for Ukrainian citizens on BestJobs at the beginning of 2022. Groups created on social media platforms, such as Facebook or Telegram also represented an important venue for refugees trying to find accommodation and a workplace in the country. Ukrscola, (Ukrainian Schools in Romania) was launched as a private initiative by the Ukrainian community from Romania with the aim of hiring Ukrainian speaking educators for teaching various disciplines. Vulnerable people coming from Ukraine are also being assisted in finding a job in the country with the help of NGOs, such as, Ateliere Fără Frontiere (Jobs for Ukraine, 2024; Adecco, 2024; BestJobs, 2022b; Guvernul României, 2024; Ukrscola, 2024).

Assessing the level of integration of Ukrainian refugees on the Romanian labour market, we contend that since the beginning of the military hostilities in February 2022 until the end of summer 2024, only a small number of Ukrainian displaced persons have managed to find a job in the country. Despite Romania being in the near vicinity of Ukraine, Eurostat data revealed that by the end of 2023, three EU countries hosted the vast majority, 60% of the beneficiaries of international protection from Ukraine, Germany accounting for 29% of the total EU, while Poland for 22.1% and Czechia for 8.7% (Eurostat, 2024). Likewise, these countries scored better with respect to the labour market integration of the Ukrainian refugees than Romania. According to the data compiled by the Institute for Employment Research, the Research Institute of the German Federal Employment Agency there were notable fluctuations concerning the Ukrainian refugees labour market integration in the 2022-2024 timeframe. From among the EU member states, Lithuania with 47.87%, the Netherlands with 46%, Estonia with 39.82%, Denmark with 39.30%, and Poland with 38.05% boasted with the highest employment rates of Ukrainian refugees already in the fourth quarter of 2022, outside the EU, the United Kingdom leading the way with 56%. Germany, Austria, France, Ireland with an average 20% rate, established themselves at the centre of the EU spectrum. Romania with 8.7%, alongside Croatia and Slovenia was among the EU members states registering the lowest level of labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees. The forefront countries<sup>6</sup> have managed to maintain this successful integration trend in 2023, respectively in the first quarter of 2024, some even increasing the integration rate. While midrange countries such as, Germany, Austria, France and Ireland have managed to increase the labour market integration rates, conversely, Romania situated at the bottom of the spectrum, registering a slight decrease from 7.33% by the end of 2023, to a 6.94% integration rate in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2024 (IAB Report, 2024: 64).

As previously underscored, in Romania the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees was rather low. According to the report prepared by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, in January 2023 out of the 107.241 (47.851 of which were children) Ukrainian refugees residing in the country only 5.007 were employed, with 1.300 Ukrainians receiving mentorship throughout the process of socio-occupational integration. Moreover, during this period, 5 job fairs were organized for Ukrainian

---

<sup>6</sup> Lithuania in the 3rd quarter of 2023 scored 56.37, and 57.24 in the 1st quarter of 2024, while Poland in the 4th quarter of 2023 registered 48.48 and 48.29 in the 1st quarter of 2024.

refugees at country level with over 700 beneficiaries (Prime Minister's Chancellery, 2023). According to a press release from the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity by September 2023, nearly 7000 Ukrainian refugees (6954) have found work in Romania, with over 500 Romanian employers indicating their willingness to hire them. Upon scrutinizing their primary occupations, it becomes evident that the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian refugees currently residing in Romania are employed in manual labour or blue-collar occupations. As indicated by the list of available jobs for Ukrainian refugees, blue-collar jobs predominate both at national and local level. Consequently, Ukrainian nationals have managed to be employed as: "automotive wiring manufacturers, automotive industry specialists, textile industry manufacturers, construction workers, violinists, drivers, jobs in the hospitality industry, sales representatives, fishermen, confectioners, pedagogues, car mechanics, IT, pastry chefs, waiters, packers, cooks, data processing operators, hairdressers, manicurists, beauticians, caretakers of green spaces, goods handlers, food industry workers, unskilled workers in the field of electricity, unskilled workers in road maintenance, chemist in the textile industry, car sales workers, car operators, social workers, translators, workers in the aircraft industry, dental technicians, engineer, architect manager, design engineer, unskilled non-ferrous metal casting worker, ship engineer, sales manager, quality controller, plastics operators, social parent, floating crane operator, ship agent, photographer and administrative clerks" (Ministrul Muncii și Solidarității Sociale, 2023). By the end of June 2024, the trend in labour market integration of the Ukrainian refugees has maintained a linear trajectory, scoring the same numbers as in 2023. As revealed on the site of National Employment Agency, between 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 and the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2024, 23.115 Ukrainian citizens have registered in the records of the territorial agencies under the National Employment Agency (ANOFM) to benefit from information, professional counselling and work mediation services. The vast majority were registered at the county employment agencies from Constanța (5.658), București (5.273), Ilfov (1.915), Maramureș (1.576), Brașov (1.488), Suceava (918), Galați (876), Cluj (702), Iași (686), Sibiu (604) and Timiș (554) etc. While 3114 Ukrainian refugees have managed to find a job in the country as a result of the employment services offered by the National Employment Agency, 6775 active work contracts are registered in the Revisal database as of date. 683 employers have shown availability to hire Ukrainian nationals, putting at their disposal 5.919 vacant jobs. As already emphasized, the vast majority of the jobs prioritized manual labour, employers declaring vacant positions in the following sectors: "restaurants, manufacture of electrical and electronic equipment for motor vehicles; manufacture of other articles of clothing (excluding underwear); construction works of residential and non-residential buildings; hotels and other similar accommodation facilities; shoe manufacturing; manufacture of furniture.; manufacture of other electric and electronic wires and cables; rolling stock manufacturing; business and management consultancy activities; stone cutting, shaping and finishing; bars and other beverage service activities; bread making, cake making and fresh pastry products; preparation of fibers and spinning of textile fibers, plumbing, heating and air conditioning works, etc."(ANOFM, 2024).

### *5.2. What do the Ukrainian displaced persons think about the work conditions in Romania and their labour market integration?*

After inquiring the opinion of the public from Romania, it is necessary to examine the perceptions of the Ukrainian refugees about the conditions from the country

as well. Statistics show that, in spite of the numerous actions and policies put in place, relatively few Ukrainian refugees have chosen to remain and seek employment in the country, in comparison with the number of Ukrainian nationals who have crossed the state borders and those who have sought safety and employment in other European/EU countries. According to a survey published by the Fundamental Rights Agency in February 2023, almost half of the Ukrainians residing in Romania, 1 in every 3 person, at the time had no intention of staying on the long-term, wishing to go back home compared to only 35% expressing a similar opinion in other EU countries. On the other hand, 65% of Ukrainian refugees staying in Romania, didn't pay for accommodation, this representing the highest rate among the countries participating in the survey, in contrast with the average 35% from other countries. As revealed in the survey, lack of proficiency in the language of the host nation was cited as the primary cause for refugees giving up education, not working, or not making the necessary arrangements to receive medical assistance. From among the respondents in the survey, while on an average 33% expressed having a paid job, 33% of women were not employed due to having sick relatives, elderly, or children to care for. Almost half of the respondents, 48% were complaining about the quality of the employment opportunities, on many occasions the offered positions being below their level of studies and qualification, 30% even declaring being exploited at the work place. Despite the lodging and financial assistance provided at country level, 79% of the participants in the survey were complaining about daily financial difficulties (Digi24 (2023)). According to one of the latest surveys, from February 2024 compiled by the Save the Children Organization, from among the Ukrainian respondents 74% declared facing difficulties related to paying their rent and utilities, 54% related to purchasing medicine or visiting the doctor. As regards employment, 62% of respondents were not employed at the time of participating in the survey, mainly citing linguistic obstacles, only 17% having a job. Learning the state language is challenging not only for the adults, but for the children as well, 34% of Ukrainian children being in need of assistance in order to learn the Romanian language (România Pozitivă, 2024).

## 6. Conclusions

The current paper was preoccupied with examining how Romania responded and managed the mass displacement of people prompted by the war in Ukraine. The qualitative assessment of the early response mechanisms and the subsequently developed legislative framework, have given evidence of a swift decision-making capacity at the executive level. The implemented medium- and long-term policy actions, starting with the reception, psychological counselling, accommodation, healthcare, childcare, labour market integration, demonstrate Romania's genuine commitment to provide assistance to the Ukrainian displaced persons. However, evidence show that regardless of such measures and in spite of millions crossing the borders from Ukraine to Romania, in the end, a smaller number of refugees have decided to stay in the country and search for employment in the long term, in comparison with other neighbouring countries like Poland or more Western European states, such as, Germany or the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the data compiled by the Institute for Employment Research revealed Romania being at the bottom of the spectrum concerning the labour market integration rate of Ukrainian refugees. We contend, that the large disparities found in several EU members states concerning the labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees are the result of divergent policy measures and integration strategies that were implemented at

national level, coupled with the already existent economic and employment conditions, childcare infrastructure and healthcare service. Moreover, member states which had a high demand for low skilled labour recorded elevated employment rates, compared to those with positive unemployment growth and a strictly regulated labour market. As revealed in the report, Germany has demonstrated that on the medium and long-term the language barrier can also be tackled by investing in extensive language and integration courses, thus reaching increased employment rates among refugees in the long term thanks to a plan focused on sustainable integration. With respect to Romania, the prevalent economic circumstances, the language barrier, as well as the type/quality of the available jobs together with the labour conditions acted as the most important obstacles in front of the Ukrainian refugees' successful labour market integration, by the end of June 2024, registering less than 7000 active employment contracts in the country.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adecco (2024), *Jobs for Ukraine*, <https://www.adeccojobsforukraine.com/>.
- Agencia Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă (ANOFM) (2024) *Situația încadrării pe piața muncii a cetățenilor ucraineni, prin intermediul ANOFM*, 25 June, <https://www.anofm.ro/situatia-incadrarii-pe-piata-muncii-a-cetatenilor-ucraineni-prin-intermediul-anofm-25-iunie-2024/>
- Amariei Cezar (2024), *Refugiații ucraineni din România nu și-au primit banii de cazare și masă din iulie, deși UE oferă sute de milioane de euro*, in: Europa Liberă România, <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/refugiati-ucraineni-bani-cazare-simasa/32822044.html>
- BestJobs (2022a), *Angajații români nu se tem de integrarea refugiaților ucraineni pe piața muncii din România*, <https://www.bestjobs.eu/casual/2022/04/29/angajatii-romani-nu-se-tem-de-integrarea-refugiatiilor-ucraineni-pe-piata-muncii-din-romania-aproape-jumatate-dintre-ei-ar-fi-deschisi-sa-ii-aiba-colegi/>
- BestJobs (2022b), *Peste 1.800 de joburi Ukrainian friendly disponibile pe platformă, cele mai multe în telecomunicații, tehnic & inginerie, vânzări, contabilitate și HoReCa*, <https://www.bestjobs.eu/casual/2022/03/21/bestjobs-sustine-refugiatiilor-ucraineni-sa-si-gaseasca-job-in-romania/>
- Coaliția pentru Drepturile Migranților și Refugiaților (CDMiR) (2023), *Ghid pentru accesul la piața muncii pentru migranți și beneficiari ai protecției temporare în România*, București
- Council of the European Union (2024), *Refugee inflow from Ukraine*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/refugee-inflow-from-ukraine/>
- Digi24 (2023), *Sondaj: Jumătate dintre refugiații ucraineni care stau în România vor înapoi acasă. 2 din 3 nu plătesc pentru o locuință*, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/ue/sondaj-jumatate-dintre-refugiatiilor-ucraineni-care-stau-in-romania-vor-ina-2-din-3-nu-platesc-pentru-o-locuinta-aici-2266487>
- Euronews Romania (2023), *Două milioane de euro, fraudă din banii refugiaților*, <https://www.euronews.ro/articole/doua-milioane-de-euro-frauda-din-banii-refugiatiilor-pest-200-de-persoane-au-fost>

- European Commission (2023), *Standard Eurobarometer 98-Winter 2022/2023*, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2872>
- Eurostat (2024), *Over 4.3 million people under temporary protection*, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240208-1>
- Government of Romania (2024a), *Report on the Integration of Ukrainian Refugees in Romania*, Period 24 February 2022-31 December 2023, [https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Monthly-report-December-2023\\_English.pdf](https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Monthly-report-December-2023_English.pdf)
- Government of Romania (2024b), *Report on the Integration of Ukrainian Refugees in Romania*, Period 24 February 2022-30 June 2024, [https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Monthly-report-June-2024\\_English.pdf](https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Monthly-report-June-2024_English.pdf)
- Guvernul României (2024), *Dopomoha*. <https://dopomoha.ro/ro>
- Guvernul României (2024), *Munca pentru refugiații din Ucraina în România*, <https://dopomoha.ro/ro/munca-pentru-refugiatii-din-ucraina-in-romania>
- Guvernul României (2022), *Muncește în România*, <https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/munceste-in-romania/>
- Guvernul României (2024), *Programul 50/20*, <https://dopomoha.ro/ro/programul-5020>
- INSCOP Research (2023), *Sondaj de opinie național- Septembrie-Octombrie 2023. Partea a IV-a: Percepții cu privire la războiul din Ucraina*, <https://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/04.10.23-Sondaj-INSCOP-News.ro-Partea-IV.pdf>
- Institute for Employment Research (IAB) (2024), *Labour market integration of Ukrainian refugees: An international perspective*, <https://doku.iab.de/forschungsbericht/2024/fb1624en.pdf>
- Institutul Național de Statistică (INS) (2022) *Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor, om cu om, casă cu casă, București*. [https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive/Institutul\\_Roman\\_pentru\\_Evaluare\\_și\\_Strategie\\_\(IRES\)\\_2023](https://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-rpl-2021/rezultate-definitive/Institutul_Roman_pentru_Evaluare_și_Strategie_(IRES)_2023)
- (2023), *Un an de război în Ucraina*, [https://ires.ro/uploads/articole/ires\\_1-an-de-razboi-in-ucraina\\_sondaj-de-opinie\\_februarie-2023.pdf](https://ires.ro/uploads/articole/ires_1-an-de-razboi-in-ucraina_sondaj-de-opinie_februarie-2023.pdf)
- Jobs for Ukraine (2024), <https://jobs4ukr.com/>
- Mészáros Edina Lilla (2019), *The Role of Romania in the Current European Union Refugee Crisis: is the Country Able to Integrate Asylum*, in *The Review of European Affairs*, Volume 3:1(5) 2019, The Polish European Community Studies Association PECSA, pp. 23-52
- Ministrul Muncii și Solidarității Sociale (2023), *Comunicat de presă. Aproximativ 7.000 de cetățeni ucraineni s-au angajat în România de la începutul conflictului armat*, <https://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/7017-cp-7000-cetateni-ucrainieni-angajati-04092023>
- Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and National Agency for Employment (2022), *Right to Work, Free Services Offered by NAE Brochure*
- News.ro (2023), *Sondaj Avangarde – 64% dintre participanți consideră că România ar trebui să acorde în continuare sprijin refugiaților din Ucraina*, București, <https://www.news.ro/social/sondaj-avangarde-64-dintre-participanti-considera-ca-romania-ar-trebuie-sa-acorde-in-continuare-sprijin-refugiatilor-din-ucraina-ce-spun-romanii-cand-vine-vorba-despre-trimiterea-de-arme-in-ucraina-1922402420122023031821067458>

- OECD (2022), *The potential contribution of Ukrainian refugees to the labour force in European host countries*, 27 July, <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/the-potential-contribution-of-ukrainian-refugees-to-the-labour-force-in-european-host-countries-e88a6a55/>
- OECD (2023), *What we know about the skills and early labour market outcomes of refugees from Ukraine*, 6 January, <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/what-we-know-about-the-skills-and-early-labour-market-outcomes-of-refugees-from-ukraine-c7e694aa/>
- Portal Legislativ (2022), Hotărâre nr. 336 din 11 martie 2022
- Portal Legislativ (2023), Hotărâre nr. 368 din 26 aprilie 2023
- Portal Legislativ (2022), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 15 din 27 februarie 2022
- Portal Legislativ (2022), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 20 din 7 martie 2022
- Portal Legislativ (2022), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 28 din 23 martie 2022
- Portal Legislativ (2023), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 15 din 31 ianuarie 2023
- Portal Legislativ (2023), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 80 din 5 octombrie 2023
- Portal Legislativ (2019), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 57 din 3 iulie 2019
- Portal Legislativ (2024), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 27 din 28 martie 2024
- Portal Legislativ (2024), Ordonanță de urgență (OUG) nr. 96 din 28 iunie 2028
- Prime Minister's Chancellery (2023), *Romania's Response to the Humanitarian Refugee Crisis*, 13 January, <https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ANNUAL-STATUS-REPORT-ROMANIA-DEC-2022-2-1-1.pdf>
- România Pozitivă (2024), *Sondaj refugiați Ucraina: Acces la servicii medicale, școală și job-uri – ce spun refugiații ucraineni*, <https://www.romaniapozitiva.ro/romania-pozitiva/sondaj-refugiati-ucraina-acces-la-servicii-medicale-scoala-si-job-uri-ce-spun-refugiati-ucraineni/>
- Ukrscola (2024), *Școli ucrainene în România*, [https://ukrscola.ro/index\\_ro.html](https://ukrscola.ro/index_ro.html)
- UNHCR (2023), *Regional Protection Profiling and Monitoring. Protection Risks and Needs of Refugees from Ukraine*, October 30, <https://data.unhcr.org/ar/dataviz/293>,
- UNHCR (2024), *Ukraine Refugee Situation*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>
- UNHCR (2024), *Romania. Ukraine Refugee Situation*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782>