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(editor)

# UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN TWO ROMANIAN SPEAKING COUNTRIES

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***The war returns to European soil…***

*For several decades, Europe experienced a period of peace, economic growth, and democratic consolidation, cultivating a distinctive model of coexistence that became a global benchmark for stability and prosperity. This European model, rooted in shared values, multiculturalism, and the rule of law, was widely admired as a pathway to sustainable development and peaceful coexistence. Romania, for instance, which emerged from decades of communist dictatorship, regarded its accession to the European Union in 2007 as a pivotal moment in its transition to democracy and integration into the global order. Moldova aspires to follow a similar path toward European integration.*

*The collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s marked a historic turning point, enabling several Eastern European nations to reclaim their sovereignty and redefine their geopolitical trajectories, Moldova included. For many of these newly independent states, the European Union symbolized not only peace and prosperity but also a safeguard against authoritarianism. As a result, they embarked on ambitious reforms aimed at aligning with EU standards and sought to join the broader Euro-Atlantic community. However, this movement was met with growing resistance from the Russian Federation, which increasingly pursued a neo-imperialist agenda, seeking to reassert its influence over its former sphere.*

*While countries such as the Baltic States successfully integrated into the EU, others faced persistent pressure designed to keep them in so-called "grey zones" characterized by instability and a lack of clear alignment with either East or West. Russia's attempts to undermine the sovereignty of its neighbors have escalated over time, manifesting in hybrid warfare, disinformation campaigns, and, more recently, direct military aggression in Ukraine.*

*The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a dramatic escalation of this strategy, representing not only an assault on Ukrainian sovereignty and*

*democracy but also a broader challenge to the international rules-based order. This aggression shattered longstanding assumptions about peace in Europe and revealed the fragility of international guarantees that were once believed to deter such conflicts. The war in Ukraine has brought the scourge of armed conflict back to the European continent in a form not witnessed since World War II.*

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**Contributors**

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**Dr. Veronica MOCANU** is a habilitated Doctor of Law, Associate Professor, and accomplished legal researcher with over 14 years of experience in academic, scientific, and policy-oriented work. She specializes in legal frameworks related to digitalization, innovation governance, data protection, IT regulation, and the legal evaluation of emerging technologies. Dr. Mocanu has served as a senior legal

expert and consultant in numerous internationally funded projects, contributing to the development and implementation of reform strategies in digital governance, research policy, and technological innovation. Her academic activity is complemented by extensive international collaboration with research institutions, universities, and public authorities from over 20 countries, including the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Ethiopia. She has been invited to contribute expert input in interdisciplinary forums at the intersection of law, digital transformation, and public policy. Dr. Mocanu is the author of multiple peer-reviewed scientific publications and policy papers. Her contributions to innovation and applied research have been recognized through numerous awards, including gold, silver, and bronze medals at national and international invention fairs held in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. Her research bridges theory and practice, fostering a rights-based approach to digital innovation and contributing to the shaping of forward-looking, legally sound digital ecosystems.

**Professor Larysa NECHAIEVA** is a professor at the National University of Odessa, Ukraine, and a distinguished specialist in the field of musical art. She holds a candidate of Pedagogical Sciences and holds a PhD in psychological sciences. Her PhD dissertation focused on the problems of communication—ranging from universal forms to those professionally relevant—exploring, in particular, communication through various types of art. Her research addressed the nature of human intelligence, consciousness, and thinking, culminating in the scientific substantiation and introduction of a new concept in domestic psychological science: *artistic thinking*. This form of thinking, considered essential for professionals in the arts—including music, visual arts, choreography, and theatre—plays a critical role in the professional training and development of future specialists in these disciplines. Professor Nechaieva is the author of over 50 scientific publications in international journals and an active participant in international scientific conferences dedicated to innovative technologies in science and education. She has supervised numerous graduate, master's, and doctoral theses in psychology, pedagogy, and the arts. Her contributions to national science and her excellence in training music students—particularly in the field of piano performance—have earned her multiple diplomas and international certificates of recognition.

**Irina BAGALOVA** is a speech therapist of the highest category, specializing in the diagnosis, correction, and prevention of speech disorders in preschool and primary school-aged children. Her professional approach is grounded in identifying the causes, symptoms, structure, and underlying mechanisms of speech communication disorders in children, followed by the development of individualized corrective strategies. The methods developed by Irina not only address speech difficulties across various age groups but also foster the holistic personal development of each child. Her continuous participation in online seminars, specialized trainings, thematic speech therapy courses, and professional communities actively supports her ongoing professional growth, scientific engagement, and the advancement of her pedagogical expertise.

**Marina VERINDEANU** is a primary school teacher, at the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. She is a specialist in the education of primary school students and an experienced methodologist. Her professional focus includes the development of students' independent thinking, the formation of a well-rounded worldview, stimulation of cognitive interest, and the broadening of intellectual horizons. Marina is also the author of methodological recommendations for teachers, offering practical strategies to enhance classroom engagement and foster holistic educational development in young learners.

**Preface**

This book is elaborated under the framework of the Project „@Work: Resilient societies in the wake of persistent crises. A case study of Ukrainian women refugees` digital work", grant nr. 760132/18.09.2023", financed by PNRR. Finanţat de Uniunea Europeană – UrmătoareaGeneraţieUE, https://mfe.gov.ro/pnrr/, https://www.facebook.com/PNRROficial/
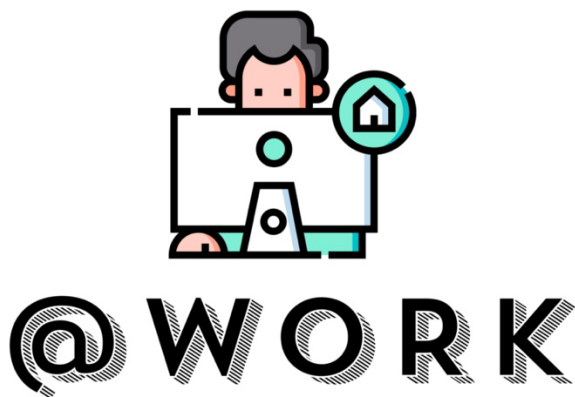
**INTRODUCTION**

We are living in an era defined by profound challenges and multifaceted crises, a time of radical transformation that demands critical reflection and thorough analysis. Contemporary events and global processes have triggered waves of upheaval, placing humanity under immense strain. Among these, the war in Ukraine stands out as a defining moment, having deeply shaken societies and ignited worldwide concern. This conflict has not only displaced millions but also underlined the fragility of international security and the urgency of humanitarian response.

Even after three years, the discourse surrounding armed conflict and the ensuing refugee crisis remains far from exhausted. By focusing on this topic, the present volume seeks to illuminate its pressing human, social, and political dimensions. Anchored in a comparative framework, the study situates its analysis within the context of two neighboring states—Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and one common language —thus enabling a coherent exploration of how each country has responded since the outbreak of war. In doing so, this work offers a timely and spatially-grounded investigation of power, violence, authority, and humanism, all of which are central to understanding our contemporary moment.

The refugee crisis precipitated by the war in Ukraine represents one of the most significant humanitarian and geopolitical challenges Europe has faced in recent decades, especially for countries located in close proximity to the conflict. Romania and the Republic of Moldova, acutely aware of their own vulnerabilities, responded swiftly with solidarity and support, aiming to meet the urgent needs of individuals who, overnight, were forced to abandon their homes in search of safety and security.

This book examines these responses by analyzing the strategies and policies adopted by both countries in managing the crisis. Romania, as a member of the European Union, and Moldova, as an EU partner country, mobilized institutional capacities, coordinated humanitarian efforts, and demonstrated a shared commitment to confronting an unprecedented situation. In doing so, they revealed crucial insights into state resilience and societal adaptability in times of acute pressure. This study therefore addresses essential questions that go beyond administrative management, offering a holistic understanding of the interplay between national action and individual agency during humanitarian emergencies.

Beyond the immediate scope of the refugee crisis, this book also engages with deeper existential and philosophical questions raised by war and forced displacement. It calls for an integrated approach to security and migration, one that considers the interdependence of state and human security and reflects critically on the normative values underpinning democratic societies in times of coercion. The war in Ukraine has revived the relevance of humanism, solidarity, and shared responsibility for the future, and has highlighted the necessity of synergy and cooperation in decision-making processes and collective action.

This volume brings together two complementary perspectives: that of the state and that of the individual. On the one hand, it investigates the coordinated efforts of national institutions; on the other, it emphasizes how conflict compels a reevaluation of national priorities, particularly regarding the dual imperatives of state security and personal safety. The heightened awareness of individual vulnerability has reaffirmed the importance of legal protections, inter-institutional cooperation, and a broader focus on human and societal security as foundational elements of national resilience.

The book also conceptualizes the responses of Romania and Moldova to the influx of refugees as a critical case study, one that reveals both countries' institutional strengths and limitations. It highlights similarities and divergences in their policy responses, decision-making processes, and resource mobilization strategies. This analysis underlines how the management of the Ukrainian refugee crisis serves as a broader lesson in emergency response, regional resilience, and humanitarian governance.

Furthermore, the book explores not only governmental and institutional actions, but also refugees perspectives, ranging from expressions of solidarity to episodes of social resistance. In doing so, it expands the scope of inquiry beyond immediate crisis response, probing the long-term implications for national identity, social cohesion, and the foundational values that sustain democratic societies.

The overarching goal of this volume is to offer an integrated analytical framework for understanding humanitarian crises within fragile regional security environments. It contributes to the academic discourse on refugees, conflict, and security by highlighting the synergies that emerge in times of crisis and by advocating for more inclusive, responsive, and ethically grounded policy approaches.

**Chapter One** provides a conceptual overview of the relationship between security and migration in the 21st century, arguing that these domains are increasingly interlinked within the European context. It examines how forced migration has evolved into a complex geopolitical and humanitarian challenge that necessitates a rethinking of security paradigms, in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, shifting the focus from state-centric models to human-centered approaches grounded in cohesion, human rights, and integration.

**Chapter Two** examines the strategies and coordination mechanisms implemented both regionally and within Romania in response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. It analyzes the initial emergency measures at the regional level and highlights Romania's ongoing efforts to establish a strategic approach and a coherent coordination framework.

**Chapter Three** delves into Romania's legal and institutional framework for refugee assistance. It explores the intersection of national legislation, EU directives, and regional and international conventions, and explores the effectiveness of these instruments in practice. The chapter evaluates both the legal protections afforded to refugees and the broader support mechanisms available for their integration.

**Chapter Four** shifts focus to the Republic of Moldova, examining the extent to which its national refugee protection framework aligns with international and European standards. It investigates the practical implications of Moldova's legal provisions and identifies systemic gaps and challenges in implementation. This chapter offers policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of Moldova's asylum and refugee protection systems.

**Chapter Five** explores the role of digital technologies in migration governance, in the specific case study of the Republic of Moldova. It critically examines the legal, ethical, and human rights implications of digital tools such as biometric systems, AI-driven decision-making, and digital identity platforms. The chapter highlights both the potential benefits and the significant risks posed by digitalization in migration management, advocating for regulatory frameworks grounded in human rights principles.

**Chapter Six** analyzes refugee integration in Romania, focusing on policy measures, institutional initiatives, and labor market programs designed to support socio-economic inclusion. It identifies both opportunities and challenges, offering insights into how integration efforts can be enhanced through cross-sectoral collaboration. The chapter also examines the ongoing shift toward long-term integration strategies, with a special attention to labor market integration.

**Chapter Seven** offers a unique, bottom-up perspective on refugee integration by foregrounding the voices of Ukrainian refugees in Romania. Through personal testimonies, it provides an authentic and humanized account of displacement, adjustment, and resilience. This chapter employs a participatory research approach, challenging conventional methodologies and highlighting the value of lived experience in understanding forced migration and integration dynamics.

In conclusion, this book raises critical existential questions that are central to contemporary scholarly debates on war, displacement, and integration. It challenges us to reconsider the foundational principles of solidarity, justice, and human dignity in the face of terror, violence, and crisis. The war in Ukraine has once again demonstrated that conflict not only inflicts immeasurable human suffering, but also diverts societal energy and resources away from constructive progress. By examining how Romania and the Republic of Moldova have responded to this crisis, the book offers a valuable contribution to the study of resilience, humanitarian governance, and the evolving landscape of security in Europe.

*Professor Rodica CIOBANU*

CHAPTER 1

# REEVALUATING THE SECURITY VALUE FRAMEWORK IN EUROPE AMID THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

*Rodica CIOBANU*

**Ethical and Legal Developments in Migration Management in 21st-Century Europe**

The 21st century has introduced new forms of interaction between individuals and states, as well as novel approaches to governance, decision-making, and technological advancement across various domains. Simultaneously, it has necessitated a renewed commitment to values and principles once regarded as universally accepted, such as rationality, responsibility, and humanism. These principles are now being critically tested through collective efforts aimed at addressing the complex challenges and multiple crises that modern states increasingly face. While the contemporary era is often portrayed as one of rationality, innovation, and global progress, marked by rising international migration and growing empathy for vulnerable populations, it has also revealed a stark contrast. Few anticipated that this century, widely envisioned as a time of innovation and advancement, would also be marked by barbarity, multiple crises, and the resurgence of armed conflicts.

The current geopolitical context presents a complex landscape for analyzing and understanding the diverse threats to the security of both states and individuals. Armed conflicts, persistent poverty, the absence of legal protections, and the inefficacy of human rights enforcement mechanisms collectively contribute to a growing tendency among populations to seek safer and more stable environments in which to live and work. In parallel, the absence of reliable security guarantees compels individuals to migrate in pursuit of protection, while pushing the state governments to employ all available measures to preserve their territorial integrity and national sovereignty.

Moreover, the prospect of a prolonged state of emergency resulting from the armed conflict had seemed inconceivable to the vast majority of citizens in

European states. However, recent developments have proven a reconceptualization of how both internal and external security are understood, moving beyond a traditionally state- and military-centric perspective. Increasing attention is now directed toward human and social security, which encompass a broader and more inclusive understanding of vulnerability and protection. This shift has been significantly driven by the massive influx of refugees triggered by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which compelled neighboring countries such as the Republic of Moldova, and Romania, to urgently respond, direct their efforts and reprioritize policy agendas to accommodate and protect those fleeing conflict in search of safety. Simultaneously, the outbreak of war has questioned the feasibility of maintaining regional security, revealing the fragility of existing security frameworks and underlying the long-term consequences of an armed conflict for the geopolitical architecture, stability, and security in Europe.

Although European Union member states have previously experienced various waves of migration, the most recent influx, shaped by its specific circumstances, geopolitical context, and rapid developments, has significantly altered prevailing perceptions of both migration and security. In this evolving framework, individuals and communities have increasingly become the primary reference point and focal concern for ensuring regional security.

An examination of the evolution of migration processes since the end of the twentieth century reveals that the European territory, particularly after 1990, has experienced multiple waves of migration driven by economic, political, and social factors, as well as by armed conflicts. As Bantoş aptly notes, "the very term 'migration' is complicated and multifaceted, intersecting with concepts such as exile, refuge, and marginalization" (Bantoş, 2023, p. 87). Building on these conceptual intersections, and in order to clarify and better understand the current context faced by the Republic of Moldova and Romania, this analysis undertakes a brief exploration of how migration has become an essential dimension in discussions about security.

To begin with, it is important to highlight that the most significant phases of migration are closely linked to the geopolitical and socio-economic developments from the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

First and foremost, one can identify a wave of migration triggered by the collapse of communist regime, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the

ensuing efforts of citizens from former Soviet states to escape poverty and economic hardship. In this context, several relevant studies have identified causal relationships between socio-political processes, structural phenomena, and the stages experienced by states within the former Soviet area. Particularly noteworthy is the research presented in the doctoral thesis by Roşca (2018), which highlights the growing complexity of intercultural dynamics in the context of intensified global migration. Roşca observes that "with the intensification of migration at the global level, there is an increase in tensions, misunderstandings, and conflicts, as well as difficulties in communication both within one's own cultural environment and with representatives of other cultures." (Roşca, 2018, p. 11) The author argues that one of the major challenges of the future will be to cultivate intercultural dialogue capable of reconciling unity and solidarity with tolerance and diversity, while dispelling fears and anxieties associated with emerging social realities. Regarding this period, Musteaţă's article highlights key moments that illustrate the efforts of former Soviet states to assert their independence and sovereignty, and to establish democratic governance and the rule of law (Musteaţă, 2011). The author analyzes significant processes that affected the territorial integrity and political evolution of these states as they increasingly emerged as autonomous political entities on both the national and international stage. These themes remain highly relevant even more than three decades later.

In this context, the Republic of Moldova stands as a state significantly shaped by external influences, internal destabilization attempts, and separatist movements. Since proclaiming its independence on August 27, 1991, Moldova has experienced various phases that have gradually encouraged emigration and left a profound impact on its socio-demographic structure. Among the key drivers of this emigration, economic factors have been the most influential in shaping the decisions of Moldovan citizens to leave. Consequently, the country now faces a deepening demographic crisis, a trend mirrored in several other states in the region. In this regard, Sarcinschi emphasizes the implications of demographic shifts for societal security, arguing that such changes constitute a pressing security issue. The author notes, "the world is currently facing, and will continue to face in the coming decades, a series of demographic trends which, when correlated, can negatively influence Romania's national security [and arguably even more so that of the Republic of Moldova]… These trends, situated within a broader context

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of increasing refugee flows, illegal migration to Europe, and sustained regional conflicts, will generate… disastrous effects" (Sarcinschi, 2022, p. 27) on societal security.
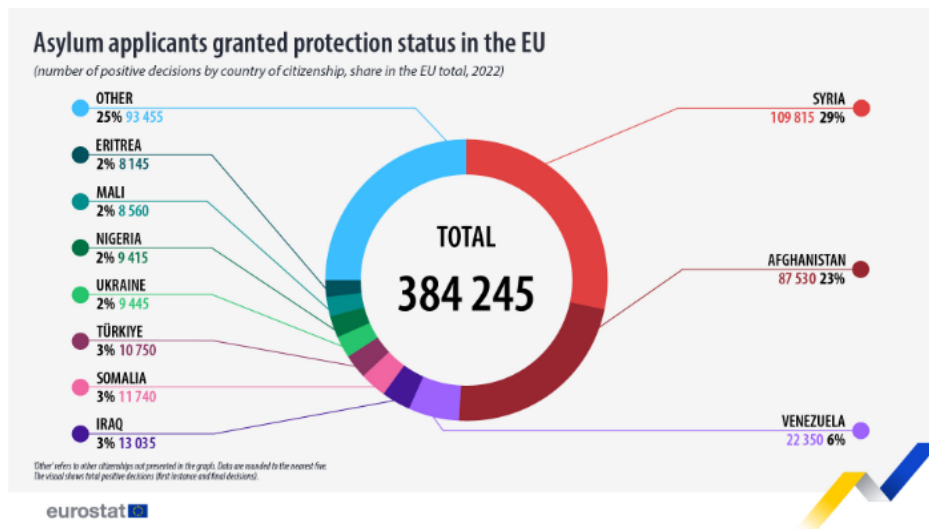
Secondly, the wave of forced migration triggered by the wars in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s occurred along severe economic hardship, the rise of extremist groups, and the collapse of federal authority (Chomsky, 2019). These conflicts were marked by heavy violations of human rights, resulting in the displacement of millions of individuals (ICTJ. 2009) who were subsequently granted refugee status. Scholarly analyses (Cristea, 2020) focusing on the nexus between security and migration in the context of the Yugoslav war highlight critical factors that prompted the European Commission to intensify its efforts aimed at safeguarding security and combating illegal human trafficking. These studies also emphasize the importance of interstate cooperation in the fight against organized crime and the development of a regulatory framework to enhance regional security. In this context, it is worth considering Chomsky's reflection on the conflict in Kosovo, where he argues that the lessons drawn from this crisis rely in "a new era of moral correctness, under the guiding arm of a new idealistic world determined to put an end to barbarism" (Chomsky, 2019, p. 136) a vision of a more humane and cohesive global society.

Thirdly, there is the wave of immigration resulting from the European Union's enlargement between 2004 and 2007, during which countries such as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic States became EU member states. Citizens from these countries sought better-paid employment opportunities in other European nations. This wave of migration is perhaps the least perplexing or subject to dual interpretations, as it falls within the pillar of free movement of people within the union. It is driven by rational decisions, rather than being imposed by external constraints such as political, ideological, or war-related factors.

Fourth, the issue of migrants from the Middle East and Africa requires significant attention. In 2015 alone, data indicate that more than 1 million refugees and migrants arrived in the European Union. This influx has emerged as a central concern for European countries and others around the world. Migration has become a topic of considerable attention, not only for policymakers but also for researchers. Prior to the Middle East refugee crisis, migration security was not a dominant area of academic inquiry. "The Middle East, situated at the crossroads

of Europe, Asia, and Africa, is one of the most politically, economically, socio-culturally, and religiously unstable regions in the world. The complex geopolitical dynamics and differing interests in the region have made it a hotspot for conflicts that threaten the security and stability of the international community" (Ejova & Voroneanu, 2017, p. 180). This situation calls for a reassessment of European policies and the development of strategies to address these risks and ensure broader security.

According to some researchers the European migration crisis, which began in 2015, is regarded as the most significant in Europe since World War II. The increasing flow of refugees and illegal immigrants into the European Union from North Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia, coupled with the EU's lack of preparedness for their reception and distribution, not only led to the widespread use of the term "refugee crisis" (Cojocaru, 2016) but also generated a divided and differentiated response among member states. The influx of refugees and illegal migrants has been identified as one of the primary drivers behind the resurgence of nationalism, fueled by anti-immigration political movements that emphasize the perceived or projected negative impact of migrants on "national culture," as argued by Sarcinschi (2022).



**Asylum applicants granted protection status in the EU**
*(number of positive decisions by country of citizenship, share in the EU total, 2022)*

OTHER
25% 93 455

ERITREA
2% 8 145

MALI
2% 8 560

NIGERIA
2% 9 415

UKRAINE
2% 9 445

TÜRKIYE
3% 10 750

SOMALIA
3% 11 740

IRAQ
3% 13 035

SYRIA
109 815 29%

AFGHANISTAN
87 530 23%

VENEZUELA
22 350 6%

TOTAL
384 245

*'Other' refers to other citizenships not presented in the graph. Data are rounded to the nearest five.*
*The visual shows total positive decisions (first instance and final decisions).*

eurostat

Source dataset: migr_asydcfsta (first instance decisions) and migr_asydcfina (final decisions)

Figure 1. *Asylum applicants granted protection status in the EU*

According to official data, a significant number of people seek refuge in Europe due to conflict, terrorism, and persecution in their home countries (Eurostat, 2023). In 2022, out of the 384,245 asylum seekers granted protection in the EU, more than a quarter were from war-torn Syria, followed by Afghanistan and Venezuela (Figure 1), which ranked second and third, respectively.

Finally, forced migration from Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated significantly since 2022, has pushed millions of Ukrainians to flee into European countries. Scholars studying this flow note that "the recent Russia-Ukraine war, along with the annexation of Crimea, has exposed Europe's vulnerabilities, particularly regarding the lack of security and the inability to ensure full protection at the European Union's borders. The war, which began on February 24, 2022, triggered a global multidimensional crisis, affecting the EU as well. This crisis has manifested in the migration sphere by significantly increasing immigration flows from Ukraine to the European Union" (Szele, 2023, p. 3).

With the outbreak of the war, regional order and security have become increasingly precarious, rendering neighboring countries particularly vulnerable to security challenges and external influences. This concern is echoed by Professor Carp, who, in his analysis of the Ukraine conflict, highlights that "the issue which has troubled both the authorities and the citizens of the Republic of Moldova from the outset is the security risk posed to the country by the potential expansion of Russian military actions" (Carp, 2024). This vulnerability has also been repeatedly emphasized in public discourses of the President of the Republic of Moldova. Specifically, President Sandu stated that "this war at Moldova's border poses a risk to all of us, especially to our region and in particular to the Republic of Moldova, which remains the most fragile and vulnerable. As …noted on other occasions, we do not currently perceive immediate or imminent threats to the security of our state, but such risks do exist, and the situation remains contingent on developments in Ukraine" (Studio-L). A similar perspective has been articulated by the President of Romania (Presidency.ro), who has addressed both the threats to Romania's national security and sovereignty, as well as the challenges posed by the ongoing refugee crisis, in numerous public speeches.

**First-time asylum applicants in EU countries, 2008-2024**
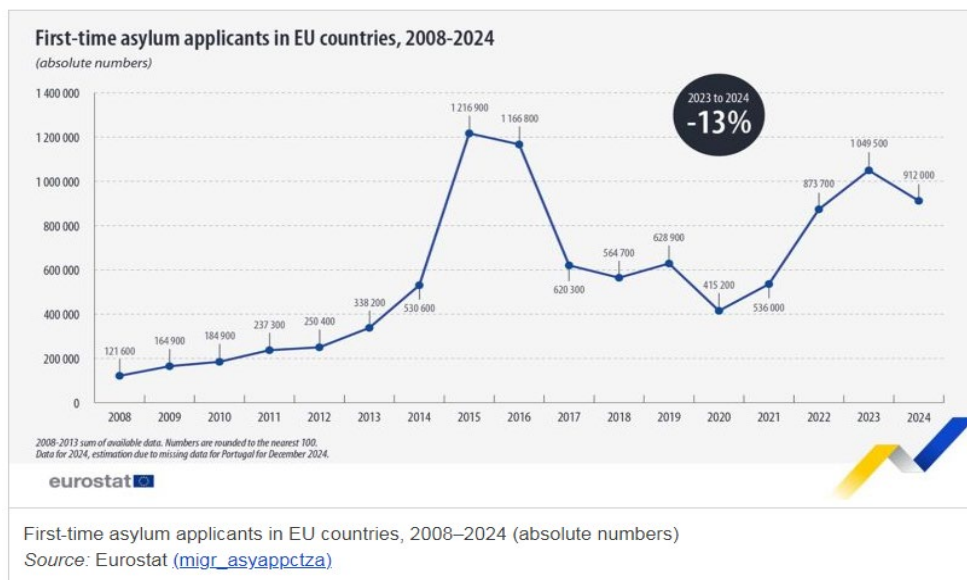(absolute numbers)

Figure 2. *First-time asylum applicants in EU countries, 2008-2024*

Since the onset of the war, Romania and Moldova, both sharing borders with Ukraine, have been confronted with a substantial influx of refugees. This sudden and large-scale movement of people placed considerable strain on the social, economic, and political systems of both countries, forcing them to address a range of complex challenges related to border security, refugee reception, integration, and the provision of long-term support. Despite their own internal difficulties, the authorities in these neighboring states undertook a comprehensive and humanitarian response, committing themselves fully to the protection of Ukrainian citizens, particularly vulnerable groups such as the elderly, unaccompanied minors, and mothers, many of whom crossed the border in search of safety, and often without identity documents (Ciobanu & Roşca, 2024).

In accordance with the provisions of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees from 1951, ratified by both Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees from 1967, the authorities of both states have sought to use all available legal instruments to balance the rights and obligations of individuals in need of protection. "The Convention is designed to provide international legal protection for refugees and to guarantee the exercise of their fundamental human rights and freedoms. The Protocol expanded the scope of the original Convention, which had been limited to European refugees in

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the aftermath of World War II, by removing both its geographical and temporal limitations. As a result, the Convention has become a universal legal framework for the protection of all individuals fleeing conflict and persecution" (Palii, 2024, p.13).

The Geneva Convention (UNHCR, 1951) provides the foundational legal framework for defining refugee status and outlines the obligations of signatory states. The Preamble of the Convention underlines several key principles: the imperative of demonstrating solidarity with individuals compelled to flee their countries of origin and ensuring the protection of their fundamental rights; the necessity for a coordinated international response to support states experiencing large refugee inflows, given the significant challenges such situations may pose; and the recognition of the inherently social and humanitarian dimensions of the refugee issue.

As a result, Romania and the Republic of Moldova made a humanitarian and moral commitment to support Ukrainian refugees by ensuring access to essential needs. However, to manage the scale of the refugee influx, international assistance proved vital (PE, 2022). This support has helped address various aspects of the crisis, including refugee management, social integration, employment, housing, healthcare, and education.

According to UNHCR (2023) data, approximately 6.9 million Ukrainian refugees had been registered worldwide, the majority in Europe. The most affected countries included Poland, Romania, and Moldova. In Romania, over 85,000 Ukrainian refugees were registered as of early 2024. In Moldova, the number, though smaller in absolute terms, was significant relative to the country's population and resources.

Since 2022, the international community has consistently supported refugees. Although responses to the refugee crisis have been coordinated, and respectful of refugees' fundamental rights, ensuring the sustainable management of such crises requires addressing the humanitarian, social, economic, and political challenges that have emerged.

The impact of the war in Ukraine on regional security has drawn significant attention not only from national authorities and European and international institutions but also from experts and researchers. The conflict has generated a reexamination of European and global security frameworks within the broader

context of international relations[1]. Existing publications offer a comprehensive analysis of the evolving geopolitical landscape, highlighting the associated risks and outlining strategic responses required to navigate this complex crisis.
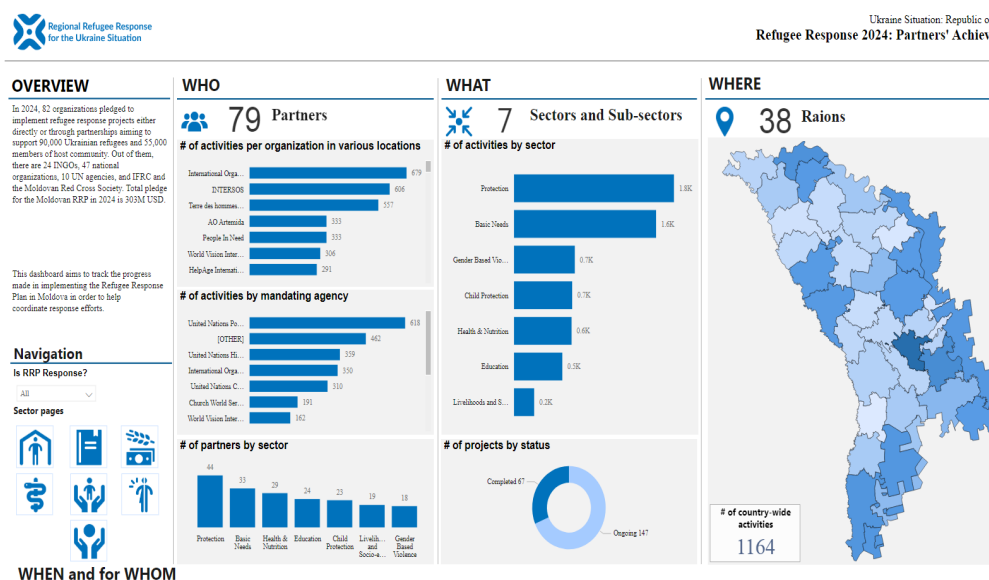


Source: *UNHCR. (2024). Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation. Republic of Moldova. https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/mda. (accessed 12.05.2025).*

Figure 3. *Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation. Republic of Moldova*

Undeniably, the war in Ukraine has a profound impact on the national security of both the Republic of Moldova and Romania, generating military and economic threats, influencing foreign policy, and prompting significant shifts in societal dynamics and internal affairs. As a result, concerns over national security have intensified. The conflict has also underlined the need of both countries to deepen their cooperation with the European Union and NATO, particularly in the areas of security and defense.

While often perceived as a phenomenon unique to the modern era, migration and forced displacement have deep historical roots. For centuries, armed conflicts, religious, ethnic, or political persecution, the collapse of empires, and regime changes have compelled people to flee their homes. However, it was

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[1] Note: A selection of articles on this topic is available under the section Russian-Ukrainian War, accessible via the following link: https://warontherocks.com/ understanding-the-russo-ukrainian-war-a-guide-from-war-on-the-rocks/

particularly during and after the two World Wars, that forced displacements reached unprecedented levels, prompting a series of international responses, including the institutionalization of refugee protection mechanisms. Moreover, the measures adopted to manage successive waves of migrants in Europe throughout this period have raised ethical and legal questions concerning the protection of human rights during armed conflicts and the responsibilities of the international community in times of crisis.

**Prioritizing Threat Axes in Human and Social Security**

Rather than focusing on the military dynamics of the conflict, our analysis centers on reflections that highlight the value foundations of a post-conflict social order. We explore how the lessons of the past have been overshadowed in the current era, leading to the erosion of fundamental principles of international law, and how what was once considered normality and stability has increasingly given way to uncertainty and chaos.

In this context, as reflected in the present analysis and supported by the European Parliament's position, migration is recognized as a multifaceted phenomenon driven by a range of factors, including security concerns, demographic shifts, human rights violations, poverty, and climate change (EP, 2020). As a result, migration, particularly forced migration, and security have become closely interrelated subjects of analysis and research. From this perspective, Căldare examines the dual impact of migration on both the host country and the country of origin. The author argues that migration and security are intrinsically linked, as both influence the socio-human landscape with significant implications for the economy, such as triggering or exacerbating economic crises. Furthermore, migration affects the cultural and religious composition of host societies, while contributing to demographic decline in countries of origin. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the consequences of migration on both the socio-economic situation and national security are particularly notable (Căldare, 2012). Statistical data highlight a persistent demographic decline; for instance, the 2024 census revealed a 13.9% population decrease compared to 2022 (BNS, 2024). Simultaneously, a comparative analysis of the Human Development Index (HDI) over the past three decades shows a

10.9% improvement, with the HDI rising from 0.690 to 0.763, indicating progress in certain development indicators despite ongoing demographic challenges.

According to data from a recent UN report, nine out of ten countries experienced a decline in their HDI due to the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and the war in Ukraine. However, the Republic of Moldova showed a slight improvement, rising one position in the global HDI ranking in 2023 to 80th out of 191 countries. By comparison, Romania ranked 53rd, and Ukraine 77th (UNDP, 2024). While Moldova has faced significant challenges, including the repercussions of the war in Ukraine and the energy crisis, its steady progress over the past three decades in human development reflects determination and resilience, stated by Gasparikova, UNDP Resident Representative in Moldova. Nonetheless, the report (UNDP, 2022) indicates that Moldova is among the countries most severely affected by the cost-of-living crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine. Since the outbreak of the conflict, Europe, particularly countries bordering Ukraine, has experienced an unprecedented influx of people forcibly displaced or seeking refuge. Frontline states have had to manage this rapid and uncontrolled flow of refugees with limited resources. Moreover, migration remains a highly sensitive issue in the Republic of Moldova, from its independence to the present day. This sensitivity stems both from the long-standing demographic crisis caused by large-scale emigration and from the more recent challenge of managing forced migration linked to regional instability and armed conflict.

As a result, the emergence of global crises and challenges has consistently placed issues of security, stability, and human rights protection at the forefront of the international agenda in recent years. This has remained the case even after numerous negotiations, progress, and agreements aimed at fostering good relations between neighboring states. On the contrary, these developments have underscored the need for states to reassess and update their priorities concerning security and human rights.

The report presented to the European Parliament references the UN Sustainable Development Report (UN, 2022), highlighting that the implementation of nearly all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is falling behind, with two consecutive years of regression in many key indicators. It reaffirms the SDGs as a shared global responsibility and emphasizes commitment to the 2030 Agenda, which includes 17 goals and 169 measurable targets. This

commitment is particularly crucial in light of the deteriorating geopolitical landscape, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as ongoing crises in climate, biodiversity, health, debt, and food security. Furthermore, the report underlines the increasing erosion of women's rights and gender equality, alongside persistent violent conflicts affecting many parts of the world, particularly in developing countries. The report stresses the critical interdependence between these crises and identifies armed conflicts, characterized by violence, loss of life, and gross human rights violations, as the most significant barrier to achieving the SDGs.

Some authors (Naumescu, 2022) have explicitly expressed concerns about security in Europe, with Russia identified as a significant threat due to its ongoing efforts to politically, socially, and ideologically divide the continent. These attempts also aim to undermine the functioning of state institutions and destabilize former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. Additionally, security experts have acknowledged the potential for a future war targeting Western European states, a conflict that could have implications for Romania's security post-2030. This war, they suggest, would likely be multinational, intergovernmental, and multi-domain in nature, involving various fronts, including the Western Balkans. It would also draw on the collective political, diplomatic, economic, and social efforts of the entire country. The authors contend that the mobilization of national resources would likely remain a defining characteristic of major Russian operations (Cîrciumaru & Petrescu, 2022). It is noteworthy that as early as 2021, one year prior to the outbreak of war, there were growing concerns within the international community about a potential conflict in the region. On January 27, 2022, during a phone call with the President of Ukraine, U.S. President Joe Biden warned of a "distinct possibility" that Russia would invade Ukraine in February, an event that subsequently occurred. The onset of the war marked the beginning of a major humanitarian crisis and a surge in violence, prompting the rapid mobilization of neighboring countries' security forces, civil society, and the international community to provide support for refugees and internally displaced persons.

In the context of inter-state violence, it is essential to examine the relationship between violence and power. Arendt's work provides a particularly relevant framework for understanding the dynamics at play in the current regional conflict. Arendt distinguishes between power and violence as fundamentally

different phenomena, though they often appear together. The author asserts that "in all cases where this combination is observed, power is […] the primary and predominant factor."(Arendt, 1972, p. 156) However, the author notes that this relationship changes fundamentally in situations involving foreign invasion and occupation, where violence often acts independently of legitimate political power. Arendt argues that the common conflation of power with violence arises from the traditional definition of government as the domination of man by man through coercion. The author explains that if a foreign invader encounters a weak government and a society unfamiliar with the exercise of political power, the imposition of domination becomes far easier. In other circumstances, however, the invader faces considerable resistance and must attempt to establish a local authority loyal to the occupier, thereby creating a proxy through which control can be exercised (Arendt, 1972).

Both in scholarly literature and in everyday discourse, the concept of power is frequently used in various forms and conceptual distinctions, reflecting the wide range of fields and realities to which it applies. This diversity underlines that power is a fundamental and indispensable term for describing and clarifying the nature of social relations, as well as for analyzing the dynamics, transformations, and trends of contemporary societies. As noted in a different context (Ciobanu, 2021), the history of civilized human development demonstrates that power is a necessary condition for the functioning of any social system, since society presupposes organization, and organization in turn supposes power (Negru et al, 2012). For some scholars (Alexandru, 2010), power is understood as a set of functions (or empowerments) or as the sum of state institutions responsible for its exercise. Nevertheless, the concept of power remains broad, ambiguous, and all-encompassing, often lacking precise or universally accepted boundaries. Most commonly, power is defined in relation to the state, given the central role the state plays in organizing and legitimizing authority. In this framework, power is typically associated with the three branches of government, executive, legislative, and judicial, each with clearly defined normative functions and legitimacy criteria. At the same time, drawing on Foucault's perspective, power in its pure form can be understood as a "rule existing by itself and for itself" not necessarily oriented toward the pursuit of the common good (Foucault, 2004, p.124).

The logic of this analysis requires clarification of several terms that are often mistakenly treated as synonyms, yet conceptually refer to distinct phenomena:

power, force, authority, and violence. Although these terms are frequently used interchangeably in both scholarly and public discourse, they each describe different dimensions of human interaction and social organization. In this regard, Arendt offers valuable insight, noting the risks of conflating these concepts. The author highlights the problematic assumption that "power, vigor, force, authority, violence is but words which indicate to us those means by which man dominates man," (Arendt, 1972, p. 147) pointing out that they are often viewed as synonymous because they appear to serve the same function. However, Arendt warns that these are not merely interchangeable words, once translated into action without conceptual clarity, they can lead to disastrous outcomes. By following Arendt's reasoning, it becomes evident that a nuanced understanding of each term is essential. These concepts must be interpreted contextually to accurately grasp the social or political reality in question. At the same time, they cannot be treated in complete isolation, as in practice they often intersect and overlap. Recognizing both their distinctions and interrelations is key to a more accurate and responsible analysis of power dynamics. Thus, power corresponds to the human capacity not merely to act, but to act purposefully and collectively. As Arendt explains, "power is never the property of an individual; it arises from and belongs to a group, existing only as long as the group remains united. When we say that someone is "in power," we are referring to an individual who has been authorized by a group of people to act on their behalf. However, once the group from which this power originates disbands or loses cohesion, the power itself also vanishes" (Arendt, 1972, p. 148).

Power is often closely associated with violence and not without reason. As Arendt observes, violence is, by its very nature, instrumental; like all means, it must be directed and justified by the ends it seeks to achieve. That which requires external justification cannot be an essential or constitutive principle in itself. In this sense, violence is always subordinate to its intended purpose. War, for example, may aim at peace or victory both of which serve as definable ends. Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to define a specific "end" of peace, as peace tends to be understood as an absolute state. Ironically, history reveals that periods of war have consistently outweighed those of peace. Power, by contrast, belongs to a different category. It is not purely instrumental, nor does it require external justification in the same way violence does. Rather, it can be considered "an end in itself," sustained by the collective will and cohesion of a group. This distinction

between power and violence is essential for understanding the foundations and dynamics of political order. According to the aforementioned author, violence is often perceived as a manifestation of power, particularly because, in both international relations and domestic politics, it is frequently employed as a last resort to preserve the integrity of a power structure against challenges, whether from an external enemy or an internal threat such as criminal activity. This tendency has led to the widespread assumption that violence is an indispensable condition of power, and that power itself is merely a facade masking coercive force. Similarly, the term force is commonly used in everyday language as a synonym for violence, especially when referring to violence employed as a means of coercion. This conflation further obscures the conceptual distinction between power, force, and violence, reinforcing the illusion that they are interchangeable rather than fundamentally different in nature and function. Therefore, power can be understood as a fundamental social phenomenon, distinguished by its high level of generality in relation to other social dynamics and by its capacity to generate or influence them (Popa et al, 1999). It is intrinsically linked to elements such as force, authority, and domination. In this context, "violence may be seen not as synonymous with power, but rather as its most visible and extreme manifestation" (Arendt, 1972, p. 137).

Arendt's analysis of violence leads her to assert that "powerlessness provokes violence" and that any form of power can "always be destroyed by violence" (Arendt, 1972, p. 158); "the most effective order, and the one which produces immediate and total submission, is the one imposed at gunpoint. But such an order can never be the source of power" (Arendt, 1972, p. 157). In this view, violence may enforce obedience, but it cannot create legitimacy or sustain true authority. There reflections raise a profound question: if war is "an essential activity for one who contemplates the succession of historical epochs," then "would the end of war signify not only the cessation of violence between states, but also the dissolution of states themselves?" (De Jouvenel, 1993, p. 140). In other words, could the disappearance of violence from international relations also imply the end of power as we currently understand it?

Thus, power and violence are interrelated phenomena that must be carefully understood in order to develop effective strategies of resilience in the face of war and conflict. In this regard, Lapierre proposes a framework for managing violence through the institutionalization of power, identifying nine degrees or stages in this process (Lapierre, 1977). He argues that coordination and cooperation, both within

societies and among the systems and institutions that constitute them, are essential in mitigating and ultimately halting violence. As Lapierre states, "power is the shifting combination of relations of command and obedience (authority), and domination and submission (power)" (Lapierre, 1977, p. 11). From this perspective, a clear and practical path emerges: through structured, collective action and institutional cooperation, societies can confront violence not merely with force, but with legitimate, organized power.

At times distinguished through clear conceptual delimitations, and at other times marked by overlapping meanings, the notions of power and authority possess a rich and complex semantic content with diverse attributions. Bochenski (1992) undertakes a detailed analysis of authority, revealing its fundamental dimensions as a status, a property, and a relationship. The author emphasizes that in any pragmatic context, authority manifests as a relational dynamic between the bearer of authority and its subject, always a conscious being. Notably, Bochenski argues that the domain of authority is not grounded in empirical reality but exists in the ideal realm (Bochenski, 1992, p. 29). Building on this perspective, Goudenhooft explores the interconnectedness of authority with key political and philosophical concepts such as legitimacy, legality, sovereignty, identity, democracy, and rationality (Goudenhooft, 2014). In the same lines Arendt highlights the elusive and often misunderstood nature of authority, noting that it may be vested in individuals or institutional structures. Crucially, authority is characterized by its unconditional recognition by those subject to it, there is no need for coercion or persuasion when authority is genuinely acknowledged (Arendt, 1972, p. 149). This insight distinguishes authority from mere power or force, positioning it as a more stable and legitimate form of influence in social and political life.

Consequently, addressing any form of violence requires the cultivation of a shared culture grounded in the authority of broadly recognized and accepted values. However, it is essential to acknowledge that "a society, in every era, possesses the culture for which it has been previously prepared, and it cannot adopt a different culture simply by decree or external imposition" (Nemo, 2008, p. 111). Sustainable cultural change, therefore, must emerge organically through long-term educational, social, and institutional development.

In the contemporary context, the prevailing value benchmarks upheld by modern societies are security, democracy, and human rights, core outcomes of

human rational endeavor. These principles, achieved through historical struggle and institutional development, have contributed to the delegitimization of violence and the advancement of key civilizational milestones essential to modern states. Among these, the value of the individual and the primacy of the rule of law, emphasizing legal rather than coercive means, have been especially prominent in Europe and globally. However, these values have also revealed their vulnerability in times of crisis. In a convergent analysis of European jurisprudence, Kovács and Tóth (2018) emphasize the imperative of safeguarding human rights through robust legal standards. Such protections are essential not only for the well-being of society as a whole but especially for the individual. As they note, "since the global rise of authoritarianism puts us on our guard, human rights are a last refuge against abuse" (Kovács & Tóth, 2018, p. 153) and represent a foundational element of the European legal order.

The Ukrainian refugee crisis is, above all, a story of human resilience and solidarity. The war in Ukraine and the resulting wave of forced displacement marks a turning point in the recent history of migration in Europe. For the first time since 1945, a large-scale armed conflict has erupted on the immediate borders of the European Union, triggering the largest mass exodus of people in such a short time span. Yet, unlike previous crises, this moment has been distinguished by an unprecedented level of collective response, demonstrating not only the strength of shared human values but also the authority of coordinated humanitarian efforts. What also sets this crisis apart is the cultural proximity of Ukrainian refugees to host countries, predominantly European in origin, which has contributed to an exceptional outpouring of spontaneous solidarity, such as in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. This solidarity, largely unmatched in previous refugee movements, has reasserted itself as a core value in international and interpersonal relations. Moreover, the crisis has reinvigorated essential principles of social organization, emphasizing the importance of cooperation based on mutual interest. It underscores that only through the recognition of shared benefits, adherence to a common normative framework, and the cultivation of universally respected principles can social order be effectively established and sustained.

In the aftermath of the war in Yugoslavia, the newly formed states actively pursued European Union accession as a pathway to stability and integration. Similarly, amid the ongoing war, Ukraine and the crisis-stricken Republic of

Moldova have taken decisive steps toward EU membership. These efforts reflect a shared aspiration to align with the foundational values of the European community, namely, the prioritization of human dignity, the rule of law, and adherence to a common legal and cultural framework equally respected by all member states. As noted by Chomsky "despite all the challenges currently facing the European continent, many positive developments have accompanied the integration of states into the EU. The steps taken toward EU accession are, … profoundly rational. Europe has become a more civilized space, at least in comparative terms. The Schengen Agreements, by limiting certain aspects of national sovereignty, have fostered a more civilized society." (Chomsky, 2019, p. 217) This evolution illustrates how power based on collective agreement and shared norms has increasingly replaced more traditional expressions of unilateral force. While vigor or strength may still manifest in individuals or institutions, it is no longer rooted in group dependency but is instead framed in relation to broader legal and cultural structures that remain distinct yet interrelated.

A theoretical and historical analysis of forced displacement reveals that this phenomenon is intrinsically tied to power dynamics, armed conflicts, and the mechanisms of international solidarity. The Ukrainian refugee crisis, while fitting into a broader historical continuum of displacement, presents distinct features. These include its geographical proximity to the European Union, the spontaneous and largely unprecedented civic responses in countries such as Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and the highly volatile geopolitical context along the EU's eastern borders.

A comparative analysis of how security threats have been assessed in Romania and the Republic of Moldova reveals a convergence in strategic approaches. In the case of Romania, Cîrciumaru & Petrescu (2022) emphasize the importance of evaluating the current security environment, forecasting medium-term developments, identifying both present and potential threats, and analyzing associated risks with the aim of informing effective management strategies to mitigate them. A key argument in the study is the necessity of adaptability in response to evolving security dynamics. Romania's geographic location is identified as a significant vulnerability, particularly in light of the Russian Federation's ongoing efforts to destabilize the region and reassert influence over its former sphere of control, concerns also echoed in Romania's National Defense Strategy 2020–2024.

The war in Ukraine and the resulting refugee crisis underlines the multifaceted humanitarian and geopolitical challenges confronting Europe in the face of an armed conflict unfolding on its immediate borders. These developments expose the limitations of relying solely on legal mechanisms to ensure security and the protection of individual rights. In a context where violence is increasingly employed as a tool to preserve power, the belief in the sufficiency of legal frameworks appears, at times, to be more aspirational than practical, revealing a tension between normative ideals and geopolitical realities.

The refugee crisis has demonstrated that both societies and states are capable of mobilizing rapidly and effectively to build resilience and provide a protective environment for those in need. The broad and coordinated engagement of the international community, state institutions, civil society organizations, and local communities has proven to be immediately impactful. In this context, the collaboration between UNDP and UNHCR under the Global Collaboration Framework for Inclusion and Solutions (2023–2025) illustrates how strategic partnerships can promote locally driven solutions that enhance resilience, foster social inclusion, and support sustainable long-term development (UNDP, 2025).

When contextualizing the waves of migration to which Europe has been periodically exposed, those triggered by armed conflicts and war stand out as the most sensitive and disruptive. In such cases, violence becomes not only the driver of displacement but also a catalyst for shifting perceptions of security. While each wave of migration has its own distinct origins, their effects are interconnected, particularly in terms of their impact on individuals and the socio-cultural fabric of host societies.

War exposes the deep vulnerabilities and uncertainties faced by both individuals and states, often revealing the limitations of national capacities to manage violence without the support of the international community. The recent refugee crises have underscored the urgent need for sustainable solutions—ones that move beyond immediate humanitarian assistance to incorporate long-term development and peace-building. These solutions must aim to foster inclusive and resilient societies through approaches grounded in solidarity, cooperation, and shared responsibility (European Commission).

Before the outbreak of war in Ukraine, migration was largely approached as an administrative or humanitarian matter, one of many social challenges, often disconnected from the realm of national security. However, the Russian invasion

has triggered a significant shift in this perception. Migration is now increasingly framed through a security lens, viewed as a potential source of political and economic instability, particularly in Eastern European countries. This shift marks more than just a theoretical change; it has reshaped European policy approaches and influenced the strategic security priorities of individual states. What has emerged is a new crisis response model, one that has been put to the test in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and which underscores the complex interplay between migration, conflict, and regional security.

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CHAPTER 2

# ROMANIA AND UKRAINIAN REFUGEES´ CRISIS: STRATEGIES AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS

*Mariana ROŞCA*

The full-scale invasion and ongoing war in Ukraine have triggered the largest displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War. Since the Russian attack in 2022, millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homeland in search of safety, primarily to neighboring countries, but also across the broader European region. Among these, Romania has emerged as one of the key countries of both destination and transit for displaced Ukrainians. In response, significant efforts and legislative measures have been adopted to address the complex and evolving needs of the refugee population.

As the conflict continues and the initial emergency phase has gradually transitioned into a prolonged situation, the urgency to implement sustainable and long-term integration strategies has grown. Romania's role in this context is uniquely complex. It accommodates not only refugees who arrived directly from Ukraine, but also those who initially sought protection in other EU member states and later relocated to Romania, as well as individuals seeking short-term refuge due to the country's geographical proximity to Ukraine. These multifaceted dynamic places increased pressure on Romanian authorities to deliver effective, coherent, and sustained responses to the refugee crisis.

To address these challenges, a wide-ranging coalition comprising international, national, and local actors, including civil society organizations, volunteers, and refugees themselves, has mobilized to coordinate the humanitarian response. This collective effort has evolved from focusing primarily on immediate protection and the provision of basic needs, to prioritizing durable solutions, particularly in the area of long-term socio-economic integration.

**Romania - part of the regional refugees' responses**

From the beginning of the war, it was clear that a single country response cannot address the massive flows of Ukrainian refugees. Therefore, both at EU and regional level few measures have been set to address the best way possible the emergency situation. The solidarity against the aggression, represented another motivation factor to jointly try to address the assistance and support to Ukrainians flying the war. Specifically, towards this goal, UNHCR (2024) took the lead and mobilized ten countries in the region (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Poland Romania, Slovakia) into a joint Regional Response Plan (RRP) for refugees, in order to help the single countries involved to address best the refugee's crises. Such a coordination initiative was particularly useful for countries that never dealt with massive refugees' flows, that transformed over night from a primary migrant sending country into a refugee's transit and refugees hosting country. Some EU countries, such as Romania, although had some experience in managing the flows before, the crises found them unprepared to deal with such huge numbers of arrivals and transit. According to the UNHCR (2025a) data, by the end of march 2025, the refugees flow in these ten countries reaches more than 33% (or 2.1 mln form 6.3 mln in total number of Ukrainian refugees). The Figure 4 data showcases the Ukrainian refugees recorded in the ten countries as well as the refugees that applied for a kind of protection. Therefore, it showcases that the refugees from Ukraine who applied for Asylum, Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes to date amount to about 3.4 million and reflects the cumulative estimated number of refugees who have fled Ukraine since February 2022. These figures may include multiple registrations of the same individual in one or more European countries; or registrations of refugees who have moved onward, including beyond Europe, due to which the data are higher. These data confirm ones again the need for a regional response.

| Country | Data Date | Refugees from Ukraine recorded in country as of date | Refugees from Ukraine who applied for Asylum, TP or similar national protection schemes to date |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bulgaria | 28/02/2025 | 77.360 | 205. |
| Czech Republic | 23/02/2025 | 398.595 | 645. |
| Estonia | 02/03/2025 | 42.550 | 65. |
| Hungary | 28/02/2025 | 62.360 | 49. |
| Latvia | 25/02/2025 | 48.555 | 61. |
| Lithuania | 12/03/2025 | 48.685 | 93. |
| Poland | 14/01/2025 | 998.070 | 1.903. |
| Republic of Moldova | 28/02/2025 | 127.785 | 71. |
| Romania | 28/02/2025 | 179.820 | 192. |
| Slovakia | 16/03/2025 | 132.775 | 164. |
| **Total** | | **2.116.555** | **3.452.** |

Source: *UNHCR. 2025a. Ukraine Refugees Situation.*
*https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine (accessed 31.03.2025).*

Figure 4. *Ukrainian Refugees in RRP countries*

The activation and consequent extension of Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for refugees from Ukraine, on 4th of March, 2022, by the Council of the European Union, was a major step in granting refugees from Ukraine access to safety, legal status, rights, and services in the EU. While the TPD effectively responds to the refugee arrivals, inconsistent implementation across EU member states has been identified by UNHCR. At the same time, UNHCR points out, the growing vulnerabilities amongst some Ukrainian refugees and that can hinder effective access to rights in host countries (UNHCR, 2025b, p.16). Additionally, UNHCR argues that many challenges persist on different approaches to implement the TPD and which can have a disproportionate impact on refugees and their ability to access their rights. For this reason, UNHCR advocates that the transition beyond TPD regime is necessary.

While the flow of refugees still continues, among the ten countries covered by RRP was noticed that the Ukrainian refugees are highly mobile. Also, these countries featured an increased temporary movement back to Ukraine among refugees, primarily to check their families, properties or obtain documentation (UNHCR, 2023a). According to this source, "two in five refugees reported that a person from their household had travelled back to Ukraine since they left (39 per

cent, including 25 per cent who visited only once and 14 per cent who went back more than once). However, most refugees (40 per cent) indicated they had not been able to go back to Ukraine even if they would have wanted to, while about one fifth indicated not having considered to go back (21 per cent). Among the ones reporting not being able to visit Ukraine, the main challenges indicated are security concerns and lack of funds (49 and 40 per cent), followed by caregiving responsibilities, lack of documentation and fear or losing their legal status in host countries (19, 14 and 11 per cent respectively). Some […] highlighted their inability to visit Ukraine, mainly due to concerns about the safety of their children" (UNHCR, 2023, p.28). The most important reasons cited by refugees for having visited their place of origin are to see relatives or friends (43 per cent), to access healthcare (15 per cent), or to obtain documentation (15 per cent) (UNHCR, 2023, p.28). "These visits are important for refugees' longer-term decisions about more durable return once conditions permit. However, varying approaches of host governments toward the impact of short-term travel to Ukraine on refugees' legal status and access to rights has led to the revocation of legal status and suspension of associated benefits for some, as well as challenges with efforts to re-instate legal status upon return to host countries. For others, this has also discouraged engaging in these important visits" (UNHCR, 2024; p.12). The Ukrainian refugee's high mobility back home as well as inside EU, emphasises one more time the need for joint regional initiatives, such as RRP, an approach that could be useful also for the future reconstruction of Ukraine. Moreover, that an important aspect of the RRP is that it aligns with the country's specific strategies and assistance measures and are based on the partnership principle of the humanitarian governance. The RRP, also, considers the principles of equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility, and complementarity of all actions put in place in the region, as mentioned in the regional sectoral responses. To this end few ambitious strategic objectives (Figure 5) have been set and aligned with the regional sectoral responses.

## Regional Sectoral Responses

**PROTECTION**
Protection partners will assist Ukrainian **refugees**, prioritize legal status, support vulnerable **groups**, **advocate** for barrier removal, and enhance social cohesion

**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**
Identify gaps and improve access to GBV services, **run** awareness campaigns, and address vulnerabilities and legal barriers

**CHILD PROTECTION**
Integrate children into national systems, focus on unaccompanied minors, those with disabilities, anxpand case management

**EDUCATION**
Support access to education, address capacity challenges, facilitate language learning, and phase out parallel systems

**HEALTH & NUTRITION**
Ensure access to quality care, strengthen health systems, integrate Ukrainian health workers, and support vulnerable groups

**BASIC NEEDS**
Target cash assistance to the most vulnerable, continue in-kind support, and improve facilities and transport for the displaced

**LIVELIHOODS & SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCLUSION**
Assist with jobs, training, and qualifications, provide long-term housing and social benefits, and strengthen municipal absorption capacities

1.Refugees have effective access to legal status, protection, and rights in host countries.

Refugees with specific needs and vulnerabilities have access to targeted support and assistance.

Refugees' socio-economic inclusion in their host communities is strengthened and their self-reliance increased

The social cohesion between refugee and host communities is reinforced

*Source:* Elabourated by the author with the data from *UNHCR. 2024. Refugee response for the Ukrainian situation. Geneva, Switzerland.* https://www.aidrom.ro/?p=79211 (accessed 31.03.2025).

Figure 5. *Regional sectoral responses to Ukrainian refugees' crisis and the regional strategic objectives*

Therefore, the regional response for Ukrainian refugees prioritizes protection, legal assistance, and community resilience through the monitoring and reinforcement of support structures, and with an emphasis on vulnerable populations. It also seeks to integrate refugees into national social protection mechanisms and eliminate administrative obstacles, while promoting social cohesion and community-based approaches. In the area of gender-based violence (GBV), the focus lies on identifying service gaps, mainstreaming GBV prevention, and enhancing access to quality services. Preventive measures include improved service accessibility, anti-trafficking efforts, and awareness campaigns. Similar, the child protection efforts aim to incorporate refugee children into national education systems, with special provisions for unaccompanied minors and children with disabilities. Within education related efforts, addressing infrastructural and language challenges is underlined. The shift from parallel learning systems to inclusive national education are complemented to ensure educational continuity and accessibility.

Efforts in livelihoods and socio-economic inclusion aim to support access to decent work through language acquisition, job placement, and credential recognition. The transition from emergency response and accommodation, to long-term and sustainable housing, enhanced social benefits access, and local stakeholders' capacity-building are integral components. In the health and nutrition sector, the main focus is on access to healthcare, integration of Ukrainian professionals, and improved health financing. Mental health, and services for high-risk groups are prioritized. Support for basic needs includes targeted cash assistance for the most vulnerable, ongoing in-kind distributions, and infrastructure improvements.

In order to have an update on the protection risks and needs among Ukrainian refugees, UNHCR (2023b) conducted across the RRP region the protection profiling and monitoring activities on an ongoing basis. As result the key protection risks and needs for refugees from Ukraine have been identified. The gathered data underlines that some of these risks and needs are specific to the Ukrainian refugees but others are common to other refugees' groups as well. Therefore, similar to other groups, the family separation characterizes the Ukrainian refugees, as has been reported by 80% of respondents of UNHCR´s study. This situation "can exacerbate several protection risks including gender-based violence, human trafficking, exploitation, isolation, and trauma, particularly

for persons with specific needs, such as unaccompanied and separated children, older persons and persons with disabilities" (UNHCR, 2024, p.14).

However, differently than other refugees' groups, Ukrainians characterizes themselves as primary female dominated (62%) and with a high percentage of children's (36%). Both the age and gender composition, together with the high number of single-parent families, highlights the increased GBV risk in the context of employment and accommodation, as well as women and girls' exposure to GBV risks also in other spheres (UNHCR, 2024). Also, differently than other refugee groups, the employment rate among refugees from Ukraine is higher. According to UNHCR's analysis, between 40 and 60 per cent of respondents are employed; while unemployment is between 10 and 20 per cent, and the remaining are outside the labour force (UNHCR, 2024, p.14). However, the official data from the countries employment services showcases a much lower employment rate among refugees. Therefore, access to decent work remains a key need and "intensive language training, better skills recognition, upskilling courses and job-matching will help facilitate transition into sustainable employment commensurate with a person's education level. Refugees also require systematic access to information about their rights and entitlements in the labour market, including how to identify and respond to potentially exploitative labour practices" (UNHCR, 2024, p.15).

Another area of concern and that is common among all refugees' groups is access to healthcare. UNHCR reports that 25 per cent of Ukrainian refugees´ respondents in need of healthcare mentioned difficulties accessing the national system. Some difficulties are due to long waiting time, language barriers and high costs. "Limited awareness, knowledge and understanding of national healthcare systems is influencing refugees' ability to seek and accept healthcare services and ability of national service providers to effectively deliver healthcare services that meet the social, cultural, and linguistic expectations and needs of refugees in host countries" (UNHCR, 2024, p.15).

The specific characteristic of Ukrainian refugees related to the high presence of children raises increased concern on securing their right to education. As such, "nearly half of households with school-aged children reported that at least one child was not registered for education in the host country. Similarly, two-thirds of young children are not accessing formal early childhood education and care services. If enrolment of refugee children and youth from Ukraine in national

school systems remains low, many hundreds of thousands are at risk of remaining out of formal education for a fourth consecutive school year, often relying on less effective and unsustainable forms of non-formal education. Missing out on multiple years of education may have profound negative consequences for their academic performance, ability to obtain diplomas and degrees and, ultimately, for their future career and life prospects" (UNHCR, 2024, p.15). An important aspect to mention here is that the Ukrainian refugees' children school interruption, is even longer if COVID-19 lockdown is considered. In this regard, Stanistreet et al. argue that the "unexpected temporary school closures and reduced instruction time suggests school closures will reduce educational achievement, both in the short and long term". Additionally, the authors argue that the "children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be affected more than others by school closures, with fewer family resources and less access to online learning resources to offset lost instruction time" (Stanistreet et al, 2020, p. 627). Such challenges could be addressed by the specific hosting countries.

**Romania´s strategy to address the Ukrainian refugee crises**

Romania's efforts to address Ukrainian refugees' crises are integrated into the broader RRP and also reflect innovative initiatives aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees.

The alignment of Romanian actions with regional strategy ensures coherence with the approaches adopted by neighboring countries and enhances cooperation on cross-border issues. Alongside other regional partners, Romania has committed to the regional objectives while also taking into account its national context by incorporating country-specific goals (Table 1).

The comparison from Table 1 shows that there is a strong alignment between Romania's strategic objectives and those outlined at the regional one, particularly in key areas such as legal access, protection, inclusion, and social cohesion.

While Romania's strategic goals are rooted in the broader regional framework, they place greater emphasis on the integration of the most vulnerable ones, specifically those related to age, gender, and disability, across all objectives.

Table 1. *Comparative Analysis: Romanian vs. Regional Strategic Objectives*

| Thematic Area | Romanian Strategic Objectives (SOs) | Regional Strategic Objectives (RSOs) | Comparison & Insights |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Legal protection & rights** | **SO1:** Ensures access to protection, legal status, and rights with focus on vulnerable groups (age, gender, diversity). | **RSO 1:** Refugees have access to legal status, protection, and rights. | Both align strongly in prioritizing legal access and protection. Romania's SO1 adds a distinct focus on *vulnerable groups* and incorporates diversity considerations. |
| **Targeted support for vulnerable groups** | **SO1 & SO2:** Emphasize protection and inclusion of vulnerable groups (especially by age, gender, disability). | **RSO 2:** Focus on access to targeted support for refugees with specific needs. | Both stress vulnerability-focused interventions. Romania's approach integrates vulnerability considerations across multiple sectors (e.g., legal protection, services), showing a more cross-cutting strategy. |
| **Socio-economic inclusion** | **SO2:** Aims at integration into national systems (work, health, education, etc.) with outreach to vulnerable groups. | **RSO 3:** Emphasizes socio-economic inclusion and increased self-reliance. | Shared goal of inclusion, but Romania emphasizes system integration (e.g., national services), while the regional focus more on self-reliance and community-based inclusion. |

| Thematic Area | Romanian Strategic Objectives (SOs) | Regional Strategic Objectives (RSOs) | Comparison & Insights |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Social cohesion** | **SO3:** Focuses on strengthening social cohesion between refugees and host communities in Romania. | **RSO 4:** Aims to reinforce social cohesion regionally. | Fully aligned in objective and language. Both aim to prevent tensions and foster integration at the community level. |
| **Localization & capacity building** | **SO4:** Promotes localization through support to civil society, municipalities, and local coordination. | *(No direct equivalent in RSOs)* | Romania's SO4 adds unique emphasis on localization. This reflects a national strategic priority to build local capacity and ownership. |

Source*: Elaborated by the author with the data from UNHCR (2024) and UNHCR (2025b).*

A defining feature of the Romanian approach is its focus on localization (Strategic Objective 4), which underlines a deeper commitment to sustainability of the measures and empowerment of local stakeholders, including civil society organizations and local authorities.

Whereas the regional strategy tends to prioritize macro-level objectives such as refugee self-reliance and broader socio-economic inclusion, Romania's strategy provides a more granular focus on integration into national systems and targeted outreach to vulnerable groups. Such an effort at the national level, requires a coordination mechanism in place, in order to be able to achieve the goals set.

**Romania´s coordination mechanisms**

To effectively manage refugee flows from the outset of their arrival, Romania established its own mechanism of coordination and action, designed to better address the refugees needs. This framework operates across all levels of government, enabling effective *planning, coordination,* and on-the-ground *collaboration* in response to the humanitarian refugee crisis and it is framed by three pillars: decision-making, operationality and coordination (Figure 6).
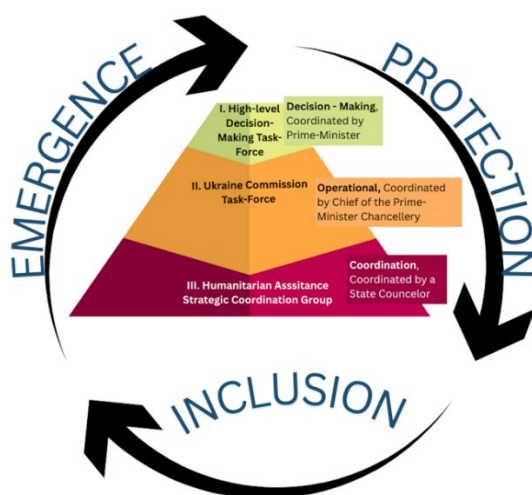


Source: *Created by the author with the data from Romanian Government. 2022. Ukraine - Together we help more. https://www.gov.ro/ro/pagina/ukraine-together-we-help-more (accessed 7.04.2025)*

Figure 6. *The Romanian coordination mechanism*

The high-level *decision-making* Task Force (*first pilar),* is coordinated by the Prime Minister, to provide strategic leadership in responding to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The first layer focused on Romania's emergency situation and immediate reaction to the influx of refugees from Ukraine. The Department for Emergency Situations (DES), operating under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), led these operations. Its responsibilities included the deployment of resources and capabilities at key border entry points, the organization of humanitarian transport, provision of emergency shelter, food, and basic medical assistance, among other essential services.

The *second pilar* is represented by the *operational* Task Force, also called the "Ukraine Commission", was created to coordinate the efforts of all the ministries involved in managing the influx of Ukrainian refugees across all areas of intervention. This authority is led by the Head of the Prime Minister's Chancellery. Specifically, this task force was fundamental in reinforcing the DES efforts, with the legislative and administrative actions undertaken by various Romanian ministries, which issued numerous legal provisions (as referenced later) to address the urgent needs of refugees. Additionally, local authorities coordinated closely with central government agencies and developed context-specific operational plans based on local needs assessments.

The *third pillar* named the *Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Coordination Group* was established within the Prime Minister's Chancellery and is led by a State Counselor. Its mandate is to define the strategic framework for Romania's humanitarian response and to promote inter-agency cooperation among national authorities, as well as with European and international partners. This pillar further strengthened the Romanian public response through the active involvement of national civil society organizations, international non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, and private sector actors.

The Romanian coordination mechanism was established to enhance its response to the refugee crisis along *two core dimensions* of intervention: *emergency* response and *protection,* and later also including *inclusion.*

The Romania's coordination mechanism was designed to ensure medium- and long-term protection and inclusion measures for Ukrainian refugees who have chosen to remain in the country. To this end, the Government established six thematic working groups tasked with formulating policy measures in key areas: health, education, labor, housing, vulnerable persons, and children and youth. Each working group operated through a collaborative process involving experts from the relevant ministries, representatives of UN agencies, and civil society actors. The outcome of their work is reflected in sectoral action plans, which were subsequently consolidated into a comprehensive National Action Plan. The entire process of development was coordinated and overseen by the Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Coordination Group.

Apart from the new institutional setting and the institutions mentioned above, there have been other entities actively engaged in the refugee coordination structures (Figure 7). Over time, additional organizations have joined these frameworks, contributing to a steadily expanding network of actors involved in the response.
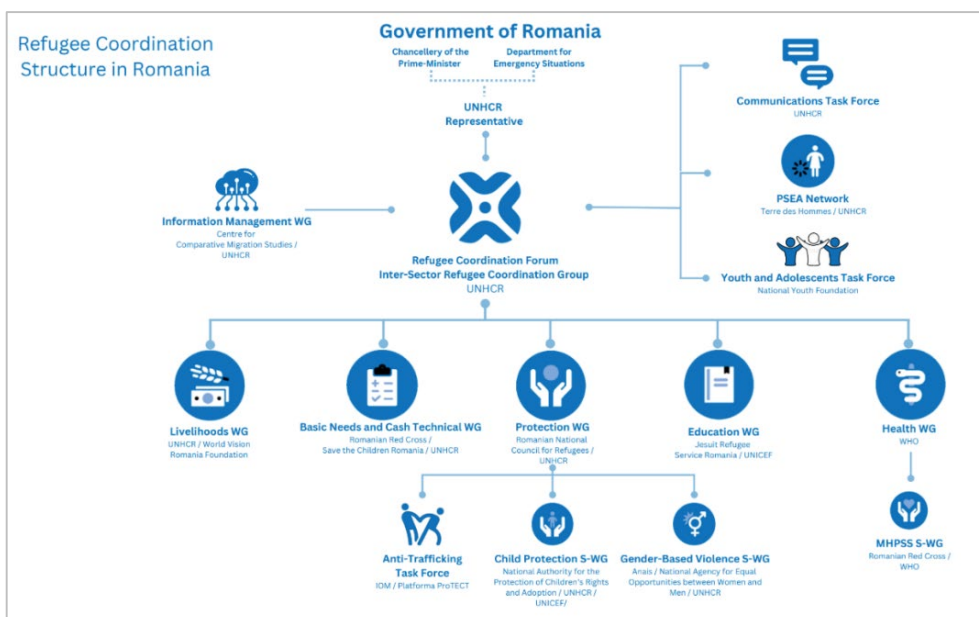
Source*: (UNHCR. 2025b, p.20)*

Figure 7. *Refugees Coordination Structure in Romania*

As Figure 7 showcases, the Government of Romania leads the refugee response primarily through the Chancellery of the Prime Minister and DES. The UNHCR plays a key coordinating role by supporting national efforts and ensuring alignment with international protection standards. A notable strength of Romania's coordination framework is the inclusion of local actors. Local non-governmental organizations, municipalities, and civil society organizations actively participate in coordination platforms, contributing to the effectiveness and responsiveness of the refugee response. This approach advances the Romanian strategic objective of localization by fostering the empowerment and leadership of local stakeholders. Notably, the number of local organizations participating increased from 14 in 2023 to 24 in 2024, and to 31 in 2025 (Romanian Government, 2022). Their role in supporting refugee inclusion and long-term integration has become increasingly significant, not only in shaping and implementing inclusion-oriented programs, but also in leading Romania's refugee response through locally driven coordination mechanisms. In this regard, Deliu and Trifan (2023) argue that "collaboration with NGOs and local authorities: Prefectural institutions and local authorities were actively involved in managing

actions and providing support to refugees. Meetings, partnerships and collaborative agreements have been established with NGOs, community organizations and institutions to address the immediate needs of refugees and ensure their integration into local communities" (Deliu & Trifan, 2023, p. 6).

Therefore, the refugee coordination structure in Romania functions as a collaborative framework involving government institutions, international organizations, civil society, and local authorities. It reflects a balanced approach that combines strong national leadership with adherence to international protection standards.

Several notable strengths characterize Romania's coordination model. Chief among them is the strong ownership demonstrated by the Romanian government, which leads the response with the active support of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations. This high level of governmental engagement ensures legitimacy, coherence, and alignment with national priorities. Moreover, the coordination mechanism is structured around well-defined sectoral groups, which allow for targeted and technically informed responses in key areas such as health, protection, and education. The Romanian coordination framework is also effectively integrated into broader regional strategies and the international humanitarian architecture, enabling cross-border coherence and facilitating knowledge exchange within the context of the RRP. Ionita-Burda (2024) also positively assess the Romanian response to the refugees' crises. The author describes it as firm and two-fold, and with a strong commitment form the institutional side as well as citizens' side. The author, also considers that at the institutional level a clear coordination and decision-making structure was established, that positively addressed the challenges encountered.

Despite these strengths, the coordination structure faces several challenges. For example, while the localization remains a strategic objective, many municipalities and local actors continue to face capacity constraints, which limit their ability to fully participate in and sustain response efforts at the community level. Another pressing challenge is the need for sustainable funding and long-term planning. As the crisis transitions from a humanitarian emergency to a prolonged displacement, existing coordination mechanisms need to evolve to prioritize more long-term integration and resilience-building.

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# CHAPTER 3

# ROMANIAN LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON REFUGEES' ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

*Mariana ROSCA*

Similar to other countries from the region and EU, Romania activated the application of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), that have provided favorable frameworks to ensure protection and access to rights and services for refugees from Ukraine. Thanks to TPD provisions, the refugees from Ukraine can get access to national systems, including education, health, housing, social services, and employment services in Romania. However, in order to ensure the humanitarian assistance and support, Romania drafted and implemented few legal provisions to address the specific challenges arising from the management of the huge refugees' flow in Romania. These provisions are described as follows in the chronological order.

| 2022 | Emergency Ordinance Nr. 15 of **February 27, 2022** (EO 15/2022) *on granting support and humanitarian assistance by the Romanian state to foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine.* |
| --- | --- |
| | The EO 15/2022 establishes the support measures of stay in temporary camps for Ukrainian refugees and humanitarian assistance offered during this time. Therefore, the EO 15/2022 aimed to offer coverage of the basic needs of refugees, such as meals; clothes; personal hygiene items; medical assistance and treatments (free of charge through the national health insurance system); inclusion into the national programs of public health; and transport. Also, this EO 15/2022 establishes the financial assistance for refugees with families as well as single individuals (art. 10); access to unemployment system; unemployment benefits and preventive measures; and measures to stimulate employment ones they register to ANOFM/AJOFM, under similar conditions as Romanian citizens (art.12). Additionally, it sets the basis for the special protection of the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Ukrainian unaccompanied minors (art.2) and people with disability and accompanying persons, as well as elderly people that can benefit from social services. However, in less than one month after the publication of the EO, the Romanian authorities became aware that the EO 15/2022 provisions need to be amended and supplemented, altogether with the other legal provisions. |
| **2022** | Emergency Ordinance no. 20 of **March 7, 2022** (EO 20/2022) *on amending and supplementing some legal acts, as well as establishing some support measures and humanitarian assistance.*<br><br>From one side, EO 20/2022 simplifies the procedures for the Ukrainian citizens legally entering Romania and that do not request any form of protection, who may be employed without the employment notice [art. VI(1)], as requested under the Government Decision no. 25/2014 on the employment and posting of foreigners in Romania. From the other side, the EO 20/2022 facilitates the employment of Ukrainian refugees and that do not possess the official documents certifying their professions. Specifically, art.VI(3) underlines that the employment of Ukrainian citizens coming from the armed conflict zone of Ukraine, who do not possess any documents proving their professional qualification or work experience necessary for employment, can for a period of 12 months with the possibility of extension for additional periods of 6 months, for a maximum of one year, on the basis of their declaration on their own responsibility be employed declaring that they fulfil the conditions of professional qualification and experience of the job vacancy, necessary for the position they are going to be employed, and declaring that they have no criminal records that are incompatible with the activity they are going to carry out on the Romanian territory. Additionally, the EO 20/2022 also prohibit the employment of refugees in some specific professions that need official diplomas certification and qualifications recognition from the competent bodies [art. VI(6)]. For example, the professions of doctor, dentist, pharmacist, general medical assistant, midwife, veterinary surgeon and architect or any of the professions listed in Annexes no. 2, 4 and 8 of the Law no. 200/2004 cannot be exercised in the absence of an official document. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2022** | Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity Ordinance No. 301/2022 of **March 9, 2022** *approving the procedure for employment of Ukrainian citizens from the armed conflict zone of Ukraine* (O301/2022). |
| | This ordinance set the guidelines for the Ukrainian refugees to register at the county employment agencies (AJOFM), and Bucharest municipality and it grants access to a variety of rights. For example, ones registered the refugees from Ukraine have free access to the services and measures provided by the Law no. 76/2002 *on the unemployment benefits insurance system and employment enhancement measures*. Under the provisions of the O301/2022, the Ukrainian refugees can benefit from information and counselling services, and mediation. The mediation process includes support to identify the vacancy that corresponds to the refugee's qualification and experience, and when identified they can receive the notification letter in order to be presented to the employer. Consecutively, the employee holds the interview and test with the refugee. |
| **2022** | Romanian Government Decision no. 367 of **March 18, 2022** *on establishing certain conditions for ensuring temporary protection, as well as amending and supplementing some normative acts in the field of foreigners* (D367/2022). |
| | This decision clarifies the roles of public authorities, the type of data and family reunification procedures. Therefore, the General Inspectorate for Immigration is the authority that grants the temporary protection in Romania (art.2) and it also assigns a personal numeric code to the beneficiaries of the temporary protection (art.3). The beneficiaries of the temporary protection data requested and stored are: name and family name, date of birth, citizenship, gender, civil status, family situation, family links, residence in Romania (art.5) and these data is stored in the System of foreigners´ information management. While, the family reunification procedures (art.8) for the beneficiaries of the temporary protection and necessary documents to proof the family relation (family members that are residing in a third country) are listed. |

| 2022 | Emergency Ordinance No 100 of **June 29, 2022** *on the approval and implementation of the National Plan of Measures on the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine* (EO100/2022). |

The plan covers a wide range of essential interventions, focusing in key areas such as child protection, access to health care, education and housing, and inclusion in the national labour market. Persons with specific protection needs and prevention of risks of abuse and exploitation are particularly addressed in the Plan. The governmental measures reflected in the plan aims to help refugees regain a sense of stability through access to socio-economic rights during the time they remain in Romania and enhance social cohesion with host communities. In this way, shifting from the emergency response to a longer-term plan focused on protection and inclusion. The support from the plan aim to provide an integrated set of cross-cutting protection measures, combined in seven areas of intervention, from transversal, to employment, housing, education, health, and to children and youth, and vulnerable people. In the transversal domain, it focuses on facilitating access to official information for displaced persons from Ukraine. It also includes measures to prevent risks of abuse and exploitation among this vulnerable population. Among the sectoral domains are employment, housing, education, health, and specific categories of beneficiaries, such as children and vulnerable groups. In the area of employment, the plan outlines several key actions such as: improving access to the labour market, enhancing the administrative capacity of public employment services, implementing targeted integration measures, increasing awareness of employment-related rights and opportunities, offering access to training and skills development, and conducting assessments of refugees' qualifications and competencies. Regarding housing, the plan underlines the allocation of unoccupied public and social housing units, the use of accommodation facilities owned by local and central public authorities as well as private entities, the rehabilitation of unused public buildings for temporary housing, and the construction of emergency housing through existing social housing programs. In the education sector, the measures aim to ensure the education for Ukrainian children and students, secure the necessary human resources (including Romanian and Ukrainian teaching staff), provide educational materials, strengthen

policy dialogue in support of learning, and digitalize the educational management and information systems to improve coordination and access. Within the healthcare domain, the plan integrates Ukrainian refugees into national public health programs, particularly those targeting the prevention and control of communicable diseases. It ensures their access to medical services, and medical devices within the national health insurance system, and promotes their full integration into the healthcare infrastructure. Additionally, it supports the digitalization of healthcare service management and information dissemination. For children and youth, the plan emphasizes the protection of Ukrainian minors from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. It also ensures their participation in the development and implementation of response measures, registration within the national child protection system, and access to essential protection services, including monitoring and family reunification. Special attention is given to children with specific needs through personalized support measures. The Plan also seeks to promote sustainable, long-term solutions that uphold the best interests of the child, enhance the competencies of child protection professionals, expand activities in existing youth centres, and develop a national network of youth centres, including mobile units. Finally, in addressing the needs of vulnerable individuals, the plan aims to identify the specific needs and the available human and material resources, and aligning these with appropriate responses. Also, it promotes awareness among vulnerable refugees about their social rights and benefits, informs local authorities about procedures to enhance responsiveness, simplifies legal frameworks to improve service accessibility, and facilitates access to social services through capacity-building and the development of operational tools. The plan also prioritizes strengthening the management capabilities of both public and private social service providers. The EO 100/2022 also sets the competences and roles of the responsible public authorities.

Romania was the first European country to develop a National Plan of Measures on the Protection and Inclusion of Displaced Persons from Ukraine (NPM) and TPD beneficiaries. Such a pioneering action, has been assessed by UNHCR (2022) as "an exemplary step towards enhancing the protection and inclusion of refugees from Ukraine who choose to stay in Romania". Also, Romanian researchers positively assess such a plan. For example, Balan and Cozma (2024) consider the

Plan as "exit and integration strategies, [… that] laid the groundwork for the sustainability of the assistance programmes and potential exit strategies related to long-term options" (Balan & Cozma, 2024, p. 23).

Consequently, few other legal binding decisions have been drafted to address the inclusion needs of refugees.

| 2023 | Government Emergency Ordinance No. 22 of **April 12, 2023** *amending and supplementing Government Emergency Ordinance no. 15/2022 on granting support and humanitarian assistance by the Romanian state to foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations, originating from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine* (EO22/2023). <br><br> It amends and supplements the EO15/2022 concerning the provision of humanitarian support and assistance. Under the provisions of EO22/2023, individuals who hosted, up to April 30, 2023, foreign citizens or stateless persons were eligible for the reimbursement of food and accommodation expenses. Specifically, hosts could receive 20 lei per person per day for food and 50 lei per person per day for accommodation, contingent upon the submission of a formal request in accordance with the reimbursement mechanisms established by Government Decision No. 336/2022. Specifically, because of these amounts this legal provision has been called 20/50. |
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| 2023 | Romanian Government Decision No. 368 of **April 26, 2023** *for the determination of the amount, conditions and mechanism of granting lump sums according to the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 15/2022 on the granting of humanitarian support and assistance by the Romanian State to foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations, originating from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine (D368/2023).* <br> It establishes the amount, conditions, and mechanism for granting lump-sum financial support to beneficiaries of temporary protection. This decision also amends the provisions of EO15/2022, which governed the provision of humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees. Under the new framework, lump-sum assistance is granted as follows: a) For the first month of arrival, to individuals who have applied for temporary protection; b) For the following three months, |

subject to compliance with specific inclusion conditions: The applicant and their family members must be either employed in Romania or registered with a County Employment Agency (AJOFM) or the Employment Agency of the Municipality of Bucharest; b) Minor children must be enrolled in an educational institution.

Art.2(1) of the decision outlines the following amounts: A differentiated sum to cover accommodation expenses: 750 lei/month for a single person and 2,000 lei/month for a family; A fixed amount for food expenses: 600 lei/month per person. To receive the lump sum during the first month of arrival and for a maximum of the following four months, beneficiaries must submit a written request to the local public authority where they intend to reside, along with a copy of their temporary protection residence permit issued by the General Inspectorate for Immigration. For subsequent months, a new request must be submitted during the first five working days of each month, accompanied by valid identification documents and proof of compliance with the following conditions: a) The applicant and eligible family members must either be employed in Romania or registered with an AJOFM office, or have income from self-employment or intellectual property rights; b) Minor children eligible for pre-university education must be enrolled in: Nursery, kindergarten, pre-school, or school programs; As auditors in pre-university institutions; or Educational activities offered by other institutions or organizations, including educational hubs, local authority-supported centres, NGOs, Blue Dot centres, children's halls and clubs, community lifelong learning centres, preschool centres, art schools, or cultural institutions.

Exemptions from these conditions apply to the following categories: Young persons aged 15–18 who are registered with an AJOFM office, employed, or have income from self-employment or intellectual property rights; Refugees enrolled in accredited higher education institutions in Romania; Persons with disabilities, holding a certificate issued by the Commission for the Assessment of Adults with Disabilities; Elderly individuals over the age of 65; Refugees caring for children under the age of two, or under three in the case of children with disabilities.

Most probably, as ReliefWeb which is a humanitarian information service provided by the United Nations Office for the

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| | Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) argues that a direct impact of the *D368/2023*, Art.2(1) provision has been an increase in the enrolment of Ukrainian children in schools (ReliefWeb). |
| **2024** | Emergency Ordinance No. 96 of **June 28, 2024** *regarding the provisions of humanitarian support and assistance of the Romanian state to foreign citizens or stateless persons in difficult situations, or coming from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine (*EO96/2024).<br><br>This ordinance expands upon existing legal provisions related to humanitarian aid and assistance offered by the Romanian state to foreign nationals or stateless persons in special circumstances who have fled the armed conflict in Ukraine. More specifically, the EO96/2024 extends the validity of earlier legal measures concerning lump-sum payments for accommodation expenses, effective until June 30, 2024. Secondly, it introduces a new financial assistance framework for Ukrainian citizens benefiting from temporary protection. Under this framework, refugees who have resided in Romania for more than three months gain access to the national social protection system, while a separate support mechanism is available for those who have been in the country for less than three months.<br><br>     The EO96/2024 provides time-limited, conditional support for newly arrived refugees, including access to emergency shelter, basic necessities, or a lump-sum payment to cover a three-month period. It also ensures eligibility for a range of social benefits, including child allowances, disability and unemployment benefits, minimum income support, and scholarships for school-aged children. These measures represent a significant step forward in promoting the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in Romania, aligning their access to services more closely with that of Romanian citizens. Importantly, these provisions have contributed to an increase in school enrollment among Ukrainian children. By the end of the 2023–2024 academic year, the Ministry of Education reported that nearly 40,000 Ukrainian refugee children were enrolled in Romania's national education system—a notable rise from 4,361 in December 2022. However, only about one-third of these children[2] regularly attend school in person, indicating persistent barriers to full inclusion. These challenges |

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[2] According to the Ministry of Education, 27 May 2024, 35 per cent of the Ukrainian children enrolled in the national system are attending classes.

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| | include both structural obstacles and parental preference for maintaining the Ukrainian online curriculum. In this context, EO 96/2024 represents a critical policy milestone in the integration of refugees into Romania's social protection framework. It plays a vital role in safeguarding the most vulnerable populations, including those experiencing severe economic hardship, older persons, individuals with disabilities, and the unemployed. |
| **2024** | Government Decision No. 1178 of **September 25, 2024** *for establishing the amount, the conditions and the mechanism for granting lump sums according to the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 96/2024 on the granting of support and humanitarian assistance by the Romanian State to foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations, originating from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine* (D1178/2024).<br><br>It sets the amount, conditions, and mechanism for granting lump-sum payments after July 1, 2024, and in accordance with EO96/2024. Also, D1178/2024 sets out the eligibility criteria and operational framework for providing financial assistance to beneficiaries in the form of lump-sum payments to cover accommodation expenses for a period of up to three consecutive months. The revised framework increases the support amount to 750 lei per month for a single person and 2,000 lei per month for a family, up from the previous allocations of 500 lei and 1,500 lei, respectively. However, the decision also stipulates a reduction in benefits for individuals who had previously received support while being accommodated in facilities designated by county emergency committees or the Municipality of Bucharest. For these individuals, the monthly amounts were decreased from 750 lei to 500 lei for a single person and from 2,000 lei to 1,500 lei for a family. |

The legal framework outlined above highlights the Romanian state's ongoing challenges in effectively responding to the refugee crisis. These challenges stem not only from the scale of the humanitarian emergency but also from the legal complexity involved, underling the need to revise and supplement certain legal provisions to better accommodate the situation. In this context, it is worth referencing similar analyses conducted by Romanian scholars. For instance, the study by Balan and Cozma (2024) offers a comprehensive examination of Romania's evolving emergency response mechanisms and legal adaptations in the

aftermath of the large-scale arrival of Ukrainian refugees during the first four months following the escalation of the conflict. The authors emphasize that "the Government has underlined, through its decisions and actions, the critical importance of prioritizing the maintenance of social cohesion, as seen in the attempt to balance support to displaced persons from Ukraine with assistance to host communities" (Balan & Cozma, 2024, p. 23). Furthermore, they highlight a crucial component of the response—the emphasis on collaborative efforts: "the importance of partnerships and collaborations. Recognizing that one organization cannot manage all aspects of hosting, various collaborations, especially public-private-non-profit partnerships, are essential" (Balan & Cozma, 2024, p. 23). This underlines the necessity of a multi-stakeholder approach to managing complex humanitarian crises, where legal, institutional, and social frameworks must work together to ensure effective and adequate support.

**Romania´s multidimensional approach**

Romania, as a neighbouring country to Ukraine, has assumed a pivotal role in both the reception and integration of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the ongoing armed conflict. Since the onset of the crisis, Romania has implemented legal and policy frameworks aimed at supporting the socio-economic inclusion of displaced persons from Ukraine. The integration of Ukrainian refugees is guided by a multidimensional approach, structured around the following key pillars:

*Access to housing* and basic needs. In Romania, the Ukrainian refugees can benefit from lump-sum financial support to cover essential needs, as food and accommodation. These provisions, established through the emergency ordinances and government decisions mentioned earlier, have been periodically updated to ensure timely assistance for both newly arrived refugees and those undergoing longer-term integration processes. However, while the short-term housing needs have been somewhat addressed, and as the conflicts continues, the need for long term solutions emerges more and more. To address this gap, Kiss et al. tried to explore the long-term housing options for Ukrainian refugees in Romania, considering the legal provisions and policies in place. After the analysis, the authors conclude that "long-term visions of housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees as they figure in the National Plan are not only roughly sketched but are problematic and unrealistic" (Kiss et al, 2023, p. 35). The authors bring few

arguments to support these claims. "First, unlike the majority of other domains of intervention, proposed housing solutions lack quantitative target indicators. One cannot find out how many empty housing units for each category are expected to be identified, or how many will be allocated. Similarly, we do not know until when the legislative framework and methodologies of allocation should be elaborated and adopted. The only tangible target indicator refers to the construction of necessity houses: it is mentioned that 1,000 such houses/apartments will be built. Second, the National Plan admits that Ukrainians do not have access to the mainstream housing solutions that it enumerates…" (Kiss et al., 2023, p.35). Building upon the data collected via interviews with refugees, Kiss et al. point out that "the legislative framework for ensuring access to these housing solutions has not been created yet and it is unrealistic to think that it will be created in the near future. Third, the National Plan revolves around publicly owned housing units". (Kiss et al, 2023, p.35). Considering statistical data from 2021 of the National Institute of Statistics, Kiss et al. showcases that there are very few publicly owned housing units, cca 118 thousand representing no more than 1.2 percent of the total stock. "Fourth, the NHA Youth Housing program is mentioned among the possible solutions. Nevertheless, there is an overemphasis on social- and necessity housing solutions. In Romania, this type of housing is of rather low prestige. Social and necessity houses are usually located in deteriorating and marginal areas of towns or in rare cases, villages. In many cases, they are actually located next to or inside compact Roma communities. As we saw, however, Ukrainians are mostly better off and of middle-class background, the vast majority of them with at least a secondary education. Including them in existing social housing schemes would barely be an adequate measure of inclusion, as it would mean for them a dramatic loss of social status and prestige." (Kiss et al, 2023, p. 36). "Fifth, the National Strategy seems to be misplaced as mainstream housing programs are too loosely integrated into it. This is connected to the perception that Ukrainians (as newcomers and refugees) should be integrated through measures that target individuals of lower social strata." (Kiss et al, 2023, p. 36). The existing "schemes that finance housing target explicitly middle- or higher-income households. These include the Youth Housing program run by NHA (the only program that targets the middle classes mentioned in the National Plan), the Prima Casa (First House) loan guarantee, and the BauSpar a loan subsidy" (Kiss et al, 2023, p. 37).

Therefore, Kiss et al point out that due to the implicit perception of Ukrainians as being marginal, the National Plan insists on housing schemes that target the lower strata and does not consider those that target middle income households. Consequently, Kiss et al conclude that the rather narrow public housing sector cannot meet the huge demand and under these circumstances it is highly unlikely that authorities would be able to allocate such accommodation to Ukrainians.

Similar thoughts have been elaborated by Deliu and Trifan, who argue that "in order to obtain the current housing, almost half of the respondents (47%) say that they managed on their own, while the remaining 53% received help from at least one of the following entities: authorities (16%), NGOs or associations (17%), private persons unknown in advance (25%), relatives or friends (20%). What the data seems to suggest is that while a good number of refugees can fend for themselves within the existing infrastructure of opportunities, others likely need help from multiple actors." (Deliu & Trifan, 2023, p. 13)

In addition to administrative difficulties to address the long-term housing of the Ukrainian refugees, in the region as well as in Romania, the prices of real estate have increased form the start of the war in Ukraine. Such a problematic has been the focus of the Cosmulese and Zhavoronok (2025), who explored the real estate changes, influenced by the Ukrainian refugees' arrivals in Romania. The authors believe that the full-scale war in Ukraine, also triggered real estate changes among other multiple areas. Specifically, the authors argue that "the war in Ukraine has significantly impacted the real estate market in neighbouring countries, particularly Romania. The impact is felt through several key factors related to geopolitical, economic, and social aspects" (Cosmulese & Zhavoronok, 2025, p. 52). The authors advocate "for public policies to support balance between supply and demand in the housing market, especially in migration crises. At the same time, interventions on interest rate regulation and increased affordability of mortgages can contribute to more stable housing market" (Cosmulese & Zhavoronok, 2025, p. 53). These results are in line with Kiss et al., who concluded that "long- or even mid-term housing solutions for Ukrainian refugees is at a rather incipient phase in Romania" (Kiss et al, 2023, p. 44) therefore need considerable attention from policy side.

*Access to the labour market:* Ukrainians with temporary protection status have been granted immediate and unrestricted access to the Romanian labour market. This includes access to services, such as vocational counselling, job-

matching, professional training, and skills recognition. Moreover, there are also some Romanian language courses offered to facilitate the employability and social integration of Ukrainians.

Gafiuc (2024) examines the situation of Ukrainian refugees regarding their integration into the labor market in Romania, analyzing the current statistical data and the social measures taken by the central public institutions after the start of the war in Ukraine. The author recognises that the integration is a complex process, and that there are many significant challenges encountered both among Ukrainians and at the institutional level. Among the most notable difficulties highlighted are the recognition of diplomas, professional certificates, the equivalence of studies, enrolment in professional training programs, as well as in information regarding the identification of jobs, labor legislation in Romania, and various aspects of employment. "Moreover, the language barrier, bureaucratic procedures, and the legislative differences between the two countries are among the main impediments to the integration process. Therefore, it is necessary to implement social support measures and develop coherent policies that promote the social inclusion of Ukrainian refugees, both for their benefit and for the Romanian community through their contribution to the economy and the elimination of the labor force deficit." (Grafiuc, 2024, p. 62)

Similar ideas have Deliu and Trifan, who argue that "integration on the labor market seems to be a deficient aspect for Ukrainian refugees in Bucharest. Only 23% of respondents, that is a little more than a fifth, have a job. Among those who work, almost half (43%) found a job without help from outside, for the remaining 57% the support received is important: from other refugees (26%), through Romanian friends (21%), through public institutions (6%) or an NGO (4%). What the data shows is the importance of individual communication skills and personal networks (knowledge among refugees or among Romanians), as well as the inefficiency of public institutions and NGOs, that is, of formal actors" (Deliu & Trifan, 2023, p. 19). In the same line of thought are the research of Dimitrov and Pavlov (2023), who were concerned about challenges to Ukrainian refugee integration in Central and Eastern Europe. The authors, identified "employment … as a key tool for the integration of Ukrainian refugees. The findings revealed a lack of a common refugee integration policy among the surveyed countries despite similar past and current socioeconomic circumstances and security environments, including mixed migration. Ambiguities across these countries, including local

population perceptions hindering Ukrainian refugee integration, were observed. Consequently, we assert the necessity for EU harmonized measures, emphasizing their long-term implementation to alleviate the economic burden of the war in Ukraine and provide predictability in the actions of individual governments." (Dimitrov & Pavlov, 2023, p. 98)

Cosciug et al. (2023) identified a huge informal employment of refugees. Specifically, **"**in response to the question about whether their labour is based on a working contract, 52% of respondents indicated that they do not have a contract to attest their employment. This suggests that a significant portion of Ukrainian refugees in Romania are engaged in informal or undocumented work arrangements, or that they have other forms of contracts that are not considered as labour contracts (collaboration, copyright, etc.). This finding that a significant proportion of respondents do not have a labour contract highlights potential challenges and vulnerabilities in their employment situations. Without a formal contract, workers may face difficulties in asserting their rights, ensuring fair treatment, and accessing social protections. It also raises concerns about job security and stability." (Cosciug et al, 2023, p. 48)

*Access to education.* Refugee children are entitled to immediate enrolment in the Romanian public education system. In addition to mainstream schooling, a variety of alternative educational opportunities, such as "Blue Dot" centers, educational hubs, and community learning centers are available to support their academic and psychosocial needs. Not least are scholarships for school-aged children. However, as the research of Deliu and Trifan (2023) shows, "among the respondents, 34% follow an education program in Romania, and 43% do not follow it nor do they want to. Reluctance was the reason why respondents stopped enrolling in the desired program in the case of 4% of them, and 20% did not know how to proceed to enroll. At the same time, 63% of the respondents' children are not enrolled in school in Romania, due to lack of knowledge of the Romanian language (each in 36% of cases)" (Deliu & Trifan, 2023, p. 22). The same authors argue that, "in the case of the respondents who participate in the education system either themselves or as belonging to the children, the main problem they face is given by not knowing the language. Moreover, the distribution of answers regarding the problems they face at school are similar for adults…" (Deliu & Trifan, 2023, p. 23).

*Language* education is featured among the first need among the Ukrainian refugees seeking employment and long-term integration. As IOM report points out the language barrier is a challenge in various sectors of daily life, including access to education and the labor market, as highlighted by refugees from Ukraine in Romania (IOM, 2022). According to Deliu & Trifan language barriers, altogether with the limited access to local information and reliance on informal networks for information exchange are among the difficulties faced by Ukrainian refugees in Romania (Deliu & Trifan, 2023, p. 8). In order to address these problems, the authors propose to centralize and tailored the information, using influential community members to disseminate information, and addressing the diverse information needs of different age groups.

Racareanu (2025) described in a straightforward way arguing that "…Ukrainians came to Romania because it is a neighbouring country and it would have been very easy to return once the war was over. The hope was that the war would be over in a few months, maybe within a year. But that has not been the case. One of the most difficult things to accept is that you may never be able to get back to the home and life you left behind. As such, after only one or two years many began to think they should rebuild their lives in Romania with everything that this entails: learning the language, finding a job, building a new home" (Racareanu, 2025, p. 140).

*Access to health care and social protection.* Under the temporary protection scheme, and additional legal provisions established, the Ukrainian refugees are entitled to access healthcare and social security services on an equal basis with Romanian citizens. This includes access to public health insurance, medical consultations, hospital care, and various social allowances such as child benefits, disability support, and unemployment assistance. However, access to health services has been identified by Deliu and Trifan (2023) as a key concern for Ukrainian refugees in both conflict and neutral zones. In relation to healthcare, these authors argue that many refugees suffer from various health problems but their access to health services is problematic. According to the data from the survey "Of the respondents, 66% say they have health problems. At the same time, 67% used medical services, 27% in emergency mode and 41% by appointment" (Deliu & Trifan, 2023, p.15).

*Fostering social cohesion and community engagement.* An essential dimension of refugee integration is the development of meaningful relationships

between host communities and displaced populations. In recognition of this, Romanian authorities, local NGOs, civil society organizations, and international partners have supported initiatives aimed at strengthening ties between Ukrainian refugees and local residents.

A variety of community-based events and activities have been organized and financially supported to promote intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and social inclusion. These initiatives include cultural festivals, language workshops, community celebrations, and neighbourhood volunteer projects. Such events serve multiple functions: they provide safe spaces for interaction, reduce potential tensions or misconceptions, and foster a sense of belonging among newcomers. They also enable refugees to become more visible and active members of the host society, while giving local communities the opportunity to express solidarity. Importantly, building links at the local level contributes to the long-term integration policies by transforming passive reception into active participation. Besoiu (2022) describe these efforts in the following way "… massive mobilization of non-profit organizations, churches, and the population" (Besoiu, 2022, p. 290), based on measures implemented by Evangelical Lutheran Church A.C. in Romania, that starting from the month of March 2022 until today, helped several hundred refugees to find shelter in the homes.

Porumbescu (2023) argue that the "massive inflow of people in need of assistance and protection demands an institutional organized response, which has been provided by the Romanian state, in cooperation with civil society, and benefitting from the support of international organizations. The public-private model of cooperation employed in this response has been unprecedented, starting with the mobilization of Romanian citizens in offering housing and food to the refugees, and continuing with the involvement of non-governmental organizations. This article aims to assess the systemic reaction to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Romania and to investigate the role of systemic cooperation in providing this reaction. Based on data available from the main public institutions involved in this response, combined with information provided by non-governmental organizations and international organizations, the study evaluates, from the system theory perspective, the types of cooperation and collaboration that emerged and their effectiveness in this situation" (Porumbescu, 2023, p. 158). Due to specificity and also considering the progress made, some

authors look at Romania as a case study that could serve as a best practice for other countries (Moldovan, 2022).

Although the positive sides of this multi-sectoral approach, through with Romania seeks not only to provide immediate humanitarian relief, and to promote long-term social and economic integration for Ukrainian refugees, it has been severely criticised. For instance, Ionita-Burda (2024) argue that the measures implemented so far by Romania are insufficient and presents many gaps, while Wang (2023) brings evidence that it moved on the opposite direction, criticizing its limitations in addressing the emerging needs of refugees. Similar view has Tomita et al. who conclude that, "though the Romanian state has the legal basis and premises to ensure the successful integration of TCNs in Romania, there is still work to be done in the field of putting the theoretical framework into common practice on the ground, thus ensuring the fair access of the TCNs to the tools and support they need to successfully integrate in the Romanian society" (Tomita et al, 2023, p. 30).

In order to address these challenges and critics, Mitrica et al. (2025) suggest to focus on raising awareness and building solidarity and support to counterbalance the effects of the crisis with respect to refugees in their hometowns and losses incurred; to address better the refugees' needs, and their expectations; and to focus on the integration of refugees into different fields of daily life; and last but not least consider also their preparation for a potential return to Ukraine.

These arguments showcase that since the onset of the armed conflict in Ukraine, Romania has demonstrated strong institutional leadership and a clear commitment to fostering effective coordination among governmental bodies, international organizations, civil society, and local stakeholders. The country's refugee coordination mechanisms have pioneered a novel approach that combines national ownership with adherence to international protection standards. This framework has enabled Romania to deliver targeted assistance across critical sectors such as health, education, protection, and employment.

A pivotal moment in Romania's refugee response was the activation of the European Union's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which granted Ukrainians legal status, safety, and access to a range of essential services. Romania acted swiftly to align its national policies with regional frameworks and distinguished itself as the first EU member state to develop a National Plan of Measures specifically aimed at the protection and inclusion of displaced persons

from Ukraine. This plan, which was met with high expectations, has been widely recognized for laying the foundation for long-term integration and for shifting the focus from emergency relief to sustainable support mechanisms. Romania's evolving approach reflects both its humanitarian commitment and its strategic alignment with broader regional and international objectives.

Despite progress, displaced Ukrainians in Romania continue to face significant barriers to full inclusion. Access to services—particularly employment—is often hindered by administrative challenges, lack of accessible information, and language barriers. Although employment outcomes have improved over time, many refugees remain employed in informal or mismatched roles, limiting their prospects for economic self-sufficiency.

Local authorities have the potential to play a central role in refugee support; however, many struggle with limited capacity and resources, which restricts their ability to effectively contribute to inclusion efforts at the community level. Strengthening municipal services, improving inter-agency coordination, and ensuring adequate local funding are essential to advancing the integration agenda. Additionally, the maintenance of social cohesion has become an emerging concern. While the initial public reception was largely welcoming, some refugees and research studies have reported instances of social tension, highlighting the need for more inclusive policies that benefit both refugees and host communities.

In conclusion, while Romania has made some progress in developing a coordinated, inclusive, and forward-looking response system, however, the path to full integration remains complex. Continued investment, inclusive and participatory planning, and a dual focus on the needs of both refugees and host communities will be crucial to securing a sustainable and dignified future for all those affected by displacement.

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CHAPTER 4

# REGULATION OF THE LEGAL STATUS OF REFUGEES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: PRACTICE, GAPS, PROPOSALS[3]

*Veronica CHEPTENE*

States are responsible for protecting the fundamental human rights of their citizens. When they are unable or unwilling to do so – often for political reasons or based on discrimination – individuals may suffer such serious violations of their human rights that they have to leave their homes, their families and their communities to find sanctuary in another country. Since, by definition, refugees are not protected by their own governments, the international community steps in to ensure they are safe and protected[4].

The protection of refugees represents one of the most important positive obligations of state authorities and involves a series of legal, social, and humanitarian measures that ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of individuals who have fled their home countries due to persecution, conflict, violence, or other serious threats. Refugees are often fleeing from life-threatening situations such as war, persecution, and natural disasters. Providing them with protection is a fundamental humanitarian obligation that aligns with international laws and human rights standards.

Actually, the world is witnessing one of the highest levels of displacement in history. Conflicts, political instability, and climate change are contributing to increasing numbers of refugees. Protecting these individuals is crucial to addressing this global crisis effectively. At the same time, the protection of refugees is not only the moral but also a legal obligation of state authorities. Countries are bound by international treaties, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention, to protect refugees and offer them asylum. This legal framework is

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[3] The chapter is developed in the context of the realization 'Strengthening socio-economic and legal mechanisms to ensure the well-being and security of the citizens' (CONSEJ 01.05.02) Institute of Legal, Political and Sociological Research Moldova State University

[4] The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol UNHCR Geneva 2 Switzerland, 2011 Online: The-1951-Refugee-Convention-and-1967-Protocol.pdf (hritc.co) p. 2

essential in ensuring that refugees are treated with dignity and respect, preventing violations of their rights.

The ensure of the effective protection for refugees by state authorities is crucial for the global and regional stability. When refugees are not protected, they may be forced into dangerous situations, fueling further conflict and instability. Proper protection and integration can help maintain social order and prevent further displacement. Otherwise, the non-compliance to international obligations in the field of refugees' protection determines their vulnerability to exploitation, human trafficking, and other forms of abuse. Ensuring their safety helps prevent these crimes and promotes human dignity.

The refugees' protection follows the humanitarian scope, contributing to long-term peace and security. By addressing the root causes of displacement and ensuring that refugees are safe, the international community can work towards a more peaceful and stable world. Protecting refugees requires international cooperation and solidarity. It is a shared global responsibility, and by protecting refugees, nations demonstrate a commitment to collective security and the well-being of humanity.

At the same time, refugees, when given protection and opportunities, can contribute positively to the economies of host countries. Many refugees bring skills, knowledge, and a strong work ethic, which can enhance local economies and foster cultural diversity.

## The international and European legal framework which refers to refugees' protection

Throughout the 20th century, the international community steadily assembled a set of guidelines, laws and conventions to ensure the adequate treatment of refugees and protect their human rights. The process began under the League of Nations in 1921. In July 1951, a diplomatic conference in Geneva adopted the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees ('1951 Convention'), which was later amended by the 1967 Protocol. These documents clearly spell out who is a refugee and the kind of legal protection, other assistance and social rights a refugee is entitled to receive. It also defines a refugee's obligations to host countries and specifies certain categories of people, such as war criminals, who do not qualify for refugee status. Initially, the 1951 Convention was more or less

limited to protecting European refugees in the aftermath of World War II, but the 1967 Protocol expanded its scope as the problem of displacement spread around the world[5]. This Protocol removed the geographical and temporal restrictions of the 1951 Convention, making it applicable worldwide and extending the protection to refugees beyond those who fled events occurring before 1951.

According to their provisions, refugees deserve, as a minimum, the same standards of treatment enjoyed by other foreign nationals in a given country and, in many cases, the same treatment as nationals. The 1951 Convention also recognizes the international scope of the refugee problem and the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in trying to resolve them[6].

According to the Article 1A(2) a refugee as a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him— or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution[7].

Therefore, in order for the **person to be considered as a refugee within the meaning of the 1951 UN Convention**, it must comply with the following conditions:

1. the person must be outside the state of this citizenship or if they have no nationality, outside their country of habitual residence. This condition refers to the fact that person could not request refugee protection being in the territory of state in which he or she is persecuted. This requirement reflects the idea that refugee protection is international in nature. The individual must have crossed an international border, seeking refuge in another country. The refugee protection could be requested when a person crosses the state border. Internally displaced persons, who have not left their country, do not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention, although they may still be in need of protection and assistance.

2. the person must have a well-founded fear of being persecuted. "Well-founded fear" involves both a subjective element (the person's fear) and an objective

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[5] The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol UNHCR Geneva 2 Switzerland, 2011 Online: The-1951-Refugee-Convention-and-1967-Protocol.pdf (hritc.co) p. 1
[6] The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol UNHCR Geneva 2 Switzerland, 2011 Online: The-1951-Refugee-Convention-and-1967-Protocol.pdf (hritc.co) p. 2
[7] Конвенция о статусе беженцев принята 28 июля 1951 года Конференцией полномочных представителей по вопросу о статусе беженцев и апатридов, созванной в соответствии с резолюцией 429 (V) Генеральной Ассамблеи от 14 декабря 1950 года Online: Конвенция о статусе беженцев (1951) | Организация Объединенных Наций (un.org)

element (the fear being reasonable in the circumstances). It means that the fear must be genuine and based on credible reasons. The risk of persecution must be significant and not merely speculative. Evidence of past persecution, while not required, often strengthens a claim by indicating that the fear is well-founded. To be qualified as a refugee in the sense of the 1951 UN Convention he or she should prove the objective nature of fear presenting the evidence, for example the addressing threatening messages, the presence of political criminal cases, the widespread persecution of the members of the group to which the person belongs, etc. Fear could not be qualified well founded, if it is based only on the subjective reason or some general aspects as political or economic crisis or the change of government party.

3. the persecution feared must be for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. This condition limits refugee status to those who face persecution on specific grounds, which are recognized as core aspects of identity or belief. Each ground has specific interpretations: a) race includes ethnic groups and other social groups linked by common descent, such as tribes; b) religion covers religious beliefs, practices, and the freedom to express one's faith; c) nationality refers not only to citizenship but also to ethnic or linguistic groups, including minorities; d) membership of a particular social group refers to a broader category that includes groups who share common characteristics or experiences that make them targets for persecution, such as gender, sexual orientation, or membership in a clan; e) political opinion encompasses opinions on political matters, including opposition to the policies or practices of the government or ruling powers. This Convention regulates the criterion of persecution exhaustively being impossible to invoke other criteria than those expressly provided. Also, the person should present specific evidence to prove each criterion invoked during the procedure for granting refugee status. In this case, person should present evidence that he or she expressed in public the political opinion for which he or she is persecuted or that he ore she makes part from one of the persecuted groups. Only membership of any particular group which is not proved without providing evidence of persecution of that group cannot be considered as a basis for granting protection under the Convention.

4. the person must be unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their country. This condition recognizes that a person who fears persecution

cannot rely on the protection of their home country. "Unable" typically refers to situations where the home country is unable to protect the individual, such as in cases of state collapse or civil war. "Unwilling" refers to situations where the individual cannot trust the state authorities due to their involvement in persecution or their failure to provide protection.

5. the person must be unable or unwilling to return to their country for fear of persecution. This underscores that the fear of persecution is ongoing and that the conditions in the home country have not changed to an extent that would make it safe for the person to return. The term "persecution" is not explicitly defined in the Convention but is generally understood to involve serious harm or threats to life, freedom, or fundamental human rights. It can include physical violence, discrimination, and other forms of severe mistreatment. The fear must be related to the specific grounds listed in the Convention (race, religion, etc.).

Also, the applicant for refugee status carries the burden of proving that they meet the criteria. However, given the difficulties many refugees face in providing evidence, decision-makers often rely on a combination of the applicant's testimony and available country information. The country of asylum is responsible for assessing whether an individual qualifies as a refugee under these criteria. This process often involves an interview and an assessment of the credibility of the applicant's claims.

Only the person who could prove the presence of all criterion analyzed above in his or her particular case could benefit for the protection under the 1951 Convention. The 1951 Convention contains a number of rights and also highlights the obligations of refugees towards their host country. The cornerstone of the 1951 Convention is the principle of non-refoulement contained in Article 33. According to this principle, a refugee should not be returned to a country where he or she faces serious threats to his or her life or freedom. This protection may not be claimed by refugees who are reasonably regarded as a danger to the security of the country, or having been convicted of a particularly serious crime, are considered a danger to the community[8].

Other rights contained in the 1951 Convention include: The right not to be expelled, except under certain, strictly defined conditions (Article 32); The right

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[8] The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol UNHCR Geneva 2 Switzerland, 2011 Online: The-1951-Refugee-Convention-and-1967-Protocol.pdf (hritc.co) p. 4

not to be punished for illegal entry into the territory of a contracting State (Article31); The right to work (Articles 17 to 19); The right to housing (Article 21); The right to education (Article 22); • The right to public relief and assistance (Article 23); The right to freedom of religion (Article 4); The right to access the courts (Article 16); The right to freedom of movement within the territory (Article 26); and The right to be issued identity and travel documents (Articles 27 and 28).

European Union elaborated a special regional form of refugee protection for persons who do not correspond to the 1951 Convention criterion. **Subsidiary protection** is granted to individuals who do not qualify as Convention refugees but would face a real risk of serious harm if returned to their home country. This harm includes the death penalty, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, or serious and individual threat to life or safety due to indiscriminate violence in situations of armed conflict. Individuals granted subsidiary protection receive similar rights to Convention refugees, including the right to stay in the host country, access to basic services, and protection from refoulement. However, the protection may be more temporary or conditional, depending on the situation in the country of origin.

The concept of subsidiary protection is introduced by Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted[9]. This Directive, known as the Qualification Directive, defines the criteria for qualifying for both refugee status and subsidiary protection, and it lays down the rights associated with these statuses. It applies to all EU Member States (except Denmark, which has an opt-out on justice and home affairs matters).

Under this directive, subsidiary protection is granted to individuals who do not qualify as refugees but who would face a real risk of suffering serious harm if returned to their country of origin. Serious harm includes: the death penalty or

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[9] Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted Online: Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (europa.eu)

execution; torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; serious and individual threat to life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict.

The conditions that must be met for an individual to benefit from subsidiary protection are as follows:

1. Non-qualification for refugee status. The European Union aimed to prevent the duplication of the provisions of the 1951 Convention and the emergence of cases of granting protection by means of both universal and regional mechanisms. In order to achieve this goal, the directive expressly stipulates that the person must not meet the criteria for refugee status as defined under the 1951 Refugee Convention. This means they do not have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

2. The presence of real risk of serious harm if returned to their country of origin or habitual residence. According to the art. 15 serious harm consists of: (a) the death penalty or execution; or (b) torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of an applicant in the country of origin; or (c) serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict[10]. So, the concept of serios harm includes 3 situations: the individual would face the death penalty or execution if returned; the person would be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in their home country; the individual would be at risk due to widespread violence and conflict, even if they are not specifically targeted.

3. The person is unable or unwilling, owing to such risk, to avail themselves of the protection of their country of origin or habitual residence. According to the art. 9 (2) Acts of persecution as qualified in paragraph 1 can, inter alia, take the form of: (a) acts of physical or mental violence, including acts of sexual violence; (b) legal, administrative, police, and/or judicial measures which are in themselves

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[10] Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted Online: Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (europa.eu)

discriminatory or which are implemented in a discriminatory manner; (c) prosecution or punishment which is disproportionate or discriminatory; (d) denial of judicial redress resulting in a disproportionate or discriminatory punishment; (e) prosecution or punishment for refusal to perform military service in a conflict, where performing military service would include crimes or acts falling within the scope of the grounds for exclusion as set out in Article 12(2); (f) acts of a gender-specific or child-specific nature.[11] This reflects the idea that the individual cannot rely on the state authorities for protection against the serious harm they face. It also applies to stateless persons who cannot return to their place of former habitual residence for the same reasons.

4. The person is persecuted based on the reasons expressly stipulated in art. 10 of the Qualification Directive: (a) the concept of race shall, in particular, include considerations of colour, descent, or membership of a particular ethnic group; (b) the concept of religion shall in particular include the holding of theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, the participation in, or abstention from, formal worship in private or in public, either alone or in community with others, other religious acts or expressions of view, or forms of personal or communal conduct based on or mandated by any religious belief; (c) the concept of nationality shall not be confined to citizenship or lack thereof but shall, in particular, include membership of a group determined by its cultural, ethnic, or linguistic identity, common geographical or political origins or its relationship with the population of another State; (d) a group shall be considered to form a particular social group where in particular: members of that group share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it, and — that group has a distinct identity in the relevant country, because it is perceived as being different by the surrounding society; e) the concept of political opinion shall, in particular, include the holding of an opinion, thought or belief on a

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[11] Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted Online: Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (europa.eu)

matter related to the potential actors of persecution mentioned in Article 6 and to their policies or methods, whether or not that opinion, thought or belief has been acted upon by the applicant[12]. The reason of persecution should be proved by applicant and the prosecution actions should be directly interconnected with the reason of prosecution.

5. The person must not be excluded from subsidiary protection based on certain criteria outlined in art. 12 of the Directive. Subsidiary protection may be denied if the individual: a) has committed a serious crime. This includes war crimes, crimes against humanity, or other serious non-political crimes outside the country of refuge; b) poses a danger to the community or security. If the person poses a serious threat to the host country's community or security, they may be excluded from protection; c) has been involved in acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations. This includes individuals who have engaged in activities that undermine international peace and security; d) can avail themselves of protection. If the individual has access to effective protection in a part of their country, where they would not face the risk of serious harm, they may be excluded from subsidiary protection.

6. The assessment of whether a person qualifies for subsidiary protection must be based on an individual examination of their specific circumstances. This requires authorities to consider the particular situation of the person, including the general situation in their country of origin and their personal history, to determine if they face a real risk of serious harm.

It should be noted that in order to be eligible for subsidiary protection, the person must meet all the cumulative conditions and prove the presence of a real risk and the persecution criterion, which correspond to those mentioned in the Directive.

The persons who benefit from subsidiary protection have the following rights: access to employment (art. 26), access to education (art. 27), access to procedures for recognition of qualifications (art. 28), social welfare (art. 29),

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[12] Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted Online: Directive 2011/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 on standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted (europa.eu)

healthcare (art. 30), access to accommodation (art. 32), freedom of movement within the member state (art. 33), access to integration facilities (art. 34).

To respond to the event of a mass influx of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin European Union elaborated another form of refugee protection, known as **temporary protection**. This concept is particularly relevant in situations of mass influx where the usual asylum procedures might be overwhelmed. Temporary protection was introduced by Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof[13]. This directive was created to ensure that, in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons, there is a coordinated response across the EU. It provides a framework for temporary protection that offers immediate and collective protection to those in need without going through the lengthy asylum process.

Art. 2 lit. (a) determines the notion of temporary protection, that means a procedure of exceptional character to provide, in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from third countries who are unable to return to their country of origin, immediate and temporary protection to such persons, in particular if there is also a risk that the asylum system will be unable to process this influx without adverse effects for its efficient operation, in the interests of the persons concerned and other persons requesting protection[14].

So, in order to benefit from temporary protection, the person must meet specific criteria related to the circumstances of their displacement and the situation in their country of origin:

1. The temporary protection mechanism is triggered in response to a mass influx of displaced persons into the European Union. According to art. 2 lit. (d) "mass

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[13] Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof Official Journal L 212 , 07/08/2001 P. 0012 – 0023 Online: Directive - 2001/55 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

[14] Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof Official Journal L 212 , 07/08/2001 P. 0012 – 0023 Online: Directive - 2001/55 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

influx" means arrival in the Community of a large number of displaced persons, who come from a specific country or geographical area, whether their arrival in the Community was spontaneous or aided, for example through an evacuation programme[15]. This means that a large number of people have fled their country of origin, often due to armed conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. The concept of "mass influx" implies that the arrival of these persons overwhelms the standard asylum procedures of the receiving countries, necessitating a special, expedited form of protection. The concept of temporary protection is not applied for the single person who is persecuted in the state of his or her origin and refers only to the situation of mass influx of persons to European Union.

2. The individuals benefiting from temporary protection must have been displaced from their country of origin due to: a) armed conflict such as civil war or international conflict; b) endemic violence that makes it unsafe for individuals to remain in their home country; c) human rights violations as systematic and widespread abuses that force people to flee for their safety; d) other circumstances that have led to a mass displacement as determined by the Council of the European Union. This criterion ensures that temporary protection is applied in situations where the safety and well-being of large groups of people are at immediate risk, and where the usual asylum process may be too slow or overwhelmed. We should highlight the fact that temporary protection is not applied for migrants, who mass and collectively emigrate in another state because of economic crisis, impossibility to find the work or attractivity of another state because of good living conditions. The temporary protection is applied only in the exceptional situation them mass influx of people to European Union is determined by armed conflict or mass violation of human rights. In this case temporary protection follows to protect the people who are not safe in the state of origin.

3. Temporary protection is granted following a formal decision by the Council of the European Union. The Council must adopt a decision based on a proposal from the European Commission, which identifies the specific group of people

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[15] Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof Official Journal L 212 , 07/08/2001 P. 0012 – 0023 Online: Directive - 2001/55 - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

who are eligible for temporary protection. This procedure is regulated by art. 5 of Temporary protection Directive. This means that the individuals benefiting from temporary protection are part of a defined group identified in the Council's decision. The decision includes the nationality or group characteristics of the individuals affected and the duration of the temporary protection. So, temporary protection mechanism works in all states that form the European Union and the decision to introduce this form of protection is taken by the Council of the European Union. This procedure generates some problems related to the length of procedure and the specific situation in which all European Union member states should be affected by the influx of people. So, temporary protection is not applied if only one member-state is affected by the influx of people.

4. Temporary protection is typically granted on a group basis, rather than individual assessment. This allows for a faster and more efficient response in cases of mass influx. Unlike the individual asylum process, which requires detailed examination of each claim, temporary protection can be applied more broadly to all members of the affected group, ensuring that protection is provided quickly.

5. To benefit from temporary protection, the displaced persons must have arrived in the European Union, or be in the process of arriving, during the period specified in the Council's decision. This criterion means that the individuals must physically be in an EU Member State or en route when the temporary protection regime is activated.

6. Individuals may be excluded from temporary protection if they: a) have committed serious crimes such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, or other serious non-political crimes; pose a danger to the community or security of the host country, they may be excluded from temporary protection. These exclusions ensure that individuals who may be harmful to the receiving state or who have committed egregious acts do not benefit from temporary protection.

Also, the temporary protection has some particularities, which differ it from other forms of protection, such as duration and burden-sharing among EU Member States rule. Temporary protection is granted for an initial period of one year, which can be extended up to a maximum of three years respecting the special procedure

regulated by art. 4 of Temporary protection directive. At the same time, subsidiary protection accorded by European Union is not limited in time.

The directive also includes provisions for solidarity and burden-sharing among EU Member States, encouraging a balanced distribution of refugees to ensure that no single country bears a disproportionate share of the burden. So, the European Union follows the proportionate distribution of displaced persons amount the member-states to prevent the bear all expenses and inconveniences by one member state.

Individuals receiving temporary protection are entitled to residence permits, access to employment, educational opportunities for adults, vocational training and practical workplace experience (art. 12), access to suitable accommodation or receive the means to obtain housing, access to social welfare and medical assistance (art. 13), access to education for minors (art. 14).

## The national regulation of the Republic of Moldova which refers to refugees' protection

In the national legislation of the Republic of Moldova the forms of refugee protection are regulated by the Law no. 270/2008 on asylum in the Republic of Moldova[16]. Moldovan's national legislation regulates the following form of refugee protection: a) refugee status; b) humanitarian protection; c) temporary protection; d) political asylum (art. 16 of the Law no. 270/2008).

According to art. 17 (1) of the Law no. 270/2008 **refugee status** shall be recognized, upon request, to a foreigner who, by virtue of a well-founded fear of being persecuted on grounds of race, religion, nationality, belonging to a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and who cannot or, because of this fear, is unwilling to place himself under the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his lawful and habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, because of this fear, unwilling to return[17].

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[16] Lege Nr. 270 din 18-12-2008 privind azilul în Republica Moldova Publicat: 13-03-2009 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 53-54 art. 145 *MODIFICAT LP223 din 31.07.24, MO355-357/15.08.24 art.555; în vigoare 15.08.24* Online: LP270/2008 (legis.md)

[17] Lege Nr. 270 din 18-12-2008 privind azilul în Republica Moldova Publicat: 13-03-2009 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 53-54 art. 145 *MODIFICAT LP223 din 31.07.24, MO355-357/15.08.24 art.555; în vigoare 15.08.24* Online: LP270/2008 (legis.md)

The Republic of Moldova's Law no. 270/2008 incorporates the definition of a refugee from the 1951 Refugee Convention with slight variations in language and structure. The moldovan law's definition explicitly includes stateless persons by stating "who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his lawful and habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, because of this fear, unwilling to return." The 1951 Convention also covers stateless persons, but the Moldovan law makes this explicit by clearly outlining the condition for those "not having a nationality." National legislation refers to "lawful and habitual residence" for stateless persons, emphasizing the legality of their residence in the country they have fled. 1951 Convention refers to "habitual residence" without explicitly mentioning the legality, though it is generally interpreted to include lawful residence.

So, the primary differences lie in the explicit mention of stateless persons and the terminology used to describe social groups and habitual residence. These differences do not significantly alter the substance of the refugee definition, which remains consistent with international standards set by the 1951 Convention.

Art. 33 of the Law no. 270/2008 regulates the following rights of refugee; (a) to be informed in writing, in a language which he understands or is reasonably supposed to understand, as soon as possible after obtaining the form of protection, of his rights and obligations; b) to remain on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and to obtain the appropriate documents for the confirmation of identity and for crossing the state border; c) to choose the place of residence and move freely under the conditions established by the legislation for foreigners; d) to be employed by natural or legal persons, to exercise free professions, to carry out entrepreneurial activity; e) to be paid and to benefit from other material rights arising from the activities carried out, as well as social insurance; f) to be enrolled in compulsory education and other forms of education under the conditions established by law for the citizens of the Republic of Moldova; g) to benefit, in the case of the family with children, as well as of the unaccompanied minor, from all social assistance measures granted to children citizens of the Republic of Moldova; h) to benefit from treatment identical to that granted to the citizens of the Republic of Moldova regarding the freedom to profess their own religion and to give religious education to children; i) to enjoy, in the system of compulsory health insurance, the same rights as the citizens of the Republic of Moldova; j) to protect his personal data and any other details in connection with his case; k) to have free

access to court and administrative assistance; l) not to be returned or expelled, except in cases provided by this law; m) to be temporarily accommodated in accommodation centers under the conditions provided by the government; n) to request integration measures in accordance with the legislation in force[18].

We consider it opportune to assess the degree of transposition of the provisions of the 1951 Convention into national legislation. Analyzing the right to information regulated of national legislation, we should mention the 1951 Convention does not explicitly mandate the provision of information in a specific language, it implies that refugees should be informed of their rights and duties. This is generally interpreted as a necessary part of the protection process but is not specified in such detail. Moldovan legislation regulated the refugee's right to remain in the territory and to obtain appropriate identity documents for crossing the state border. The 1951 Convention (art. 28) requires states to issue travel documents to refugees who are lawfully staying in their territory, allowing them to travel outside the country, but it does not explicitly detail the right to remain in the territory. The national regulations related to the freedom of movement and residence (art. 33(c)) establish that refugees have the right to choose their place of residence and move freely under conditions established for foreigners. The 1951 Convention (art. 26) Convention guarantees refugees the right to choose their residence and to move freely within the territory, subject to any regulations applicable to aliens generally.

Analyzing the regulation of the right to employment, the Moldovan Law (art. 33(d)) establish that refugees have the right to be employed, exercise free professions, and engage in entrepreneurial activities. The 1951 Convention (Arts. 17-19) provides for the right to engage in wage-earning employment, self-employment, and the liberal professions under conditions similar to nationals, or at least as favorable as those given to other aliens. At the same time, Moldovan Law (art. 33(e)) mentions that refugees are entitled to be paid and benefit from other material rights and social insurance. The 1951 Convention (art. 24) ensures that refugees enjoy the same treatment as nationals concerning remuneration, social security, and other benefits resulting from employment.

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[18] Lege Nr. 270 din 18-12-2008 privind azilul în Republica Moldova Publicat: 13-03-2009 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 53-54 art. 145 *MODIFICAT LP223 din 31.07.24, MO355-357/15.08.24 art.555; în vigoare 15.08.24* Online: LP270/2008 (legis.md)

National law (art. 33(f)) stipulates that refugees have the right to enroll in compulsory education and other forms of education under the same conditions as Moldovan citizens. The 1951 Convention (art. 22) mandates that refugees should have access to public education under the same conditions as nationals, particularly with regard to primary education. Analyzing the right to social assistance, we should mention that national legislation corresponds to the 1951 Convention (art. 23), which establish that refugees should receive the same public relief and assistance as nationals.

Both Moldovan Law (Art. 33(h)) and the 1951 Convention (Art. 4) regulate right to freedom of religion and religious education for refugees. Also, both acts regulate right to health care. Moldovan Law (art. 33(i)) establish that refugees are entitled to the same rights as Moldovan citizens in the compulsory health insurance system. The 1951 Convention (Art. 24) requires that refugees receive the same treatment as nationals in terms of social security, which includes health care. National legislation regulates the right to data protection (art. 33(j), which is not explicitly mentioned in the 1951 Convention, but this right can be inferred from general human rights principles.

The national provisions referred to the right to access courts (art. 33(k)) correspond to the 1951 Convention (art. 16) regulations. The principle of non-refoulement is a cornerstone of the 1951 Convention, prohibiting the expulsion or return of refugees to a country where they may face persecution is successfully transposed in the Moldovan Law (art. 33(l)). The national legislation establishes the right to temporary accommodation in centers under conditions set by the government is not regulated by the 1951 Convention, which mentions only the need for adequate living conditions. Moldovan authorities are concerned about the refugees' integration, establishing the right to request integration measures, while the 1951 Convention does not explicitly address integration measures, it encourages states to facilitate the naturalization and integration of refugees.

The rights granted to refugees under Article 33 of the Republic of Moldova's Law no. 270/2008 largely align with the rights enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Moldovan law expands on these rights in some areas, particularly by specifying the process and conditions for their exercise, such as the explicit right to data protection and the detailed right to social assistance for children and unaccompanied minors. The law also emphasizes the administrative processes related to these rights, reflecting a more structured approach to refugee protection within the national context.

National legislation regulated the temporary protection in art. 3 of the Law no. 270/2008: temporary protection is protection of an exceptional nature designed to ensure, in the event of a massive and spontaneous flow of displaced persons who cannot return to their country of origin, immediate and temporary protection of this persons, where there is a risk that the asylum system will not be able to process this flow without adverse effects for its efficient functioning, in the interests of the persons concerned and other persons in need of protection[19].

The definitions of temporary protection in the national legislation of the Republic of Moldova and the EU Directive are closely aligned, both in their core purpose and in the conditions under which temporary protection is granted. Both frameworks recognize the exceptional nature of temporary protection, the need for immediate and temporary measures in response to a mass influx of displaced persons, and the importance of protecting the integrity and efficiency of the asylum system.

The differences are primarily in the nuances of language: the Moldovan law refers to a "massive and spontaneous flow" while the EU Directive speaks of a "mass influx or imminent mass influx." Additionally, the EU Directive explicitly refers to displaced persons from "third countries," emphasizing its applicability to non-EU nationals. Despite these differences, the overall objectives and conditions for triggering temporary protection are highly consistent between the two legal frameworks.

Art. 21 (1) of the Law no. 270/2008 establish that temporary protection shall be granted by government decision, at the proposal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on the basis of a report submitted by the migration and asylum bureau on the need to grant temporary protection. By government decision, the measures and the period for which temporary protection is granted are established; (2) the report shall be prepared on the basis of the situation analysis carried out by the asylum and Integration Directorate, taking into account the causes of possible inflow of persons[20].

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[19] Lege Nr. 270 din 18-12-2008 privind azilul în Republica Moldova Publicat: 13-03-2009 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 53-54 art. 145 *MODIFICAT LP223 din 31.07.24, MO355-357/15.08.24 art.555; în vigoare 15.08.24* Online: LP270/2008 (legis.md)

[20] Lege Nr. 270 din 18-12-2008 privind azilul în Republica Moldova Publicat: 13-03-2009 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 53-54 art. 145 *MODIFICAT LP223 din 31.07.24, MO355-357/15.08.24 art.555; în vigoare 15.08.24* Online: LP270/2008 (legis.md)

The procedure for granting temporary protection in the Republic of Moldova is a national process, centralized within the government and driven by an internal analysis of the situation. In contrast, the EU procedure is supranational, involving coordination between Member States and international organizations, and is enacted by a decision of the Council of the European Union.

The Moldovan procedure emphasizes national sovereignty and decision-making, with the government directly responsible for both initiating and implementing temporary protection. The EU procedure, on the other hand, emphasizes coordination and harmonization across Member States, ensuring that temporary protection is implemented uniformly across the EU based on a collective decision-making process. This reflects the different scales and structures of governance between a single nation-state and a union of multiple states.

Similar to the European Union regulations, temporary protection in the Republic of Moldova is granted for a period of one year. If the reasons for temporary protection persist, the duration of temporary protection may be extended by periods of 6 months for a maximum of one year but not exceeding 2 years[21].

According to the art. 39 of the Law no. 270/2008 beneficiaries of temporary protection have the following rights: a) not to be returned to the country where he is at risk of prejudice to his life, freedom or physical or mental integrity; b) to be informed in writing, in a language which he understands or is reasonably supposed to understand, of his rights and obligations during the period of temporary protection; c) to be issued an identity document for the period in which he is granted permission to remain on the territory of the Republic of Moldova; d) to work, on request, for a period not exceeding the period of temporary protection; e) access to appropriate accommodation; f) to receive primary medical care and emergency medical care according to the legislation in force; g) to have access to compulsory education, in the case of minors, under the same conditions as children citizens of the Republic of Moldova; h) to benefit, in the case of the family with children, as well as of the unaccompanied minor, from all social assistance

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[21] Lege Nr. 270 din 18-12-2008 privind azilul în Republica Moldova Publicat: 13-03-2009 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 53-54 art. 145 *MODIFICAT LP223 din 31.07.24, MO355-357/15.08.24 art.555; în vigoare 15.08.24* Online: LP270/2008 (legis.md) art. 21 (3)

measures granted, in accordance with the legislation in force, to children citizens of the Republic of Moldova[22].

The rights of beneficiaries of temporary protection as established by Moldovan legislation (Art. 39 of Law no. 270/2008) and those regulated under the EU Temporary Protection Directive (Directive 2001/55/EC) share similar core protections. However, there are differences in how these rights are articulated and implemented. Both frameworks uphold the principle of non-refoulement, ensuring that beneficiaries are protected from being returned to a dangerous situation. European Union Directive and Moldovan legislation emphasize the importance of providing clear and accessible information to beneficiaries in a language they understand, ensuring they are aware of their rights and responsibilities. These frameworks ensure that beneficiaries receive appropriate documentation to confirm their identity and legal status during the period of temporary protection. Both legislations grant beneficiaries the right to work during the temporary protection period, though the EU directive potentially offers broader opportunities depending on national conditions.

One and the other legislation recognize the importance of providing adequate accommodation for beneficiaries of temporary protection. The Moldovan law and the EU Directive provide for the medical needs of beneficiaries, although the EU Directive emphasizes assistance for special needs groups, which may include more comprehensive care. The analysis legal frameworks ensure that children under temporary protection have the same access to education as local children, reinforcing the importance of educational continuity. Both frameworks provide social assistance, with a particular focus on families and unaccompanied minors, ensuring their welfare during the temporary protection period.

The rights established under Moldovan legislation for beneficiaries of temporary protection are broadly aligned with those under the EU Temporary Protection Directive. Both frameworks ensure protection against refoulement, provide necessary documentation, access to work, accommodation, medical care, education, and social assistance.

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[22] Lege Nr. 270 din 18-12-2008 privind azilul în Republica Moldova Publicat: 13-03-2009 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 53-54 art. 145 *MODIFICAT LP223 din 31.07.24, MO355-357/15.08.24 art.555; în vigoare 15.08.24* Online: LP270/2008 (legis.md)

However, the EU Directive often provides broader and more detailed provisions, reflecting the EU's supranational nature and the need to harmonize the rights and obligations across multiple Member States. In contrast, Moldovan legislation is more focused on national implementation, with rights and services tailored to the country's specific context. Despite these differences, the core principles of protecting and supporting displaced persons are consistently upheld in both frameworks.

Analyzing the practical applicability of the national provisions related to the legal protection of refugees, we should mention the fact that after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the situation of Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova has become an urgent and significant problem. Thousands of Ukrainians have sought refuge in Moldova, seeking safety and protection from the armed conflict in their home country. The Republic of Moldova has implemented a number of measures to provide protection and assistance to Ukrainian refugees, based on national legislation and the international refugee protection framework.

After the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, Moldova was one of the first countries to receive large numbers of Ukrainian refugees, due to its geographical proximity and common borders. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees entered Moldova, and the Moldovan authorities worked with international and local organizations to provide immediate help. Reception centers and temporary shelters have been established to accommodate refugees and provide them with basic needs such as food, water and medical care.

The Republic of Moldova has taken extraordinary measures to cope with the crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine, including declaring a state of emergency. The Republic of Moldova declared a state of emergency on February 24, 2022, the same day that Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine by Parliament Decision No. 41 of February 24, 2022 on the declaration of a state of emergency[23]. The state of emergency was initially established for a period of 60 days. This decision was taken at the proposal of the Government, considering the security situation in the region and the associated risks for the Republic of Moldova. By Parliament's decision, the powers to manage the refugee crisis were given to the Commission for Exceptional Situations.

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[23] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 41 din 24-02-2022 privind declararea stării de urgență Publicat: 24-02-2022 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 52-2 art. 63-1 Online: HP41/2022 (legis.md)

The state of emergency has been repeatedly extended by the following acts:
1. Parliament Decision No. 85 of April 21, 2022[24] according to which the state of emergency was extended for another 60 days until June 24, 2022; 2. Parliament Decision No 164 of June 23, 2022[25] adopted for the extension of the state of emergency for a further 45 days until August 8, 2022; 3. Parliament Decision No 218 of July 28, 2022[26] extending the state of emergency for a further 60 days until October 6, 2022; 4. Parliament Decision No 278 of October 6, 2022[27] by which the state of emergency was extended for a further 60 days until December 6, 2022; 5. Parliament Decision No 330 of December 1, 2022 which prolonged the state of emergency for a further 60 days until February 4, 2023[28]; 6. Parliament Decision No 12 of February 2, 2023[29] which has extended the state of emergency for a further 60 days until April 4, 2023; 7. Parliament Decision No 67 of March 30, 2023[30] adopted to extend the state of emergency for a further 60 days until June 1, 2023; 7. Parliament Decision No 113 of May 26, 2023[31] adopted to prolong the state of emergency for a further 60 days until August 4, 2023, 8. Parliament Decision No 244 of July 31, 2023[32] of extension of the state of emergency for a further 60 days until September 30, 2023, Parliament Decision No 274 of September 21, 2023 which prolonged the state of emergency for a further 60 days until November 21, 2023[33]; Parliament Decision No 361 of November 24, 2023

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[24] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 105 din 21-04-2022 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Publicat : 22-04-2022 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 119 art. 216-1 Online: HP105/2022 (legis.md)

[25] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 163 din 23-06-2022 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Publicat : 23-06-2022 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 186 art. 352/1 Online: HP163/2022 (legis.md)

[26] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 245 din 28-07-2022 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP245/2022 (legis.md)

[27] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 278 din 06-10-2022 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP278/2022 (legis.md)

[28] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 330 din 01-12-2022 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP330/2022 (legis.md)

[29] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 12 din 02-02-2023 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP12/2023 (legis.md)

[30] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 67 din 30-03-2023 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP67/2023 (legis.md)

[31] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 113  din 04-08-2023 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP133/2023 (legis.md)

[32] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 244 din 31-07-2023 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP244/2023 (legis.md)

[33] Hotărârea Parlamentului 274 din 21-09-2023 privind prelungirea stării de urgență Online: HP274/2023 (legis.md)

which prolonged the state of emergency for a further 30 days until December 30, 2023[34].

The Commission for Exceptional Situations (CSE) of the Republic of Moldova was responsible for the implementation and coordination of specific measures during the state of emergency, which include: 1. setting up refugee reception and management points at state borders and within the country[35], 2. measures to ensure the housing and feeding of refugees in reception centers; allocation of resources to manage refugee flows[36], 3. coordination with international organizations and NGOs for the distribution of humanitarian aid to refugees[37]; 4. ensure refugees' access to health services, including emergency services and immunization[38], 5. expand accommodation capacities and identify new locations for refugee reception centers[39], 6. measures to register unaccompanied children and ensure their protection,[40] 7. creation of the mechanism to provide financial assistance to shelters hosting refugees[41], 8. allocation of additional funds to cover the costs of housing and feeding refugees[42], 9. measures to facilitate refugees' access to the Moldovan labor market.

The mechanism for managing the refugee crisis by the Moldovan authorities by declaring a state of emergency and setting up the Commission for Exceptional Situations instead of activating temporary protection for refugees contained a number of shortcomings. Declaring a state of emergency allows authorities to take rapid action and ad hoc decisions for crisis management. The Commission for Exceptional Situations has the possibility to implement immediate measures, such

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[34] Hotărârea Parlamentului Nr. 361 din 24-11-2023 privind prelungirea stării de urgenţă Online: HP361/2023 (legis.md)

[35] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr. 1 din 24 februarie 2022 Online: dispozitia_cse_nr.1_24.02.2022.pdf (gov.md)

[36] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr. 4 din I martie 2022 Online: dispozitia_cse_4_01.03.2022.pdf (gov.md)

[37] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr. 9 din 10 martie 2022 Online: dispozitie_cse_nr_9_din_10.03.2022_modif_10.11.pdf (gov.md)

[38] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr. l0 din 15 martie 2022 Online: dispozitia_cse_a_rm_nr._10_din_15.03.2022_stampila.pdf (gov.md)

[39] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr. 12 din 25 martie 2022 Online: dispozitie_cse_nr_12_din_23.03.2022_1.pdf (gov.md)

[40] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr. 14 din 14 aprilie 2022 Online: dispozitia_cse_14_14.04.2022.pdf (gov.md)

[41] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr. 16 din 20 aprilie 2022 Online: cse_rm_dispozitia_nr.16_20.04.2022_v2.pdf (gov.md)

[42] Dispoziţia Comisiei pentru Situaţii Excepţionale a Republicii Moldova nr.2l din 18 mai 2022 Online: dispozitia_cse_a_rm_nr.21_din_18.05.2022.pdf (gov.md)

as establishing reception points, organizing accommodation centers, and allocating emergency resources. However, this approach could be reactive and not always well-coordinated, leaving room for decisions that are not uniform or that do not fully take into account all refugee needs. In emergencies, measures are often adopted as problems arise, which can lead to a lack of effective coordination between the different agencies and institutions involved. The Commission for Exceptional Situations can act quickly, but these actions are often not based on a long-term strategy, which can lead to overlaps, gaps or confusion in the implementation of refugee support measures.

At the same time, the protection granted by the declaration of a state of emergency is usually short-term and depends on the periodic extension of the state of emergency. This can create uncertainty for refugees, as there is no clear guarantee as to how long they will receive protection and what forms of assistance will be available in the future. The same is true regarding the rights and benefits granted to refugees. During the state of emergency regulation of the refugee rights may vary and depend on the specific provisions adopted by the Commission for Exceptional Situations. There may be limitations in access to certain economic, social and labor rights. Personal data protection and other fundamental rights may not always be fully ensured.

The approach implemented by the authorities is flawed because the implementation of emergency measures can put a strain on state resources and may require additional funding to cover emergency costs. Without a long-term plan, these measures may become financially and logistically unsustainable.

At the same time, the temporary protection mechanism provides a well-defined legal framework that offers clear and coordinated measures for the protection of refugees. This mechanism is designed to respond specifically to a mass influx of persons and to provide structured and long-term protection. It is more predictable and provides a clear framework for the rights and obligations of refugees, as well as the obligations of the host state. There are established protocols and procedures that facilitate effective coordination between national authorities, international organizations and NGOs. Temporary protection can thus ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and a more organized response to the needs of refugees. Moreover, temporary protection offers a clearly defined period of protection that can be extended, providing refugees with a level of stability and predictability. This mechanism ensures a clear set of rights for

refugees, including access to the labor market, education, health care and other social services.

The decision to grant temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova was adopted by the Government of the Republic of Moldova only on the January 18, 2023 for one year[43], over a year after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. After the expiration of this term, it was extended for another year, from March 1, 2024 until March 1, 2025. Automatically, the identity document of the beneficiary of temporary protection will also be extended. A decision was approved by the Executive in February 28, 2024[44]. So, the decision to grant temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova has been extended one time by the Moldovan Government, being in force until March 1, 2025.

In the Republic of Moldova, temporary protection can be granted on the basis of a decision of the government, at the proposal of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and on the basis of a report prepared by the Bureau for Migration and Asylum. For Ukrainian refugees, the conditions for granting temporary protection included: a) Ukrainian citizens and stateless persons residing in Ukraine. Persons who were Ukrainian citizens or stateless persons habitually resident in Ukraine prior to the conflict were eligible for temporary protection in the Republic of Moldova; b) family members of the above-mentioned Ukrainian citizens or stateless persons fleeing the conflict were also eligible for temporary protection; c) eligibility requirements: to qualify for temporary protection, refugees had to demonstrate that they had fled Ukraine because of risks to their life, security or physical integrity as a result of the armed conflict[45].

Ukrainian refugees enjoyed a number of rights and facilities, including: a) the right not to be returned, in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement. Ukrainian refugees could not be returned to Ukraine if there was a risk to their life

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[43] Hotărâre de Guvern Nr. 21 din 18-01-2023 privind acordarea protecţiei temporare persoanelor strămutate din Ucraina Publicat : 26-01-2023 în Monitorul Oficial Nr. 21-22 art. 38 Online: HG21/2023 (legis.md)

[44] Protecţia temporară a refugiaţilor ucraineni, prelungită cu încă un an 28/02/2024 https://anticoruptie.md/ro/stiri/protectia-temporara-a-refugiatilor-ucraineni-prelungita-cu-inca-un-an

[45] Din martie, Republica Moldova va implementa un nou cadru de protecţie temporară a refugiaţilor din Ucraina. Ce prevede acesta? 28 februarie 2023 Online: Din martie, Republica Moldova va implementa un nou cadru de protecţie temporară a refugiaţilor din Ucraina. Ce prevede acesta? - Portal informativ privind sectorul justiţiei din Republica Moldova (justitietransparenta.md)

or integrity; b) access to basic services such as temporary shelter, basic health care and access to education for refugee children; c) the right to work based on the right to apply for work permits for the period of temporary protection; d) social assistance accorded to vulnerable persons, including families with children and unaccompanied minors[46].

Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova have faced several problems and challenges since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. These difficulties reflect the complexity of managing a massive influx of refugees and the limited resources available. Moldova, being a small country, has had difficulties in ensuring a sufficient number of adequate accommodation places for all refugees. Although reception centers and temporary shelters were set up, their capacity was often exceeded. The large influx of refugees put pressure on health, education and social welfare systems. Staff in these areas were often overwhelmed by the large numbers of people needing help. Although refugees have the right to basic medical care, effective access to these services was sometimes problematic due to a lack of medical staff, limited financial resources and language barriers. Many refugees suffered psychological trauma caused by conflict and displacement experiences. Access to specialized mental health services was limited and psychological support was not always available. The language barrier was a major challenge for refugees, many of whom spoke only Ukrainian or Russian. This made it difficult to communicate with local authorities and to access important information about their rights and obligations. In addition, refugees faced difficulties in integrating into local communities, mainly due to language and cultural differences. Social integration was often limited to minimal contacts with the local population.

Ukrainian refugees have also had difficulties accessing education. Although Moldova provided access to education for refugee children, the process of enrolment in schools was sometimes complicated due to lack of necessary documents or limited resources in schools to cope with the increased number of pupils. Differences in curriculum and teaching language presented obstacles for refugee children. This has created difficulties in adapting to new educational requirements and maintaining adequate academic progress.

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[46] Din martie, Republica Moldova va implementa un nou cadru de protecție temporară a refugiaților din Ucraina. Ce prevede acesta? 28 februarie 2023 Online: Din martie, Republica Moldova va implementa un nou cadru de protecție temporară a refugiaților din Ucraina. Ce prevede acesta? - Portal informativ privind sectorul justiției din Republica Moldova (justitietransparenta.md)

Although refugees had the right to work, employment opportunities were limited, especially for those who did not know Romanian or did not have qualifications relevant to the Moldovan labor market. Many refugees depended on humanitarian assistance from the government, international organizations and local NGOs to meet their basic needs. This dependency created economic uncertainty and vulnerability. In some cases, refugees were vulnerable to exploitation or abuse, including human trafficking. The lack of adequate legal support and protection mechanisms contributed to their vulnerability. Although temporary protection provided them with a legal status, some refugees lived in fear that this status could be revoked or that they could be deported, which generated anxiety and instability. Therefore, despite a significant number of measures which were implemented, Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova faced difficulties in realizing the fundamental rights provided by international and national standards.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The Republic of Moldova has made significant strides in aligning its legal framework for the protection of refugees with international and European standards. Through the implementation of various types of protection, including refugee protection and temporary protection, Moldova has demonstrated its commitment to upholding the rights and safety of individuals fleeing persecution and conflict. The national regulations, as stipulated in Law no. 270/2008, have incorporated key aspects of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the EU Temporary protection Directive, providing a structured and comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of refugees.

However, despite these efforts, certain gaps and challenges persist in the practical implementation of these protections. The Ukrainian conflict has brought these issues to the forefront, highlighting the need for more robust and sustainable mechanisms to manage large influxes of refugees effectively. While the temporary protection measures adopted during the Ukrainian crisis were crucial in providing immediate relief and safety, the reliance on emergency declarations and the ad-hoc decisions of the Commission for Exceptional Situations revealed the limitations of the current system. These measures, while swift, may lack the

consistency, predictability, and coordination necessary for long-term refugee integration and protection.

To address these gaps, Moldova must continue to refine its legislative and institutional frameworks. This includes enhanced coordination with international organizations, improved infrastructure for refugee reception, and the development of integration programs tailored to the specific needs of refugees are crucial steps forward. Additionally, Moldova should focus on strengthening the capacity of national institutions responsible for refugee protection to ensure a more effective and humane response to future crises.

In conclusion, while Moldova has made commendable progress in the regulation of the legal status of refugees, ongoing efforts to address existing gaps and enhance the resilience of its protection systems will be vital in ensuring that the country remains a safe haven for those seeking refuge from conflict and persecution.

**Recommendations for Moldovan Authorities:**

To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of refugee protection in the Republic of Moldova, the following recommendations are proposed:
1. Moldovan authorities should continue to harmonize national legislation with international and European standards. This includes incorporating comprehensive definitions and procedural safeguards for determining refugee status, in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention.
2. Moldovan authorities should develop and implement clear guidelines and protocols for the identification, registration, and processing of refugee applications to ensure consistency and fairness in decision-making.
3. Moldovan authorities should enhance access to legal aid for refugees throughout the asylum process. This can be achieved by collaborating with legal NGOs and providing funding for legal assistance programs, ensuring that refugees have the necessary support to navigate the legal system.
4. Moldovan authorities should regulate the institution of subsidiary protection, providing clear definitions and criteria for subsidiary protection within the national legal framework and ensuring it is distinct from refugee status. This clarity will help authorities make consistent and accurate assessments of protection needs.

5. Moldovan authorities should clearly outline the rights and obligations of individuals granted subsidiary protection, including access to employment, education, healthcare, and social services. This will ensure that individuals under subsidiary protection receive adequate support and can integrate into society effectively.

6. Moldovan authorities should create inter-agency coordinating bodies or committees that bring together national, regional, and local authorities responsible for refugee and asylum issues. This will facilitate better communication, information sharing, and coordinated action.

7. Moldovan authorities should provide training and capacity-building programs for officials at all levels to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to handle refugee protection and integration effectively. This includes understanding international legal standards, cultural sensitivity, and specific needs of refugees.

8. Moldovan authorities should promote collaboration between authorities and local communities to enhance social cohesion and support for refugees. This can include partnerships with local NGOs, community leaders, and civil society organizations.

9. Moldovan authorities should develop clear and accessible pathways for refugees to achieve permanent residency and eventually citizenship. This could include reducing bureaucratic hurdles, providing language and integration courses, and recognizing the qualifications and skills of refugees.

10. Moldovan authorities should implement targeted programs that promote the social and economic integration of refugees, such as vocational training, employment support services, and community engagement initiatives. Integration programs should be inclusive, considering the diverse backgrounds and skills of refugees.

11. Moldovan authorities should expand language training and cultural orientation programs to help refugees adapt to Moldovan society. These programs should aim to foster mutual understanding and respect between refugees and the host community, promoting a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

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CHAPTER 5

# THE DIGITALIZATION OF MIGRATION: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS. THE CASE STUDY OF MOLDOVA'S DIGITAL RESPONSE TO UKRAINIAN DISPLACEMENT

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Digital technologies are increasingly transforming the governance of migration and the management of borders around the world. From biometric identification systems and AI-driven risk assessments to big data platforms tracking population movements, states and international organizations are embracing technology to manage complex migration flows. These innovations promise greater efficiency in processing visas and asylum claims, enhanced security through improved identification of travelers, and streamlined delivery of aid to displaced persons (Palazzi et al, 2025). For example, many countries now use online visa applications and automated decision systems, and agencies like UNHCR have rolled out biometric registration for refugees in numerous operations.

However, the digitalization of migration governance also raises profound legal and ethical questions. The deployment of surveillance tools and algorithms can clash with fundamental human rights – including the right to privacy, the right to nondiscrimination, and the right to seek asylum (Papachristodoulou, 2022). There is a risk that efficiency and security objectives may undermine the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees if not carefully regulated. Reports have documented how AI technologies and large-scale data systems at borders may reinforce inequalities and erode human rights, targeting already vulnerable population (Amnesty International, 2024). Yet technology itself is not inherently good or bad; much depends on the legal frameworks and governance structures in place. This article provides a global legal perspective on these developments, examining how international and regional instruments address (or fail to address) the challenges of digital migration management. It also discusses emerging risks such as surveillance overreach, algorithmic bias, and data breaches, through the lens of human rights law and theory.

We proceed as follows. The first section reviews relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, including surveillance theory and the concept of algorithmic governance, to contextualize how digital tools alter power dynamics in migration control. The next section surveys key legal frameworks at the international and regional levels that govern or guide the use of technology in migration and border management – from human rights treaties to data protection laws and specialized migration instruments. We then present a case study focusing on the Republic of Moldova's management of Ukrainian migrants using digital tools. This case illustrates how a small state, in collaboration with international partners, adopted new technological platforms to cope with a sudden influx of refugees, and what legal measures and challenges accompanied this process. The discussion examines the human rights implications – including data protection, non-discrimination, and access to justice – both in the Moldovan context and more broadly. Finally, we offer a critical discussion on policy implications and safeguards, before concluding with recommendations for ensuring that the digitalization of migration governance upholds human rights and the rule of law.

**Literature review and theoretical background**

The intersection of migration, technology, and law has attracted growing scholarly attention in recent years. Researchers in law, sociology, and surveillance studies have analyzed how digital tools are reshaping border governance, often using theoretical frameworks like surveillance theory and algorithmic governance to understand these changes. This section outlines key themes from the literature, providing a conceptual backdrop for the legal analysis that follows.

Surveillance and the "Digital Border": A number of scholars argue that we are witnessing the emergence of a "digital border" – a complex surveillance apparatus that operates across physical and virtual domains to monitor and control movement (Bigo, 2005). Classic theories of surveillance, such as Michel Foucault's *panopticon*, have been adapted to migration contexts. Didier Bigo's concept of the *"Ban-opticon"* is particularly influential: it describes a regime in which states use surveillance technologies not only to observe populations, but to ban or exclude undesirable migrants (Bigo, 2005). In the European Union, for example, Bigo and others note a shift from the ideal of free movement to a security-oriented approach that employs databases, biometrics, and real-time

tracking to filter who "should be admitted" and to bar those deemed risky (Molnar, 2019). These technologies create what one author calls a *militarized border* that can make the right to seek asylum elusive (Papachristodoulou, 2022). Surveillance drones, motion sensors, and facial recognition cameras at frontiers exemplify how digital surveillance is being used to reinforce borders. While such tools are often justified as enhancing safety (for instance, spotting migrant boats in distress), critics highlight that they are also used to intercept migrants before they can reach territory and claim protection (Papachristodoulou, 2022). Thus, from a surveillance studies perspective, digitalization tends to expand state power over mobility – a trend requiring careful scrutiny through a human rights lens.

Algorithmic governance in migration: Another lens in the literature is the concept of *algorithmic governance*, referring to the use of automated decision-making systems and predictive analytics in administrative processes. In migration management, this can include AI systems that help decide visa or asylum applications, risk-scoring algorithms that flag travelers for extra screening, or automated workflows that prioritize certain cases. Scholars like Petra Molnar have documented experiments with these technologies: for example, Canada's immigration authorities have piloted automated tools (such as the "Chinook" system) to triage visa applications, and the EU tested an "AI lie detector" for travelers (Molnar, 2019). Algorithmic systems are seen as efficient in handling large volumes of cases – indeed, such systems can process routine immigration files *"87% faster"* according to one Canadian government report (Cerna, 2016). However, literature cautions that efficiency gains come with trade-offs. Automated systems may lack transparency, potentially undermining due process and accountability. They also carry the risk of bias: algorithms trained on historical data might perpetuate existing prejudices, for example by unfairly flagging applicants from certain national or ethnic groups (a phenomenon sometimes termed *"algorithmic bias"* or *"digital discrimination"*). As one commentator notes, *"technology is not inherently democratic"* Molnar, P. (2019). – without oversight, algorithmic tools may reflect and amplify the inequities present in their design and data. This concern ties into broader discussions about inequality and racism in migration control. A recent Amnesty International report emphasized that new border technologies *"are not neutral, but often reflect or intensify existing historical inequalities,"* disproportionately impacting racialized and marginalized communities (Amnesty International, 2024). In other words,

algorithmic governance can entrench the systemic biases of what some call the "border-industrial complex."

Datafication and "Dataveillance": A related concept in the literature is the datafication of migration – the idea that migrants are increasingly being reduced to data points in vast information systems. Borders now involve intensive data collection: biometric fingerprints, facial images, GPS locations, database checks, etc. Scholars have used terms like *"dataveillance"* (data-driven surveillance) and even *"data colonialism"* to describe this phenomenon (Molnar, 2019).. The latter term, "data colonialism," highlights power asymmetries: states and international organizations collect extensive personal data from migrants (often a condition for receiving aid or permission to stay) without robust accountability, thereby extracting value and control in ways that echo colonial practices (Molnar, 2019).. Historical parallels are drawn – for instance, the systematic registration of minority populations has tragic precedents (such as identity registries used in genocides) (Molnar, 2019). Today's large-scale migration databases, if misused, could facilitate rights violations on a comparable scale. This has led to calls for decolonizing data practices and ensuring that affected populations have agency over their data. For example, **informed consent** in humanitarian data collection is a growing concern: refugees often must hand over biometric data to receive assistance, raising ethical questions about voluntariness and alternative means of verification (Wille, 2023).

Security, securitization, and exception: Finally, theoretical perspectives from security studies are relevant. Many scholars observe that the digitalization of migration governance is fundamentally *"driven by security and political concerns"* and by state interests in control (Cerna, 2016). The migration context often frames certain migrants (such as undocumented entrants or asylum seekers) as potential security threats, which is used to legitimate extraordinary measures. The notion of securitization of migration – treating it as a security issue rather than a humanitarian or economic issue – has been extended to digital practices. For instance, the "foreign terrorist fighter" narrative after 2015 spurred investments in biometric systems and travel data exchanges to track suspect individuals. This framing can lead to a state of exception where normal data protection or privacy rules are relaxed at borders. Scholars like Giorgio Agamben (on states of exception) and the *crimmigration* literature (which blends criminal law and immigration control) provide a lens to critique how migrants are surveilled as if

they were criminal suspects. In practical terms, this means migrants are often subject to more intrusive data collection and fewer privacy protections than citizens. Some theorists link this to colonial and capitalist continuities, arguing that modern border tech serves to maintain global inequalities – either by reinforcing old hierarchies of whose movement is valued, or by creating new forms of exploitation (e.g. surveillance capitalism profiting from migrant data) (Cerna, 2016).

In summary, the literature paints a picture of both promise and peril in the digitalization of migration. On one hand, digital tools could improve efficiency, facilitate mobility (e.g. e-visas), and even enhance protection (through better registration of refugees, etc.). On the other hand, without strong legal safeguards, these tools risk expanding surveillance to dystopian extremes, undermining fundamental rights, and reinforcing discrimination. Theoretical frameworks such as surveillance (Panopticon/Ban-opticon), algorithmic governance, and data colonialism help us critically assess these trends. Building on this foundation, we now turn to the actual legal and normative frameworks in place to regulate the use of technology in migration and border management.

**Legal frameworks for digitalized migration governance**

The deployment of advanced technologies in migration and border control implicates a web of legal frameworks at multiple levels. This section examines the key international and regional legal instruments that form the governance regime for digital migration management. It covers: (a) international human rights law and refugee law, which set baseline standards that all digital measures must respect; (b) international and inter-governmental policies specific to migration (including soft-law compacts and guidelines); and (c) regional legal frameworks, with a particular focus on Europe, which has developed sophisticated data systems and data protection rules. Throughout, we identify how these instruments address issues of surveillance, data processing, and algorithmic decision-making in the migration context.

## International human rights and refugee law

Privacy and data protection: At the global level, the right to privacy is enshrined in instruments such as Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966). These provisions protect individuals (including non-citizens) from arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy and family life. Digital surveillance and data collection on migrants clearly fall within the scope of "interference," and thus must be justified under the strict requirements of legality, necessity, and proportionality. In practice, this means any system that, for example, collects biometric data or tracks a person's movements should be authorized by clear law, used only for legitimate aims (such as verifying identity for asylum processing or ensuring security), and be proportionate (not overly intrusive in relation to the aim). The Human Rights Committee (the ICCPR's monitoring body) has emphasized that mass surveillance or indiscriminate data retention are incompatible with Article 17. While the ICCPR does not explicitly mention data protection, an emerging consensus treats data protection as a fundamental aspect of the right to privacy. Indeed, the UN General Assembly has affirmed the right to data protection in the context of digital privacy (e.g. GA Res. 73/179 (2018)).

In the absence of a universal binding treaty on data protection, many states look to instruments like the Council of Europe's Convention 108 (1981) – the only multilateral treaty on personal data protection – for guidance. Convention 108, open globally, requires that personal data (including that of migrants or refugees) be processed fairly and securely, for specified purposes, and with rights of individuals to access and correct their data. Moldova, for instance, is a party to Convention 108 since 2008, and has modernized its domestic data protection laws in line with European standards (OneTrust, n.d.). International standards also come from institutions: UNHCR and IOM each have their own data protection policies for refugee and migrant data. These policies, while not public international law per se, set important benchmarks – for example, UNHCR's Data Protection Policy (2015) requires consent where feasible and limits sharing of refugee data to third parties. In summary, international privacy law provides a framework to evaluate digital migration tools: if a government installs CCTV with facial recognition at border crossings, we must ask if this is lawful, necessary, and proportionate under Article

17 ICCPR and related norms. If an international agency collects refugees' biometric data, it must align with data protection principles even in the absence of binding law (Molnar, 2019) (the Ukraine response, discussed later, provides an example where these principles influenced practice).

Right to seek asylum and non-refoulement: A central concern is ensuring that digital border technologies do not impede the right to seek asylum or lead to refoulement (return to persecution). The 1951 Refugee Convention (and its 1967 Protocol) oblige states to respect the principle of non-refoulement (Art. 33), meaning no refugee or asylum-seeker should be expelled or returned to a territory where they face serious threats to life or freedom. This obligation has taken on new dimensions in the digital age. For instance, if states use advanced surveillance (satellites, drones, etc.) to intercept migrants before they reach their borders, are they indirectly breaching non-refoulement by preventing access to asylum procedures? Human rights bodies have warned against using technology as a barrier to asylum. The EU's proposed AI Act notably includes a recital (Recital 60) underscoring that AI systems in migration management must *"in no circumstances be used to circumvent [states'] international obligations"* under refugee law, nor to deny safe and effective access to protection (European Union, 2023). This is a clear acknowledgment that digital tools must not become digital walls that keep refugees out. Furthermore, any risk-profiling algorithms used in immigration should not profile against those from certain persecuted countries in a way that effectively denies them entry en masse – that could amount to indirect refoulement or discrimination. International law also protects the *right to seek asylum* (e.g. Article 14 UDHR), though not as a binding treaty right except regionally (e.g. Article 18 of the EU Charter). Still, it is a guiding principle: technology should facilitate, not frustrate, the ability of people fleeing danger to make claims for asylum. If an automated border control system flags an asylum-seeker as an illegal entrant and denies entry without due process, that would violate this principle and likely the procedural guarantees under human rights law (e.g. the right to an effective remedy).

Equality and non-discrimination: International law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, nationality, and other grounds (ICCPR Art. 26; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, etc.). This applies fully to how migrants are treated, including by digital systems. States must ensure that technologies *do not treat individuals*

*unfairly* due to protected characteristics – whether intentionally or implicitly. One emerging issue is algorithmic bias: if an AI system used in visa decisions inadvertently disadvantages applicants of a certain ethnicity or from a certain country, this can violate non-discrimination norms (Amnesty International, 2024). Similarly, automated decision-making must not become a way to hide discriminatory practices behind a veneer of objectivity. The UN Special Rapporteur on racism has highlighted the need for algorithmic systems to be tested for disparate racial impacts. In migration, an infamous example was the UK's visa algorithm (used until 2020) that allegedly graded visa applicants partly by nationality, resulting in systemic bias; it was scrapped after legal challenges by civil society. International human rights law would view such bias as unlawful discrimination unless strictly justified. Another angle is differential treatment between groups of migrants: for example, the warm reception of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 (often facilitated by digital platforms for quick registration) versus harsher treatment of other asylum seekers has raised questions. While states can legitimately prioritize certain groups (e.g. under a temporary protection regime), they must still afford basic fairness and dignity to all. Technology should not be deployed only to survey or deter some nationalities while aiding others in an arbitrary manner – that would offend equality before the law.

Other relevant rights: Several other rights may be engaged by digital migration management. The right to freedom of movement (ICCPR Art. 12) could be indirectly affected if digital measures unduly restrict migrants' ability to move or if digital status systems (like electronic visas or permits) malfunction and leave people stranded. The right to freedom of thought is even implicated, as one paper argues that pervasive surveillance and AI profiling might chill migrants' expression of political or religious beliefs – an aspect of "freedom of thought" and opinion that is often overlooked (Bigo, 2005). Moreover, the right to an effective remedy (ICCPR Art. 2(3)) is crucial: migrants must have a means to challenge decisions made by algorithms or data errors. If a person is denied boarding on a flight due to an erroneous travel risk score, or refused asylum due to a faulty automated credibility assessment, international law demands they can seek review by a human decision-maker and have errors corrected. Finally, human dignity is a core value recognized universally (e.g. in the Preambles of human rights treaties). Excessive or dehumanizing use of technology – treating humans as data points or "risks" – can erode dignity. Legal scholars have argued we need to safeguard

human dignity in the face of automation, ensuring that individuals are not reduced to mere objects of computational decision-making (Bigo, 2005).

**International policy frameworks and standards**

Beyond binding law, there are important global policy instruments and guidelines that shape the digitalization of migration governance. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2018, though non-binding, is a landmark agreement reflecting collective goals. The GCM encourages states to use data to inform migration policy (Objective 1) and to employ technology to facilitate fair and efficient migration processes. It stresses the importance of *"digital identity mechanisms"* to ensure migrants have proof of legal identity (Objective 4) and calls for cooperation in using biometric data to streamline processes like border checks and re-documentation, *provided* that privacy and human rights are respected. The GCM also warns against misuse of data, urging that collected information be used only for legitimate purposes and shared responsibly. Likewise, the Global Compact on Refugees (2018) notes the utility of biometric and registration systems to better assist refugees (indeed UNHCR's rollout of its PRIMES biometric registration system is framed as enhancing protection and aid delivery), but it underscores data protection and confidentiality as paramount in refugee data management.

Various international organizations have issued guidelines. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has its Data Protection Principles (2010) which align with global privacy norms and are specifically tailored to migrant data. IOM and UN agencies have also explored the concept of "digital identity" for migrants – for example, the World Bank's ID4D initiative and others promote giving refugees portable digital IDs to access services. While seen as empowering, these raise questions of interoperability and security (e.g., how to prevent such IDs from being tracked by malign actors). The UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation (2019) recommended improving digital inclusion for vulnerable groups including migrants, and developing human-rights-based norms for the use of digital public goods like identification systems.

One significant recent development at the UN Security Council is Resolution 2396 (2017), which, in response to terrorism threats, *"directs all States to collect biometric data"* to identify and deter the movement of terrorists, including at borders (United Nations Security Council, 2017). While aimed at foreign terrorist fighters, this binding mandate essentially requires states worldwide to implement biometric screening for international travellers, impacting refugees and migrants as well. Many countries have since expanded biometric border controls (fingerprinting, facial scans) citing UNSC 2396. However, human rights experts, including the UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism, have cautioned that these measures must include safeguards so they do not violate privacy or result in profiling of certain nationalities (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011). The interplay between security mandates and human rights obligations is thus a critical part of the legal framework: states cannot cite a UNSC resolution to override peremptory norms like non-refoulement or to engage in blanket surveillance without oversight.

**Regional frameworks: The example of Europe and beyond**

Europe – EU Law and the ECHR: The European Union has arguably the most developed legal regime governing digital migration management. The EU has created a set of large-scale IT systems for migration and border control, each with its own legal basis. These include the Schengen Information System (SIS) (for alerts on persons, including undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers), the Visa Information System (VIS) (storing biometric data of visa applicants), Eurodac (a biometric database of asylum seekers' fingerprints) (Thales Group, n.d.) and two new systems about to come online: the Entry/Exit System (EES), which will log non-EU travelers' movements with fingerprints and facial scans, and ETIAS, an automated travel authorization system that will algorithmically screen visa-exempt visitors for security or migration risk (Palazzi et al., 2025). All these systems are governed by EU regulations that include data protection clauses, oversight mechanisms, and purpose limitations. For example, the Eurodac Regulation specifies how long fingerprints can be retained and who can access them, and a 2013 amendment controversially allowed law enforcement to query Eurodac for serious crimes, raising privacy concerns. Additionally, the EU in 2019 enacted an Interoperability Regulation to interlink these databases, creating a

shared biometric matching service and a common identity repository – effectively a mega-system for all third-country nationals' data in Europe. This has heightened the debate about data privacy and function creep, though EU lawmakers insist on safeguards and the role of the European Data Protection Supervisor in monitoring these systems.

Crucially, Europe's strong data protection laws apply to migration systems. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (2016) provides stringent rules for processing personal data, including that it must be lawful, necessary, and proportionate, with rights for data subjects (like access and rectification) [1]. While GDPR mostly governs civilian and private-sector processing, the parallel Law Enforcement Data Protection Directive (LED) (2016) covers police and immigration enforcement data. EU border agencies like Frontex are subject to their own data protection frameworks overseen by the EDPS. Moreover, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (binding on EU institutions and member states implementing EU law) explicitly protects the right to data protection (Art. 8), privacy (Art. 7), non-discrimination (Art. 21), asylum (Art. 18), and an effective remedy (Art. 47). Any digital migration measure within EU jurisdiction must comply with these Charter rights. For instance, if an AI system is used to assess asylum applications in an EU country, it would be subject to the upcoming **EU** AI Act (which classifies most migration-related AI as "high-risk") and to fundamental rights scrutiny. As noted, the AI Act's recitals affirm refugee and human rights obligations [1], and the Act will impose requirements like transparency, human oversight, and risk assessment for high-risk AI in migration (Palazzi et al., 2025). (However, as scholars point out, the AI Act has delayed application to some existing migration databases until 2030, which is controversial (Palazzi et al., 2025)).

Additionally, the Council of Europe system – especially the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) – provides external oversight. The ECHR's Article 8 (right to private life) has generated a robust jurisprudence on surveillance and data retention. Although the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has not yet ruled on a case specifically about migrant biometrics, analogous cases are instructive. In *S. and Marper v. UK* (2008), the ECtHR held that indefinite retention of fingerprints and DNA of individuals not convicted of a crime violated privacy (Palazzi et al., 2025). By analogy, holding asylum seekers' biometric data indefinitely *after* they've obtained protection or left might be disproportionate.

The ECtHR also polices collective expulsion and refoulement (Art. 3 and Protocol 4), which could come into play if digital systems are used to effect pushbacks without individual assessment. Importantly, any person (including a non-national) who has their rights violated by a European state's use of surveillance or data processing can ultimately petition the ECtHR. For instance, if a migrant alleges that an automated profiling system led to discriminatory treatment or denial of entry, they could bring a case claiming breach of Article 8 (privacy) and Article 14 (non-discrimination) of the ECHR. In sum, Europe offers a relatively comprehensive legal framework – detailed regulations for specific technologies, a general data protection regime, and human rights oversight – though enforcement and practical implementation remain challenges.

Other regions: While Europe leads in formal rules, other regions are also grappling with these issues. The Americas: The Inter-American human rights system recognizes privacy and data protection (e.g. the American Convention on Human Rights, Art. 11). Some Latin American countries have strong data privacy laws and have used them to question practices like biometric voter IDs or immigration databases. The U.S. and Canada have heavily digitized immigration systems (e.g. US-VISIT fingerprints for all foreign entrants), but rely on a patchwork of domestic law and no comprehensive data protection law (in the U.S.) – raising concerns about oversight. The U.S. has faced litigation over things like algorithmic no-fly lists and ICE's use of big data for tracking undocumented immigrants. In Africa, the African Union adopted the Malabo Convention (2014) on data protection and cybersecurity, which, once widely ratified, will provide a framework applicable to migration data. Several African countries, aided by donors, are rolling out biometric refugee ID cards and even interlinking with financial services (e.g. mobile cash aid), making data security critical. Asia lacks a regional human rights mechanism, but countries like India have seen court battles around the Aadhaar biometric ID system and its use for social services (with the Supreme Court invoking privacy as a fundamental right in 2017). Gulf states, which host large migrant labor populations, extensively use biometrics (fingerprinting, iris scans) for migrant workers; yet, their legal systems provide limited recourse for privacy violations by the state. Globally, there is an observable governance gap: technology spreads quickly through pilot programs and donor-driven initiatives, but legal and institutional safeguards lag behind, especially outside Europe. This gap underscores the importance of developing

common principles – which is why instruments like the GCM, although soft law, emphasize data protection and human rights as cornerstones of migration management.

In conclusion, a multi-layered legal framework applies to digital migration governance. International human rights and refugee law set the fundamental constraints: no tech deployment can override core rights such as privacy, non-discrimination, or asylum. International policies and Security Council decisions encourage uses of tech (for efficiency or security) but also call for responsibility. Regional regimes like that of the EU provide detailed rules on how data and AI should be handled in the migration context, aiming to balance state interests with individual rights. The effectiveness of these frameworks depends on implementation. The next section will illustrate these legal considerations through a concrete case study: Moldova's experience during the recent Ukrainian refugee crisis, where digital tools were extensively employed within a specific legal and humanitarian context.

## CASE STUDY:
### Moldova's digital response to Ukrainian displacement

The Republic of Moldova, a small country on Ukraine's southwest border, became a frontline state in the displacement crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In proportion to its population, Moldova received more refugees from Ukraine than any other country at the height of the crisis [12]. By June 2023, roughly 110,000 Ukrainian refugees remained in Moldova (over 4.5% of Moldova's 2.6 million population), even after many transited onward to the EU (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023). Managing this sudden influx severely tested Moldova's migration governance capacities. Even before the war, Moldova's institutions were relatively small and resource-constrained, though the country had aspirations of EU integration (and has since become an EU candidate country). From day one of the crisis, Moldova declared a state of emergency and worked with international partners to assist refugees (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023). Digital tools quickly became central to the response – used to register arrivals, coordinate humanitarian aid, and eventually implement a formal temporary protection status.

This case study examines how Moldova leveraged technology, what legal frameworks and reforms underpinned these efforts, and the associated human rights implications. It highlights: (1) the introduction of an online registration system for Temporary Protection; (2) the creation of the "UAHelp" information system to manage aid and accommodation; (3) use of biometric data and IDs for refugees; and (4) coordination with international bodies like UNHCR, IOM, and the EU in deploying these tools.

## Legal and institutional reforms during the crisis

In 2022, as Ukrainians poured in, Moldova did not yet have a dedicated temporary protection status in force (unlike the EU which activated its Temporary Protection Directive). Initially, Moldova allowed Ukrainians to enter visa-free and even to work immediately under emergency decrees (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023). The country relied on its existing asylum law framework for those seeking formal refugee status, but relatively few applications were filed since most hoped to return home or move to the EU. Realizing a more lasting solution was needed, Moldova's government moved to activate Temporary Protection (TP), a status already provided for in its 2008 Law on Asylum (which mirrored the EU's 2001 TP Directive) (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023). On 18 January 2023, the Government approved a decision to implement temporary protection for Ukrainians (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023). This decision, which took effect 1 March 2023, defined the eligibility (Ukrainian citizens and certain residents displaced by the conflict) and the rights conferred, aligning largely with European standards (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023). Notably, Moldova even extended TP to Ukrainians who were present before the invasion and unable to return, an expansive approach going beyond the EU's initial eligibility cutoff (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023).

Institutionally, in February 2023 Moldova restructured its migration authority, turning the Office of Migration and Asylum into the General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM) with regional branches, to improve access to services (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024). This reform aimed to decentralize and bolster capacity, enabling the rollout of TP documentation across the country

rather than just in the capital. The legal decision on TP also laid out procedural aspects – crucially, it mandated a digital registration process. Beneficiaries of TP were required to *preregister online* for an appointment to finalize their application at an IGM office (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023).. This was a strategic use of technology: given the large number of people, an online system would queue and organize registrations to prevent overcrowding and manage workload. Applicants then had to appear in person with identity documents to receive a temporary protection certificate (a physical document akin to a residence permit) (International Centre for Migration Policy Development, 2023). . They were given 90 days (March–May 2023) to apply and regularize their stay (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024).

Parallel to protection status, Moldova, with support from the EU and UN, facilitated relocation and humanitarian transfer programs. One notable tool launched as early as April 2022 was a digital platform for emergency flights. The Moldovan e-Governance Agency developed a website (accessible at dopomoga.gov.md – "dopomoga" meaning "help") where Ukrainian refugees could register online for free evacuation flights from Moldova to EU countries. The application allowed refugees to input personal data, travel document details, and even pet information, and then receive a document to present at the airport. This was part of the EU's "Solidarity Platform" transferring vulnerable refugees to EU Member States (Government of Moldova – E-Governance Agency, 2022). Legally, these transfers were coordinated through EU–Moldova agreements and did not require changes in Moldovan law beyond the emergency authorization to use personal data for this purpose. The platform exemplified how digital solutions were deployed in real-time to manage logistics and humanitarian corridors.

By mid-2023, with TP in place, the focus shifted to longer-term coordination of assistance. In August 2024, the Moldovan government approved the launch of a new state information system called "UAHelp." The UAHelp system is designed as a comprehensive registry to keep track of Ukrainian refugees and the services/support they receive (UNN News, 2024). According to the Moldovan Ministry of Labor, *"the UAHELP information system will allow tracking the accounting and distribution of financial support provided to displaced persons, including financial assistance provided to host families by international partners." (UNN News, 2024).* In other words, UAHelp creates a database of refugees' requests (through the Green Line hotline and at

accommodation centers) and matches them with assistance – whether cash aid, housing with host families, or other support Host families housing refugees (for more than 7 days) are also registered, since they might receive stipends. The first year of UAHelp's operation (2024–25) is funded by international donors, after which the government will allocate budget funds. Legally, UAHelp required a government regulation (approved 28 August 2024) detailing data collection, usage, and roles of various agencies (UNN News, 2024). We see here a formalization of data management for the refugee response: what started as emergency spreadsheets and ad hoc lists in 2022 evolved into an integrated digital system by 2024, institutionalized through law. Moldova had to ensure that this system complies with its data protection law (which by 2023 had been updated toward GDPR alignment (ICMPD, 2023). The UAHelp regulation likely includes provisions on who can access the data, data security measures, and consent (especially since it involves sharing info with NGOs and international partners).

**Technological platforms and biometric systems in use**

Online registration for temporary protection: The backbone of the TP rollout was the online platform for scheduling registration. This site (managed by IGM) allowed Ukrainians to create an account or fill a form with their basic details and then obtain an appointment "ticket." During early 2023, thousands used it: between 1 March 2023 and mid-June 2023, over 8,400 people preregistered for TP and about 4,500 had already received their TP documents in that period (ICMPD, 2023). By November 2024, the number preregistered reached 79,020 (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024)– a testament to the platform's extensive use. The system was generally successful in preventing chaotic queues and spreading out the workflow. Digital literacy issues, however, did emerge. Many refugees navigated the system with ease (Ukrainians overall have high digital literacy and often traveled with smartphones), but a subset – particularly elderly or rural folks – struggled with the online forms. NGOs like the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) stepped in to hold information sessions and assist less tech-savvy refugees in the preregistration process. DRC reported that while most Ukrainians in Moldova were skilled with IT, *"among them are also women and men of age or limited education who are not confident with online applications or who may not have access to smartphones and internet"*. (Danish Refugee Council, 2023) To

accommodate this, IGM also allowed registration directly at offices (for those who walked in) and worked with NGOs to help people register. This experience spotlights a digital divide concern: moving protection processes online improves efficiency but can inadvertently exclude or delay those lacking digital access. In Moldova's case, the government's collaboration with civil society was crucial to mitigate this and ensure equitable access to TP. From a legal standpoint, one could argue the state had an obligation (under principles of non-discrimination and fairness) to make reasonable accommodations – which they did by permitting alternate means and engaging support for those facing digital barriers (Danish Refugee Council, 2023).

When refugees attended their in-person appointment, the process would include identity verification and issuance of a TP residence permit (valid for 1 year, extended subsequently to 2025). Biometric data was likely collected at this stage, in line with standard practices for residence permits. Moldova's law, aligned with EU practice, would typically require a photograph and fingerprints for foreign resident ID cards or permits. Although specific documentation is sparse, it is reasonable to infer that the TP card included security features and the authorities took fingerprints, given that by November 2024 over 62,000 TP identity documents had been issued (Danish Refugee Council, 2023). These biometrics help prevent fraud (ensuring one person gets one status) and facilitate border crossing (TP holders can be recognized if they exit and re-enter). The collection and use of biometrics by Moldovan authorities fall under the personal data law – requiring protection against misuse. Notably, unlike many refugee situations elsewhere, UNHCR did not separately register Ukrainians in Moldova using its own biometric system in 2022–23. This contrasts with other refugee crises (Syria, Rohingya, etc.) where UNHCR often biometrically registers refugees to issue assistance. In the Ukraine response, the Ukrainian government itself objected to international agencies collecting biometric data from its citizens (Wille, 2023). As Belkis Wille of Human Rights Watch noted, *"the government of Ukraine took a firm position that it did not want international organisations collecting its residents' biometric data"*, and many agencies dropped biometric requirements for aid (Wille, 2023). In Moldova, this meant that cash assistance programs run by UNHCR used alternative verification (like scanning Ukrainian passports or IDs) rather than iris scans or fingerprints. The risk of biometric data falling into the wrong hands was a real concern, especially in a region vulnerable to cyber threats and with an adversary (Russia) that might seek refugee

data (Infosecurity Magazine, n.d.). This unique dynamic led to a more privacy-preserving approach for Ukrainians: a noteworthy precedent in humanitarian data management.

UAHelp platform and data integration: The UAHelp system launched in late 2024 represents a consolidation phase of Moldova's digital response. Through UAHelp, various data streams are integrated: refugee registration info, call center inquiries, records of aid distribution, and host family details (UNN News, 2024). Essentially, it's a case management and resource allocation tool, ensuring transparency in aid and avoiding duplication (for instance, preventing a family from receiving the same aid twice or allowing tracking of whether a refugee who requested help received it). For coordination, UAHelp needed to connect government bodies (e.g. the Ministry of Labor, IGM, local authorities) and international partners (UN agencies, NGOs providing aid). This raises data-sharing agreements issues. Likely, Memoranda of Understanding govern how, say, UNHCR or WFP shares assistance data with the government. The system being financed by donors implies that technical expertise was provided (possibly by EU or UNDP projects on e-governance). Legally, UAHelp is bound by Moldova's Law on Personal Data Protection. One concern is cybersecurity: a central database of refugee personal information (names, DOB, addresses, assistance received, etc.) could be an attractive target for hackers or could be misused politically. The government presumably has taken measures (the e-Governance Agency in Moldova is experienced in secure platforms for citizens). The involvement of international partners likely also brings in their data protection advisors. For example, the European Commission and UNHCR would encourage Privacy Impact Assessments and security audits as part of supporting such a system.

Financial and credit data sharing: An interesting technological initiative in Moldova was connecting Ukrainian refugees to financial services. In October 2022, the International Finance Corporation (World Bank Group) helped establish a "digital data corridor" between Moldova's and Ukraine's credit bureaus (International Finance Corporation, 2022). This mechanism allows Moldovan banks to *access the credit history records of Ukrainian refugees* who seek loans or credit in Moldova (International Finance Corporation, 2022). It was a response to the problem that refugees, despite possibly being creditworthy, had no local financial history. By electronically verifying their past credit in Ukraine, banks could safely extend services. The legal groundwork involved auditing Moldova's

laws to enable cross-border data exchange and ensuring alignment with data protection (likely requiring consent of the individual to retrieve their credit report). This is a good example of tech-assisted integration – helping refugees rebuild economically. However, it also illustrates data protection risks: sensitive financial data moving across borders. The system had backing from government and was framed as enhancing refugees' rights (access to finance is crucial for self-reliance). Proper safeguards (encryption, limited access) would have been instituted. For our purposes, it shows that digital transformation in the migration context is not only about border control but also social and economic inclusion tools.

International coordination and platforms: Throughout the crisis, Moldova coordinated closely with international bodies. The UNHCR-led Refugee Coordination Forum in Moldova included a platform (UNHCR's data portal) that compiled statistics and updates. For instance, UNHCR's portal provided real-time numbers of arrivals (over a million entries by March 2024) and those remaining (hovering around 100k) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.). This aggregated data (mostly from Moldova's Border Police and IGM) was shared publicly in line with transparency and to inform donors. Frontex (the EU border agency) also sent teams to help Moldova monitor its borders in 2022, using surveillance tools – under an EU-Moldova status agreement. Additionally, the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) deployed experts to assist with capacity-building, including the TP process (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.). The presence of these actors meant that European standards heavily influenced Moldova's approach. Indeed, Moldova's TP eligibility and procedure were consciously aligned with the EU's, to facilitate any future harmonization and also because many refugees would travel between Moldova and the EU.

The IOM assisted on more classic border management needs: providing equipment to Moldovan border guards, improving databases for entry/exit, and even setting up a Passenger Information Unit for collecting Advance Passenger Information (API) on travelers (International Organization for Migration – Moldova, 2022). These behind-the-scenes projects helped Moldova handle the increased flows and security screening digitally. They have indirect human rights implications – e.g., API collection must be balanced against privacy (in the EU, PNR data use is governed by law and court rulings). Moldova, by implementing an airline passenger data system with IOM/EU support, is moving toward those standards as well.

**Human rights considerations in the Moldovan experience**

Moldova's use of digital tools for Ukrainian refugees provides a microcosm to examine human rights implications:

• Data protection and privacy: From the start, personal data of refugees was being collected (names, ID numbers, biometrics, addresses). Moldova's legal framework (the 2011 Law on Personal Data Protection, updated in 2022) applied. The National Center for Personal Data Protection (NCPDP) is the supervisory authority. There is no public report yet on how the refugee response handled data, but informally, international actors paid attention to this. For example, when UAHelp was being set up, one can expect that Privacy Impact Assessments were conducted. A potential concern was data-sharing with Ukraine's government: to prevent abuse of refugee data (some refugees might be opposition activists or otherwise at risk), it was important that data collected in Moldova not be misused. There's no indication of any such misuse; indeed, Ukraine's own stance on data likely ensured respect. However, cybersecurity remains a worry – Russian state-sponsored hacks are a threat. Any breach of refugee personal data could expose identities and locations of people who fled Russian aggression, possibly endangering relatives back home. This underscores that data protection in a refugee context is not just a formality but can be lifesaving. Moldova, being under a state of emergency for much of this period, had to be vigilant that emergency powers did not override privacy protections. Thus far, there have been no known data scandals involving the Ukrainian refugees in Moldova, suggesting that – with international support – the country managed to uphold privacy reasonably well.

• Non-discrimination and equity: Moldova's response to Ukrainians was overwhelmingly positive – a generous reception widely praised. However, one could question if other groups of migrants would receive similar treatment. Moldova historically hosts very few asylum seekers from beyond the region (dozens per year). The special measures (like visa-free entry with any document, immediate access to work) were extraordinary and specific to Ukrainians (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024). Legally, this is justifiable given the mass influx and Ukraine's proximity; it doesn't per se violate discrimination law to have nationality-specific temporary protection if based on objective criteria (armed conflict in that country). Nonetheless, the contrast is notable: a refugee from, say, Syria arriving in Moldova would technically have to apply for asylum and might

be placed in a formal camp, whereas Ukrainians were largely allowed to live freely and register later for TP. The digital tools themselves (registration systems) were open only to the designated group. This raises a policy point: going forward, Moldova may consider extending such digital facilitation to all asylum-seekers (not just Ukrainians) to ensure fairness. On another discrimination angle, within the Ukrainian refugee population, there were minorities (Roma, third-country nationals who fled Ukraine). Reports in the region indicated Roma refugees sometimes faced more difficulties accessing assistance. A digital platform could either help (by making processes uniform) or hurt (if they lack access or face language barriers – though Moldova provided the sites in multiple languages (International Organization for Migration – Moldova, 2022) and had Russian/Ukrainian options). Ensuring inclusive design of these systems was thus important. Based on NGO involvement, it appears Moldova did try to be inclusive: for instance, making the TP registration site available in Ukrainian, Russian, English, and Romanian, and providing in-person help for those who needed it (International Organization for Migration – Moldova, 2022).

• Access to justice and transparency: Did refugees have recourse if something went wrong in the digital process? Suppose someone registered for TP online but never got an appointment due to a system glitch – could they appeal? In practice, IGM had hotline numbers and one-stop centers where issues could be resolved. Any denial of temporary protection (for example, if someone fell under an exclusion clause for having a serious criminal background) would be given in writing and the person could still apply for asylum for an individualized determination. Moldova's TP decision explicitly provides that individuals excluded or denied TP can resort to the normal asylum procedure to have their case heard (International Organization for Migration – Moldova, 2022). This is a crucial safeguard aligning with due process. It ensures no one is left in a protection gap by an automated or summary process. Moreover, refugees dissatisfied with their treatment could reach out to UNHCR or NGOs, who act as a sort of accountability mechanism on the ground. There is also the possibility of judicial review in Moldovan courts for administrative decisions, though it appears few, if any, such cases arose during this emergency period.

• Human dignity and agency: One notable aspect of the Moldova case is the agency of the refugees themselves in influencing data practices. Ukrainians, coming from a country with strong IT infrastructure (Ukraine's government is

highly digitalized), had expectations regarding their data. Their pushback against biometric registration was essentially a defense of their privacy and dignity – they did not want to be treated as "faceless" beneficiaries whose iris patterns go into an aid agency database. This influenced UNHCR and others to respect their wishes (Wille, 2023).

• . It's a reminder that refugees are rights-holders and stakeholders, not just passive recipients of aid or control. Moldova's approach, aided by Ukraine's input, was more consent-based than many other refugee situations. For instance, cash assistance in Moldova was given based on showing Ukrainian ID and verification through government lists, rather than pulling refugees into lengthy separate biometric enrollment. Many felt this preserved a measure of dignity – they weren't being subjected to unnecessary additional screening beyond what was needed for delivering help.

In summary, Moldova's experience showcases both the advantages of digital tools (efficient processing, better aid coordination, transparency) and the challenges (ensuring inclusion, securing data, maintaining legal standards under pressure). On the whole, Moldova, with international help, managed to avoid major human rights pitfalls in its tech-enabled response: it enacted a legal basis for protection, used tech to facilitate (not deny) that protection, and paid attention to data protection concerns. The case study also underscores the importance of partnership – Moldova's coordination with the EU, UNHCR, IOM, and others meant it imported good practices and had oversight. Smaller or less connected states might not have those benefits and could more easily err (for example, by surveilling refugees for security without privacy safeguards). Thus, a lesson from Moldova is that international cooperation can help uphold rights when implementing digital migration management.

## Human rights implications of digital migration management

Building on the above analysis, this section delves more generally into the human rights implications of digitalizing migration governance. While the case study provided an applied context, here we draw broader insights and critically assess how these technologies intersect with rights such as privacy, non-discrimination, asylum, and due process. We also consider emerging risks like bias and error in algorithmic systems, and the accountability mechanisms needed.

**Privacy and data protection**

Data collection minimization: A core privacy principle is that entities should collect only the minimum data necessary for a given purpose. In migration control, however, there is a tendency toward maximum data collection "just in case" it might prove useful for security or management. Large databases like Eurodac or national fingerprint systems for visa applicants collect biometric data from millions of individuals who are not suspected of any wrongdoing – an approach that has drawn criticism for treating ordinary migrants as if they were under criminal scrutiny. The blanket retention of asylum-seekers' fingerprints for years, accessible to law enforcement, has been challenged as disproportionate by privacy advocates. Balancing state interest and individual rights is key. As the ECtHR implied in *S. and Marper*, keeping biometric data of those not implicated in crimes requires careful justification; otherwise it violates the reasonable expectation of privacy (Palazzi, Mitsilegas, Cole, & Sánchez-Mazas, 2025). In the migration context, justification often hinges on preventing identity fraud and multiple claims. While that is a legitimate aim, regulators should ensure data is not kept longer than needed and is deleted once a person gets citizenship or leaves, etc. Many current systems lack robust deletion rules (or have long retention periods). The right to privacy demands periodic review of whether retaining a particular migrant's data is still necessary.

Surveillance vs. privacy in border zones: Border areas have frequently been treated as zones of exception to privacy (e.g. travelers expect some baggage search). But the intrusion of digital surveillance – constant CCTV, drones, cellphone data capture – means migrants can be tracked in ways far beyond a simple visa check. For example, some countries reportedly use social media monitoring or require visa applicants to submit social media handles for vetting, raising freedom of expression and privacy issues. The intrusiveness of surveillance must be checked by legal standards. Any surveillance that is secret or bulk (like indiscriminate scanning of faces in a crowd at an airport) should be subject to necessity-proportionality tests and independent oversight. The ECtHR and other bodies have emphasized that where surveillance tech is used, there must be clear legal frameworks, narrowly defined purposes, and remedies for abuse (like an independent complaint mechanism).

Data security and risk of misuse: A major human rights concern with big data collection is the risk of data breaches or misuse. Migrant data is often highly sensitive (ethnicity, religion, biometric identifiers). If hacked or leaked, it could expose individuals to danger – especially refugees from oppressive regimes. States have an obligation to protect personal data against such threats (this is part of the "security" principle in data protection law). Yet many immigration databases have been targeted by cyberattacks. There was an incident where biometric data of Afghan and Iraqi refugees, collected by aid agencies, reportedly fell into the hands of armed groups due to device loss – a chilling scenario. To comply with the right to privacy and security of person, states and agencies must employ state-of-the-art cybersecurity and limit data access on a need-to-know basis. Moreover, misuse by authorities is a concern: for instance, using asylum seekers' data for criminal investigations unrelated to asylum can deter people from coming forward. Regulations like the GDPR strictly regulate secondary use of data – authorities should not repurpose data for incompatible aims without legal authorization. An example: Eurodac data was originally only for asylum allocation, but later opened to police – a move that civil society argued undermined trust and privacy. Human rights law would ask: is this secondary use necessary and proportionate? Often, that answer is contested.

Consent and autonomy: In many migration situations, individuals have no real choice but to give data – if a refugee refuses fingerprinting, they might not get help. This coerced nature means that consent is not a strong basis for processing (instead, legal obligations are). However, where possible, giving migrants some control or at least information about their data fosters dignity and trust. The humanitarian sector's rethink during the Ukraine crisis – opting not to force biometrics – highlights that alternatives exist. Anonymous or aggregated data can sometimes achieve similar ends (for example, to track numbers or eligibility without personal identifiers). Privacy-enhancing technologies (like storing data on secure personal devices rather than central servers) could empower migrants with their own data. These approaches should be explored to reconcile the need for information with respect for autonomy.

**Non-discrimination and fairness**

Algorithmic Bias: One of the gravest human rights risks of digital migration management is that algorithms could bake in and conceal discriminatory practices. If an AI system is trained on past data that reflects prejudices (e.g., a higher rejection rate for applicants from certain countries), it may perpetuate those patterns under the guise of neutral processing. This undermines the right to equality. The challenge is that bias in AI can be hard to detect because of proprietary systems or complexity. Therefore, transparency is crucial: migrants subjected to an automated decision should be informed and ideally the system's criteria should be explainable. The EU AI Act will require some level of explainability and auditability for high-risk algorithms, which could help. Additionally, periodic bias audits by independent experts can identify disparate impacts. For instance, if a "fraud detection" algorithm in a refugee cash program disproportionately flags single males from a certain region, the agency should investigate whether that is justified or a bias. From a legal standpoint, if an algorithm results in systematic disadvantage to a protected group, it could violate non-discrimination clauses (unless the state can prove a very weighty reason and that no less-discriminatory means were available). The difficulty lies in attribution: who is accountable, the software provider or the state using it? Human rights principles would hold the state responsible for outcomes of technology it deploys – it cannot hide behind "the computer said so."

Racial profiling and surveillance: Automated systems at borders can effectively amount to racial or ethnic profiling if not careful. For example, automated risk scoring might consider a traveler's country of origin as a risk factor, which correlates with ethnicity or religion. If someone is pulled aside mainly because they come from a Muslim-majority country, that could be discriminatory profiling (as several courts have found in analogous contexts). Human rights law (e.g. CERD General Recommendations) forbids profiling solely on ethnicity or religion in immigration enforcement. Thus, developers of these systems must ensure that profiles are behavior-based or individually assessed, not crude proxies for protected traits. The Amnesty International briefing in 2024 pointed out that *"digital technologies are reinforcing border regimes that disproportionately impact racialised people"* (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2024), underlining that inherent racism can be ingrained in seemingly modern

systems. Addressing this requires diverse and inclusive policy-making – involving representatives of migrant communities in the design of digital border programs to spot and prevent bias.

Equality of access: As seen in the Moldova example, digital systems might disadvantage those with less education, older migrants, or women (who in some societies have less access to technology). There is a risk of indirect discrimination if a required process (like online registration) cannot be equally navigated by all sub-groups of migrants. States should implement reasonable accommodations, such as providing alternatives or assistance, to avoid such disparate impact. In legal terms, failing to do so could violate equality guarantees if one group (say older refugees) is consistently left behind. It also intersects with the right to information: information about immigration procedures must be effectively accessible, which may mean offering it through multiple channels (digital and non-digital).

## Access to asylum and due process

"Digital Barriers" to asylum: Perhaps the most consequential human rights issue is whether digital tech is being used to block access to territory and asylum. Examples include: geospatial surveillance that directs coastguards to interdict boats in international waters (preventing asylum-seekers from reaching land to claim asylum), or automated entry systems that pre-screen individuals and deny boarding based on watchlists or profiles, without considering asylum needs. Such practices risk contravening the principle of non-refoulement if individuals are sent back without assessment. The use of drones and satellite tracking in the Mediterranean by Frontex, for instance, has been double-edged – while it can help rescue operations, evidence suggests it has also enabled Libya to intercept migrants, returning them to abuse in Libyan detention (Papachristodoulou, 2022). If an EU member state actively uses digital surveillance to facilitate those interceptions, it could be held complicit in refoulement (a legal grey zone currently under litigation by NGOs). The bottom line is that technology should facilitate the identification of persons in need of protection, not make them invisible. An automated system that flags someone as "irregular migrant – deny entry" should have a built-in safeguard: *is this person seeking asylum?* The EU AI Act's recital explicitly says AI must not be used to deny legal avenues like asylum (Palazzi et

al., 2025). Practically, this could mean any adverse decision by an algorithm at the border must be reviewed by a human who can spot an asylum claim or vulnerability.

Procedural fairness and remedies: When decisions affecting rights (detention, deportation, visa denial, etc.) are made with the assistance of algorithms or big data, procedural fairness requires that the individual can *contest* the decision. This is a well-established administrative law principle: one must know the reasons for a decision and have an opportunity to respond. With opaque AI, knowing the real reason can be hard. Migrants might receive a generic notice like "visa denied due to security concerns" if behind the scenes an algorithm scored them high-risk. To ensure a meaningful remedy, authorities may need to explain, at least in summary, what factors led to that outcome (without divulging state secrets or proprietary info unduly). There is a push in Europe for a "right to explanation" for automated decisions. In the immigration context, countries like Canada (after civil society pressure) now conduct more detailed manual reviews of refusals initially flagged by AI, and disclose notes. The right to an effective remedy (e.g. Art. 13 ECHR, Art. 47 EU Charter) would be violated if a migrant is unable to challenge an inaccurate database entry or an algorithmic rejection. Therefore, legal systems must adapt: for instance, creating fast-track appeals for visa denials that might be based on erroneous data, or allowing refugees to request correction of their personal data held in security databases. Encouragingly, the EU interoperability laws included a provision that individuals can request access and correction of their data across all systems via a "single point of contact" in each country.

Oversight and accountability: To safeguard due process and rights, oversight bodies are essential. Data Protection Authorities (DPAs) should oversee immigration data systems (many have started doing audits of border agencies). National human rights institutions or ombudspersons can also play a role by examining complaints about digital border practices. Ultimately, courts remain the backstop. If, for example, an asylum-seeker believes an automated translation tool misinterpreted their interview leading to a wrong outcome, they should be able to bring that up on appeal. If a refugee's biometric data is shared with their country of origin (breaching confidentiality), they should have a cause of action under data protection law or human rights law. Ensuring these avenues exist and are known is part of the state's duty.

**Emerging Risks: big data, AI, and the future**

Looking ahead, certain emerging technologies raise new human rights questions:

• Predictive analytics: Using big data to predict migration flows or individual behavior (e.g., likelihood of absconding) could guide policy but might also lead to preemptive restrictions. If an algorithm predicts a surge from X country, a state might prematurely shut its border or detain arrivals from that country, potentially infringing on the right to leave and seek asylum based on a prediction. There is a danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy and of policies based on statistical risk rather than individual conduct, which challenges the principle of individual determination in refugee law.

• Artificial intelligence in decision-making: As AI gets more sophisticated, there is talk of AI assessing credibility of asylum claims (through voice stress analysis, etc.) or automating refugee status determination. This would raise profound fairness and accuracy issues – human narratives are nuanced and cultural context is crucial, something AI may not grasp. A wrongful denial of asylum because an AI didn't "believe" an applicant could be a life-or-death error. Most legal scholars agree that core adjudications should not be fully automated, and the EU AI Act will likely classify such uses as high-risk or even prohibit some (e.g., the Act may ban AI lie detectors at borders as falling under unacceptable practices). The human rights principle of *non-refoulement* demands rigorous scrutiny of any negative asylum decision, which is incompatible with a black-box AI making the call. Thus, one can argue there should be a human-in-the-loop requirement for all crucial decisions affecting status or expulsion.

• Surveillance and chilling effects: Constant monitoring of migrants (e.g., ankle bracelets for immigration detention alternatives, or mobile phone tracking of asylum-seekers) might achieve compliance but at the expense of dignity and mental health. Such measures can be traumatizing and make individuals feel criminalized. The right to liberty and security (ICCPR Art. 9) and freedom of movement can be engaged here. Less intrusive means (reporting by phone or in-person) could often achieve the same goals without turning to surveillance tech. Human rights law would counsel to always pick the least intrusive option.

• Private sector involvement: Many border technologies are developed by private companies – from biometrics firms to data analytics startups. This raises

questions about accountability and privacy. Companies may have interests (profit, reuse of data) that conflict with human rights. States should ensure robust procurement standards that require vendors to comply with data protection and facilitate audits. Also, if a private contractor misuses migrant data or an AI they built is discriminatory, states should not shy from legal remedies against them, as part of ensuring effective remedy to the individual.

In sum, the human rights implications of digital migration management are multifaceted. The overarching principle is that migrants do not lose their rights simply because technology is involved. As Amnesty International's briefing succinctly put it, invasive border technologies can violate numerous rights – privacy, equality, asylum – and urgent action is needed to prevent a slide into an era of "digital migration control" where rights are an afterthought (JURIST, n.d.). Instead, a human-rights-by-design approach should be adopted: from the early design of any migration-related technology, legal and ethical safeguards must be built in, rather than added reactively later.

## Discussion

The analysis above highlights a paradox: digital tools have immense potential to improve migration governance, yet they also risk entrenching a "digital fortress" mentality unless guided by a strong rights-based framework. In this discussion, we synthesize the findings, address how law and policy can reconcile security/efficiency with human rights, and consider best practices and recommendations moving forward.

A rights-based approach to digital migration governance: It is evident that a *status quo* where technology outpaces law is not sustainable. A rights-based approach means placing the migrant – as a human being with dignity and rights – at the center of any digital initiative. Practically, this involves several strategies:

• Embedding privacy and equality into system design: Before deploying a new data system or AI tool, authorities should conduct Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIA). For instance, if a government plans to use AI for visa screening, an HRIA would evaluate risks to privacy (what data is used? how secured?), risks to non-discrimination (does the model disadvantage certain groups?), and impacts on due process (can applicants contest outcomes?). Mitigation measures – like data encryption, algorithmic bias tuning, and manual

review processes – should then be built in. This proactive approach aligns with the concept of "privacy by design" in data protection law and extends it to "human rights by design."

• Legal reform and clear uidelines: Many countries need to update their legal frameworks to explicitly regulate the use of digital tech in migration. This could take the form of amendments to immigration or asylum laws to require human oversight of automated decisions, to mandate data protection measures, or to prohibit certain particularly intrusive technologies (akin to how the EU AI Act will ban social scoring and predictive policing AI in migration (European Commission, 2016)). One idea floated by scholars is a "Digital Migrant Bill of Rights" – a set of principles ensuring that migrants' digital interactions with states uphold fundamental rights. While not an actual bill, it could guide domestic legislation. For example, it might enshrine that every migrant has the right to understand how their data will be used, the right to object to purely automated decisions, and the right to data portability (to take their records when they move).

• Strengthening oversight mechanisms: Independent oversight is a cornerstone of accountability. Data Protection Authorities should be well-resourced and empowered to audit border agencies and even international organizations operating within states. They should conduct periodic audits of large migration databases and publish findings (with security-sensitive info appropriately handled). Parliamentary committees or ombudsmen can also scrutinize whether surveillance at borders is conducted legally. Crucially, involving the judiciary is important: courts may need training on these technological issues to be able to adjudicate disputes effectively. International oversight is harder (as there's no single body for this), but UPR (Universal Periodic Review) at the UN and treaty body reviews can start asking states about their use of migration tech and compliance with rights.

• International cooperation and standards: Given migration is inherently transnational, there is scope for developing international standards. One proposal could be a set of guiding principles on human rights and migration digitalization endorsed by the UN or regional bodies. These might echo the principles for business and human rights or for AI ethics, but tailored to migration. For instance, UNHCR and IOM could jointly develop guidelines for governments on the use of biometrics that include minimum safeguards (similar to how there are guidelines for biometrics in refugee registration already, but those could be universalized).

The involvement of the private sector also calls for international standards – e.g. encouraging companies supplying border tech to sign up to a "Human Rights Charter" pledging not to design discriminatory systems and to cooperate with oversight.

Positive potential and examples: It is worth highlighting that technology, if harnessed correctly, can *promote* human rights in migration. For example, digital case management systems can help identify vulnerable individuals (unaccompanied children, trafficking victims) more quickly and ensure they receive special protection – but this requires proper data sharing among protection actors, done lawfully. Technology can also reduce opportunities for corruption in immigration processes by automating and transparently tracking decisions, thus supporting the right to equal treatment. The key is ensuring these systems are transparent. Another positive example is how digital connectivity enabled refugees from Ukraine to self-organize and communicate – a reminder that migrants use technology for their own agency too. Policies should thus facilitate migrants' access to technology (e.g. providing Wi-Fi at refugee centers, digital literacy training) as part of upholding their rights to information and expression.

Addressing emerging risks: Newer uses like AI deserve special attention. The EU's approach with the AI Act – classifying migration-related AI as high-risk and insisting it not violate refugee law (European Commission, 2016) – is a step in the right direction. Other countries should adopt similar stances. There might even be areas where a moratorium is wise: for instance, deploying emotion recognition or lie detection AI on asylum seekers is so fraught with potential rights violations that a preemptive ban (at least until proven reliable and ethical) is sensible. On predictive analytics, one recommendation is to keep such tools as advisory only, not decision-making. They can assist planning (e.g. anticipating needs) but should not be used to curtail individual rights.

Empowering migrants and refugees: A recurring theme is the need to involve those affected in decisions about technology. Consultation with refugee communities about data collection methods, or with diaspora groups about proposed surveillance measures, can provide perspectives that bureaucrats or developers overlook. This inclusive approach not only improves the humanity of systems but can lead to creative solutions – for example, refugees might prefer to keep their own data on a USB or blockchain-based ID that they control, rather than a government database; such ideas have been piloted. Access to justice for

migrants in digital contexts can also be improved by legal aid and NGOs becoming tech-savvy – e.g., providing toolkits to lawyers on how to challenge an automated decision, or digital rights organizations extending their work to immigration issues.

The security-right synthesis: Governments often frame this issue as a trade-off between security and rights. But a strong argument exists that respecting human rights actually enhances security in the long term. If migrants trust that their data won't be misused, they are more likely to cooperate with authorities (for health screening, registration, etc.). If decisions are fair and transparent, it reduces grievances that can lead to unrest. Indeed, overreliance on opaque tech can produce errors that undermine security (like missing a real threat because the algorithm was looking at the wrong indicators). Thus, integrating human rights is not antithetical to the goals of states; it can improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of migration management. This perspective should be emphasized in policy discourse to counter a false dichotomy.

Finally, the discussion would be incomplete without noting differential global capacities. Wealthy nations and blocs (EU, US) are pioneering expensive tech (often with controversial elements, like AI border agents or biometric blocklists), while poorer countries may lack even basic data infrastructure (which can also cause rights issues like lost files, etc.). There is an inequality in who defines the standards – often Global North-driven. It is important to have voices from the Global South, where a lot of refugee situations occur, in shaping how technology is used. Also, capacity-building efforts should not just export gadgets, but also export training in human rights-aligned usage. Bodies like the IOM's Immigration and Border Management division and UNODC (for border security) should integrate human rights modules in all their tech-related assistance.

In conclusion of this discussion, bridging the gap between rapid technological adoption and the slower evolution of legal frameworks is imperative. We are at a juncture where choices made will set precedents – either for a future of humane, digitally-aided mobility or a future of high-tech exclusion. The following concluding section will wrap up the insights and reinforce the call for a balanced approach.

**Conclusions**

The digitalization of migration governance is not a distant prospect but a present reality. All around the world, borders are "going digital", and migration management is increasingly conducted through algorithms, databases, and surveillance networks. This evolution offers opportunities to improve state functions and migrant experiences – from quicker processing at airports to better-targeted humanitarian aid. Yet, as this article has explored, it also presents significant legal and ethical challenges. Key international and regional legal frameworks – from human rights treaties to EU regulations – provide a scaffold of principles that must guide the use of technology in this realm. Human rights considerations are not optional; they are legal obligations that constrain how far states and organizations can go in pursuit of efficiency or security.

A global perspective reveals both common themes and divergent approaches. International law insists on privacy, dignity, equality, and the right to asylum, even as it grapples to keep pace with new tech. Regional regimes like in Europe have begun to codify specific rules for AI and data in migration, which could serve as models elsewhere, albeit needing stronger enforcement. The case study of Moldova illustrated that even a small country under great strain can implement digital tools in a manner consistent with legal protections – but it required will, resources, and cooperation with the international community.

Several policy implications emerge. First, robust data protection measures are indispensable – including clear rules on data use, independent oversight, and security safeguards – to protect migrants' personal information. Second, transparency and accountability must be ensured in any use of automated systems: migrants should know decisions affecting them and have recourse to challenge errors. Third, states should refrain from using technology to unduly prevent or deter migration in ways that violate international obligations (for example, using remote surveillance solely to push people back without assessing protection needs). Fourth, capacity-building in digital literacy for migrants and digital rights training for officials can help bridge gaps and prevent unintentional exclusion.

The human rights risks identified – from erosion of privacy to potential algorithmic bias – are not merely theoretical. There have been concrete instances of harm, and without corrective action, these could multiply. However, the trajectory is not set in stone. As we stand in 2025, there is active engagement by

courts, scholars, civil society, and some forward-thinking governments to ensure that digital borders remain under the rule of law. Lawsuits and advocacy have already led to the cancellation of biased systems and prompted new legislation (e.g., the UK dropping its visa algorithm, the EU writing human-rights clauses into the AI Act for migration (Papachristodoulou, 2022)). This demonstrates the power of legal processes to check technological excesses.

For policymakers, the key message is one of balance and vigilance. Embracing innovation in migration governance can yield benefits, but it must be accompanied by equally innovative safeguards. This could mean updating refugee law interpretation to account for data issues, or it could mean crafting entirely new legal instruments (perhaps a protocol on data use in cross-border contexts). There is also a need for cross-border coordination: migration data often moves between states, so privacy cannot be protected by one state alone if others don't reciprocate. International agreements on data sharing (with rights clauses) are a way forward – the example of Moldova and Ukraine's credit info sharing, done thoughtfully with legal audits (International Finance Corporation, 2022), suggests it's feasible to share data while respecting rights.

In conclusion, the digitalization of migration is a double-edged sword. It can either enhance governance in line with our highest legal standards, or it can undermine human rights on a large scale if left unchecked. The outcome depends on the frameworks we build now. A human-rights-based, legally robust approach is not just ideal but necessary to prevent a "subtle erosion" of rights in this domain [4]. Upholding human dignity for people on the move – whether through legal guarantees in an app's code or through a judge's ruling in a courtroom – remains the lodestar. As technology continues to advance, our commitment to fundamental rights must advance in tandem, ensuring that the humanity of migrants is never lost in the digitalization of migration.

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# CHAPTER 6

## INTEGRATION OF UKRAINIANS IN ROMANIA

*Mariana ROSCA*

According to the report issued by the office of the Prime Minister of Romania, between February 24, 2022, and March 31, 2025, a total of 11,342,140 Ukrainians entered Romania. Among them, 4,522 applied for asylum, 198 were granted a form of protection, and 248,494 received temporary protection status. Of those benefiting from temporary protection, 9.7% are children aged 0–6 years, 14.3% are children aged 7–18 years, 71.8% are adults aged 19–64 years, and 4.2% are elderly individuals over 65 years old (Figure 8). As the war continues with no foreseeable end, the demand for temporary protection remains high. In March 2025 alone, 2,284 new beneficiaries were registered in Romania.
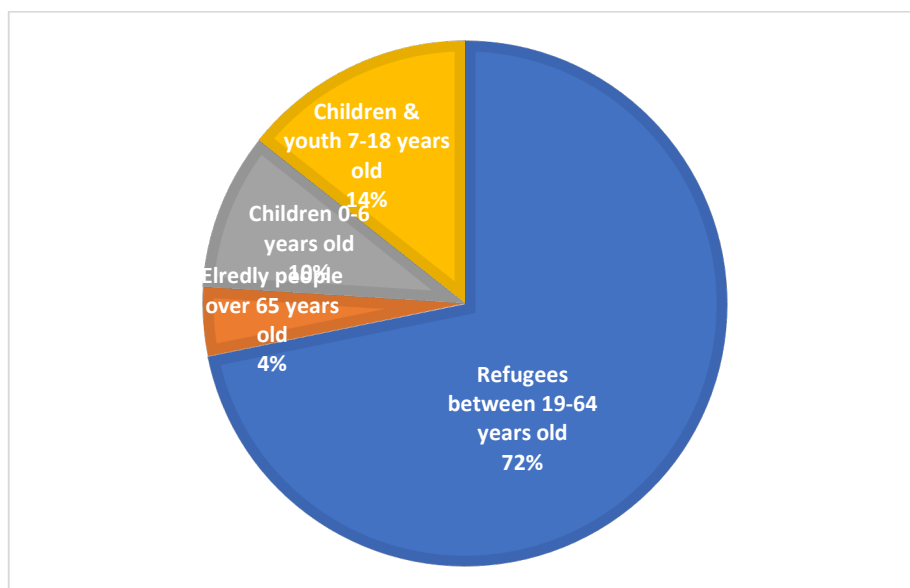


Source: *Data from the: Secretariatul General al Guvernului. Cancelaria Prim-Ministrului. (2025). Raport privind integrarea refugiatilor Ucraineni in Romania (Perioada 24.02.2022 – 31.03.2025). https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/analize-si-statistici/ (accessed 04.05.2025).p.1.*

Figure 8. *Beneficiaries of the TPM in Romania*

The demographic composition of refugees from Ukraine in Romania has become more balanced, with approximately 51 percent female, 49 percent male, and children making up about one-third of the total (UNHCR, 2025). This trend is expected to persist through 2025 and 2026. As the crisis continues, both refugees already in Romania and new arrivals will face a range of socio-economic challenges. Extended displacement has exhausted the refugees financial savings. "Most respondents do not have enough savings to rely on for at least a year (92%). Among the households that can rely on savings, 27 per cent that estimate having savings that can last for one month, followed by the households that rely on savings for one to two weeks. Only two per cent have savings that they can rely on for a year. And five per cent either did not know (3%) or refused to answer (2%).(UNHCR, 2024, p. 44) This situation increases the risk of harmful coping mechanisms for Ukrainian refugees. "At the time of the survey, most households could afford fewer goods compared to their first month in the country (64%), followed by 26 per cent that stated that they could afford the same amount of goods" (UNHCR, 2024, p. 48). As of December 2024, 64 percent of refugee households report a decline in purchasing power compared to their initial months in Romania, 25 percent of households reporting reduced food consumption, and 39 per cent of refugee households reporting cuts in essential health expenditures (UNHCR, 2024).

The mid- and long-term integration of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society is closely linked to facilitating access to the Romanian labor market. The Ukrainians that legally entered Romania, both those requesting and receiving the temporary protection, as well as those that have requested other forms of protection, some exceptional conditions have been set to integrated them in Romania in general and into the Romanian labour market in particular. According to the legal framework described earlier, the Ukrainian refugees need to follow few basic steps in order to access the Romanian labour market. First of all, the refugees have to register and get a permit of stay for the temporary protection. The Ukrainians that do not wish to request any kind of protection but wishes to work in Romanian ca do so and do not need a work permit. Secondly, the refugees need to register at the closest AJOFM or Bucharest Municipality office as job seekers and follow the research of the job vacancies advertised in ANOFM web page or other sites. Ones registered at the local employment services, the refugees can

benefit from ANOFM support to integrate into the labour market, offering various assistance and support services. Additionally, the refugees registered can attend the free professional training courses, Romanian language courses.

In the absence of legal documents testifying the qualification or experience additional exemptions have been put in place as mentioned earlier in EO 20/2022. Also, the Ukrainians requesting any form of protection in Romania, can access the labour market in the same conditions as Romanian citizens, after three months of asylum request, and during the period of decision making. For the Ukrainians that have obtained any kind of international protection in Romania have access to the unemployment system similar to Romanian citizens.

Thanks to these provisions, the match of the local labour demand with the refugees' labour offer has been addressed. The indicators and data presented in Table 2 outline some insight with regard to the access intentions to the labor market, as well as to the employment rate and also the employers that offer jobs for the Ukrainians refugees specifically.

Table 2. *Key indicators on integration of Ukrainian citizens in the Romanian labour market*

| | 24.02.2022-31.12.2024 | 01.02.2024-17.02.2025 | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Ukrainian nationals registered at Employment Agencies seeking employment | 23.941 | 24.165 | **+224** |
| Number of employers that declared available vacancies for Ukrainian citizens | 732 | 736 | **+4** |
| Number of vacancies hired through AJOFM/AMOFM | 3.256 | 3.284 | **+28** |
| Number of registered active employment contracts | 6.240 | 6.250 | **+10** |

Source: *Created by the author with the data from Secretariatul General al Guvernului. Cancelaria Prim-Ministrului. (2025). Raport privind integrarea refugiatilor Ucraineni in Romania (Perioada 24.02.2022 – 31.03.2025). https://protectieucraina.gov.ro/1/analize-si-statistici/ (accessed 04.05.2025) and ANOFM. 2025a. Situația încadrării pe piața muncii a cetăţenilor ucraineni, prin intermediul ANOFM – 17 februarie 2025. https://www.anofm.ro/situatia-incadrarii-pe-piata-muncii-a-cetatenilor-ucraineni-prin-intermediul-anofm-17-februarie-2025/ (accessed 27.03.2025).*

These data highlights key indicators for the integration of Ukrainian nationals into the Romanian labor market from 2022 to 2025, and provides insight into both the overall progress and challenges in integrating Ukrainian refugees into the Romanian workforce.

The data reflects a relatively stable and slowly progressing integration of Ukrainian citizens into the Romanian labor market over the observed periods. Over this time, the number of Ukrainian nationals registered at Romanian Employment Agencies (AJOFM/AMOFM) seeking employment increased slightly from 23,941 to 24,165. This modest growth of 224 individuals suggests a continued, though not high, interest in employment among the Ukrainian refugee population. It may also indicate ongoing arrivals or a shift from informal work to official job-seeking channels.

The number of employers declaring vacancies for Ukrainian citizens rose marginally from 732 to 736. This shows a small but positive signal that the Romanian labor market remains open and committed to hiring Ukrainians. Although the increase is small, it reflects a sustained level of employer engagement and solidarity with the Ukrainians.

In terms of job placements, the number of vacancies filled through employment agencies grew slightly from 3,256 to 3,284. While the increase of 28 placements is relatively small, it aligns with the broader pattern of stable but limited growth. It also suggests that institutional mechanisms for employment mediation are functioning consistently, even if the overall numbers remain low relative to the total number of job seekers.

Finally, the number of registered active employment contracts increased marginally from 6,240 to 6,250—an increment of only 10 contracts. Despite appearing minimal, this figure is particularly significant as it underlines a persistent gap between the number of Ukrainian nationals actively seeking employment and those who ultimately secure formal, contractual positions. This disparity likely reflects a range of structural challenges, including language barriers, mismatches between available skills and labor market demands, and bureaucratic obstacles. Nevertheless, the sustained level of employment contracts since the outset of the conflict indicates a degree of labor market absorption. It suggests that Ukrainian employees are not only being integrated into the Romanian workforce but are also being retained over time. This ongoing

employment relationship implies that these individuals are making meaningful contributions to their host country's economy. Furthermore, their continued presence in the workforce may be helping to mitigate labor shortages in specific sectors of the Romanian labor market, highlighting their potential as a stabilizing and productive force within the broader context of refugee integration.

A recent study published by Novapolis reports a total of 7,561 active employment contracts held by Ukrainian citizens in Romania. Of these, 6,238 contracts were initiated at the onset of the armed conflict in Ukraine, indicating that approximately 82.5% of the current employment relationships involving Ukrainian nationals began as a direct response to the humanitarian crisis (Novapolis, 2025, p. 16). This data offers valuable insight into the labor market integration of Ukrainian refugees in Romania. The high proportion of contracts initiated following the outbreak of the conflict suggests a rapid and structured response from Romanian institutions and employers to accommodate displaced individuals. It also reflects the willingness or necessity of Ukrainian refugees to enter the labor market shortly after arrival, which is a crucial factor in promoting self-reliance and socio-economic inclusion. Moreover, the sustained number of active contracts over time indicates not only the successful placement of Ukrainian workers, but also their retention in the Romanian labor market. This suggests that Ukrainian employees are valued by employers, and that there is a low rate of attrition, once employment is secured. The stability of these contracts may also point to favorable working relationships, job satisfaction, and a degree of alignment between refugees' skills and the needs of the labor market.

An analysis of the geographical distribution of employment contracts held by Ukrainian citizens in Romania reveals significant regional disparities, with the highest concentration of employment recorded in Bucharest**,** where 2,500 contracts were registered. This is followed, at a much lower scale, by Maramureş (339)**,** Cluj (317)**,** Constanţa (306)**,** Timiş (304)**,** and Braşov (262). Other counties with notable figures include Bistriţa-Năsăud (261)**,** Ilfov (250)**,** Arad (218)**,** Iaşi (183)**,** Galaţi (168)**,** Suceava (167), Bihor (157), and Sibiu (154). The predominance of Bucharest is unsurprising, given its status as the capital and largest urban center, which offers a diverse labor market, higher concentration of employers, and more extensive support services. The presence of international organizations, NGOs, and integration programs in Bucharest likely further facilitates access to employment for refugees. The relatively high figures in

Maramureş and Suceava, two border counties in the north, may be attributed to their proximity to Ukraine and their role as key entry and transit points during the initial phase of displacement. These regions likely absorbed a significant number of refugees early in the crisis, some of whom have since remained and integrated into the local labor market. Counties such as Cluj, Timiş, Constanţa, and Braşov are important regional economic hubs with diversified economies, high levels of investment, and a demand for labor, particularly in services, construction, manufacturing, and logistics. Their economic dynamism and openness to foreign labor might have contributed to their attractiveness for Ukrainian job seekers. Meanwhile, counties like Bistriţa-Năsăud, Arad, Ilfov, and Sibiu show moderate levels of employment integration, indicating that Ukrainian refugees are not solely concentrated in major cities, but also present and employed in smaller or mid-sized urban areas. This suggests a certain level of geographical dispersion, which can be beneficial for both decongesting urban centers and supporting the labor needs of less populated areas. However, the data also implies an uneven distribution of employment opportunities, likely influenced by factors such as local economic capacity, availability of support services, municipal preparedness, and labor market demand. Regions with fewer contracts may face structural challenges, such as weaker local economies or limited institutional capacity, that restrict the integration of refugees into the workforce.

An examination of the sectoral distribution of employment contracts held by Ukrainian citizens in Romania reveals a diverse integration into key segments of the national economy. The highest concentration of employment is observed in the manufacturing sector (1,191 contracts), followed by construction (982), commerce (812), and hospitality (673 in hotels and restaurants). Additional sectors with notable figures include information and communication (580), administrative and support services (455), transport and storage (339), other service activities (332), and professional, scientific, and technical activities (282) (Secretariatul General al Guvernului, 2025). The sectoral overview of Ukrainian refugee employment in Romania reveals therefore a balanced and adaptive integration into both labor-intensive and knowledge-driven industries. While the majority are employed in traditionally high-demand sectors, the presence in skilled professions offers a promising outlook for long-term integration.

While refugees find it difficult to access employment, the Romanian labor market is experiencing significant workforce shortages, as evidenced by data from

economic agents recorded by ANOFM, which indicates a current demand for 32,128 workers across the country (ANOFM, 2025b). These vacancies underline the persistent need for labor in critical sectors such as construction, logistics, retail, manufacturing, and hospitality. It highlights both structural workforce gaps and the employment opportunities available to job seekers, including Ukrainian refugees and other foreign workers who could help fill these shortages. Looking at the job openings in Romania, it can be seen that the majority of job openings are concentrated in labor-intensive and manufacturing-driven sectors, including:

- Hospitality and Food Services: Jobs in restaurants, hotels, and similar accommodation facilities indicate strong demand in Romania's tourism sector. Many positions in these fields require minimal formal qualifications, making them accessible to refugees with varying skill levels.

- Manufacturing and Industrial Production: Vacancies exist in the manufacture of electrical and electronic equipment for motor vehicles and engines, footwear production, textile and garment manufacturing, shipbuilding, and rolling stock (railway vehicle) production. These industries are vital to Romania's export economy and often face challenges in recruiting sufficient labor, making them reliant on foreign workers.

- Construction and Infrastructure Development: The presence of vacancies in residential and non-residential construction, building demolition, and material processing suggests that Ukrainian refugees can be absorbed into Romania's construction sector, which register steady growth and labor shortages.

- Consulting and Business Services: The vacancies in business and management consultancy, reflect potential opportunities for skilled professionals with backgrounds in administration and advisory roles.

The job roles most frequently offered by employers align with the sectors mentioned above and predominantly include low-skilled and semi-skilled positions. These include:

- Manufacturing and Assembly: Positions such as unskilled workers for assembling and fitting parts, manual packers, textile garment-makers, and workers in electric and electronic wiring production indicate a demand for labor in Romania's industrial production sector.

- Construction and Manual Labor: Roles such as unskilled workers for building demolition, masonry lining, tiling, and cutting building materials

highlight the sector's dependence on physically demanding roles that require minimal training.

• Hospitality and Food Services: Positions such as kitchen workers, kitchen helpers, large dishwashers, and waiter's assistants emphasize the growing demand for staff in Romania's restaurant and hotel industries, which are key drivers of the country's tourism economy.

• Logistics and Warehousing: The need for goods handlers and packers for solid and semi-solid products reflects the ongoing expansion of Romania's logistics and supply chain sectors, which require a steady workforce for processing and distribution tasks.

• Technical and Skilled Trades: While the majority of jobs are unskilled, there are also opportunities for skilled professionals such as welders, which indicates employer interest in hiring individuals with technical expertise.

The distribution of job vacancies suggests that Ukrainian refugees in Romania are being funneled primarily into low-wage, labor-intensive industries, which may not fully utilize the skills of more educated or experienced individuals. This trend highlights potential barriers to economic mobility, including language proficiency requirements, recognition of qualifications, and lack of sector-specific training programs. Furthermore, while demand is high in fields like construction, manufacturing, and hospitality, there appears to be a limited number of job openings in high-skilled sectors, such as IT, engineering, or healthcare. This suggests that skilled refugees may struggle to find employment that matches their qualifications, reinforcing the need for targeted policies such as language training, credential validation programs, and employer incentives for hiring skilled workers.

Thus, while Romania's job market has demonstrated a willingness to absorb Ukrainian refugees, the nature of available positions suggests that many are entering the workforce in low-skilled roles despite potentially higher qualifications. Addressing this imbalance could improve long-term economic integration and allow refugees to contribute more effectively to the Romanian economy.

**Services to match Ukrainian refugees´ demand with labour supply in Romania**

In 1990, the indicial steps have been taken by Romania to address the need to set up an institution that will deal specifically with employment, professional training, counseling of the job seekers, and paying unemployment benefits. However only in 1998, National Agency for Employment and Professional Training was established and started its activity, under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour. In 2020, the institution changed its name into ANOFM being reorganized and functioning on the principle of tripartism, being managed by an Administration Council formed by the Governmental representatives, representatives from confederations of the national trade unions and patronages. Thanks to this change, shortly, ANOFM transformed into a service provider for unemployed people looking for a job and delivering a broad range of services until today, such as: professional counseling, professional training courses, mediation, counseling on starting a business, aid to vulnerable people employed, etc. For a better outreach at the local level, in 2006, was new legal provisions on organization and functioning of ANOFM and establishing the functioning framework for county offices, so called AJOFM (regional agencies of employment) and Bucharest municipality.

For refugees, ones registered at the closest employment service, they can benefit from support to integrate into the labour market, offering professional counseling and information, assessment and certification of professional competences obtained in non-formal and informal contexts; assistance services to obtain a job in EU member states or in European Economic Area. Additionally, the refugees registered can attend the free professional training courses, Romanian language courses. A more detailed description of the most relevant services offered for refugees is as follows:

*Vocational Information and Counselling* service aims to equip Ukrainian jobseekers with essential information about the labor market, occupation trends, and various employment opportunities. It also involves profiling jobseekers, assessing their employability, offering training in job search techniques, and providing guidance during the socio-professional integration process at the workplace. The provision of vocational information and counselling serves plays a fundamental step for refugees, helping them understand the nuances of the local

job market. This is especially important for individuals from foreign countries who may not be familiar with the labor market dynamics in Romania, such as many Ukrainian refugees. Offering such guidance during the integration process is crucial for a smoother transition into Romanian workplaces, particularly for refugees who may face cultural and other kind of barriers.

*Job-Matching Services* involves connecting jobseekers with employers, facilitating the employment and relationship between employer and employee. It is designed to streamline the recruitment process for both parties. Job-matching services help bridge the gap between demand and supply in the labor market by linking employers with suitable candidates. This is essential for Ukrainian refugees who might otherwise struggle to navigate the job market on their own, especially when dealing with language barriers or unfamiliar systems. The free nature of such services ensures that economic barriers do not prevent refugees from accessing job opportunities in Romania.

*Vocational Training* aims enhance the professional skills of registered individuals, increasing their market mobility and employability. This service helps diversify skillsets, which is critical for integration into the Romanian labor market. The availability of vocational training allows refugees to upgrade their skills, increasing their chances of finding stable and long-term employment. This is particularly valuable for refugees who possess qualifications that are not immediately recognized in Romania. By offering this service free of charge, it promotes greater social inclusion and economic integration for Ukrainian refugees who may have limited financial resources for private training programs.

*EURES Support Services* provides jobseekers with comprehensive support in finding employment within the European Union (EU) and European Economic Area (EEA). This includes information on the European labor market, working and living conditions, job vacancies, and European mobility schemes. The EURES support services are particularly beneficial for Ukrainian refugees who may want to seek employment beyond Romania, either temporarily or permanently. This broader EU labor market mobility enables Ukrainian citizens to access opportunities in other EU and EEA countries, where they may find better employment prospects or higher wages. The integration of EURES services in Romania ensures that refugees are not limited to the Romanian labor market alone but can benefit from the wider European employment landscape.

Therefore, the services provided in Romania to Ukrainian refugees offer comprehensive support aimed at facilitating their integration into the Romanian labor market. Through vocational guidance, job matching, professional training, and related services, public employment agencies play a key role in lowering employment barriers and enhancing the capacity of Ukrainian refugees to contribute both economically and socially to Romanian society.

Moreover, the integration of EURES support broadens the range of employment opportunities by granting access to the wider European labor market. However, the overall effectiveness of these services is contingent upon their outreach, accessibility, and the extent to which refugees' skills align with the demands of the Romanian labor market. Continuous monitoring and adaptive service provision are essential to ensure that these mechanisms remain responsive to evolving labor market dynamics and effectively support long-term integration.

Nevertheless, the previously presented data indicates relatively modest employment outcomes for Ukrainian refugees through public employment services. As such, it is crucial to also consider the role of private employment services to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the overall employment landscape.

Apart from public employment agencies, in Romanian there is a broad list of private stakeholders that complement the public services and offer employment services. On 25th of February 2025, there were 1944 entities in the National Register of Accredited Employment Service Providers (ANOFM, 2025c).

The dataset provides a national overview of accredited employment service providers in Romania. It includes detailed information such as the provider's name, legal status, type of accredited services, operational location (city and county), and certification details. The analysis reveals important patterns regarding the structure, services, and geographic distribution of these providers.

There are a total of 62 distinct legal statuses. The vast majority of providers operate under private or non-governmental legal structures (Table 3). Other legal types include public or administrative bodies and various forms of NGOs or cooperatives, but they represent a minor share. This distribution suggests a highly privatized and decentralized framework for employment services in Romania, relying significantly on private businesses and civil society organizations.

Table 3. *Legal status of other employment service providers (top 8)*

| Nr. | Legal status | Number of entities |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Limited Liability Company (SRL) | 1083 |
| 2 | Asociation | 554 |
| 3 | Foundation | 123 |
| 4 | Administrative Teritorial Unit | 21 |
| 5 | Authonomous organization | 20 |
| 6 | Joint Stock Company (SA) | 13 |
| 7 | High Educational Institution | 8 |
| 8 | Voluntary Organization of Employees | 7 |

Source: *Elabourated by author with the data from ANOFM. 2025c. Registrul naţional al furnizorilor de servicii de ocupare acreditaţi. https://www.anofm.ro/registrul-national-al-furnizorilor-de-servicii-de-ocupare-acreditati/ (accessed 5.05.2025).*

The analysis of the services accredited reveals three main categories (Table 4). These figures suggest that most providers focus on career guidance and job matching—two core services aimed at improving labor market mobility and reducing unemployment. These services are aligned with active labor market policies encouraged across the European Union, aimed at reducing unemployment and matching jobseekers with opportunities more efficiently.

However, the dataset lacks significant representation of vocational training, entrepreneurship coaching, or support, which are also essential employment components. This may indicate gaps in the service spectrum available through accredited providers.

Table 4. *Types of accredited services*

| Services accredited | NR of entities |
|---|---|
| Information and counselling | 944 |
| Employment mediation | 843 |
| Combined services (both from the above) | 157 |

Source*: Elabourated by author with the data from National Register of Accredited Employment Service Providers.*

The distribution of providers across Romania is heavily unbalanced. Bucharest dominates the national landscape with over 460 providers registered across its six sectors: Sector 1 (115), Sector 2 (102), Sector 3 (100), Sector 4 (54), Sector 6 (51), Sector 5 (42). In contrast, most other counties have very few providers: Cluj: 2 providers (Cluj-Napoca); Harghita: 1 provider (Odorheiu Secuiesc); Arad: 1 provider. Several other counties show similarly low or no representation.

This indicates a clear urban-centralization of employment services. Bucharest's dominance likely reflects both its population density and the presence of administrative offices. Meanwhile, rural and smaller counties appear underserved or underrepresented in the registry. These disparities could lead to structural unemployment, particularly in rural Romania, where services are either missing or inaccessible.

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CHAPTER 7

# THE INTEGRATION THROUGH THE LENS OF UKRAININ REFUGEES

*Mariana ROSCA*

Traditionally, refugee integration has been studied from the outside, through the lens of scholars, policy-makers, and international organizations, using various research tools such as surveys, and interviews, among many others. These approaches, while useful, often risk objectifying refugees as mere subjects of research, rather than acknowledging them as agents with meaningful insights and lived experience. In recent years, however, alternative research methodologies have emerged, notably citizen science, which offers a more inclusive and participatory approach. Citizen science enables individuals, including marginalized or displaced populations, to actively contribute to the production of scientific knowledge by collecting data, sharing experiences, and shaping research questions.

In this line, Tulloch et al. (2013) reviewed various citizen science approaches and proposed several recommendations to enhance their efficacy. These included incorporating more rigorous sampling techniques into unstructured data collection processes, improving data quality, broadening the user community, and strengthening communication between data collectors and users. When applied to the study of refugees, citizen science not only allows refugees to express their experiences directly, but also enables researchers to access rich, first-hand narratives that offer nuanced and emotionally resonant insights into integration processes (Tulloch et al, 2013).

This chapter draws on citizen science approach by engaging Ukrainian refugees as co-contributors and co-authors in a participatory research action. It aims to amplify their voices and provide a platform for personal storytelling, enabling a deeper understanding of their integration journeys, seen and expressed by themselves. In this context, storytelling is not merely anecdotal; it is a methodologically grounded approach that captures the complexity of human experience in ways that traditional methods often cannot.

Liu et al. (2012) argue that storytelling offers a powerful way to uncover multi-level and dynamic perspectives, especially in culturally and contextually complex environments. They contend that storytelling can reveal hidden dynamics

and facilitate theory development by surfacing implicit cultural and emotional dimensions. Similarly, Wilkins (2000) emphasizes that storytelling is a natural human mode of communication and considers that it makes sense to use it in any investigation of human experience. It serves as a method of inquiry, a tool for data processing, and a means of presenting findings. Wilkins critiques traditional research paradigms for privileging academic language and positivistic frameworks, often at the expense of lived, dialogic, and creative forms of expression.

Lewis takes this argument further, asserting that "story is central to human existence and understanding" (Lewis, 2011, p. 506). He sees storytelling as both a cognitive process and a product of cognition, simultaneously rational and affective, individual and collective. He argues that narratives are essential for identity formation, and that storytelling in research offers a way to include those who are often excluded from academic discourse. According to Lewis, narrative research offers a completer and more complex picture of social life by "giving voice to the voiceless" and providing a less exploitative and more humanistic research method (Lewis, 2011, p. 506). The author notes that stories have their own life and agency, shaped by both the storyteller and the act of telling.

This chapter thus responds to Lewis's call by integrating storytelling as a method of refugee research. Specifically, it reflects how Ukrainian refugees articulate their integration experiences, challenges, and aspirations through storytelling. Drawing on Lewis and Hildebrandt (2019), the study recognizes storytelling as foundational to human meaning-making and as a substantial, though often unacknowledged, basis of many qualitative methodologies.

In this study, storytelling was implemented innovatively, without researcher intervention or interpretive framing during the data collection process. One refugee acted as a gatekeeper, facilitating the contact with other members of their community who voluntarily submitted personal stories on their experiences of integration. This peer-led, self-directed narrative method emphasized autonomy, trust, and sensitivity. Importantly, it respected the participants' voices, and the translations made have been directed towards the maintaining the original voices and tones. Therefore, this chapter presents these collected narratives not merely as illustrative stories, but as meaningful data that reflect the lived reality of Ukrainian refugees' integration. These narratives provide insight into their adaptation, resilience, and cultural negotiation within hosting society, while simultaneously contributing to a more democratic, inclusive, and reflexive model of social research.

As "the majority of Ukrainian refugees in Romania originate from Odessa (38%), Khersonska (12 %) and Mykolaivska oblasts" (UNHCR, 2024), it is not surprisingly that the refugees that participated in this study are preponderantly from Odessa. The Odessa region shares a common border with Romania, making Romanian territories geographically accessible to those seeking refuge and in the same time staying close to their homes.

At their core, these narratives illuminate the personal and professional journeys of Ukrainian women who sought refuge in Romania following Russia's full-scale invasion. They chronicle not only the process of adaptation but also the meaningful exchange between refugees and Romanian cultural and educational life, while offering insight into the evolving interethnic dynamics between Ukrainians and Romanians. Common themes that emerge include forced displacement and trauma, the preservation and expression of cultural identity, civic engagement, and the strategic use of art and education as mechanisms for integration and resilience. Ultimately, these narratives transcend the individual to reflect broader sociopolitical dynamics of refugee integration. They affirm the capacity of individuals and institutions to adapt, collaborate, and mobilize under crisis conditions. Simultaneously, they invite critical reflection on the challenges refugees face and underlines the importance of sustainable, inclusive structures that respond to the complexities of displacement in times of uncertainty.

## A. "Integration of Ukrainian refugees into the Romanian society is a vital historical process"

by *Larysa Nechaieva*,
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Translated by **Mariana Rosca**

Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, now ongoing for three years, has led to the largest influx of refugees into European Union countries since the Second World War. Consequently, Ukrainian refugees have become an integral part of the social fabric in many European states and, by extension, a significant factor in international relations. Furthermore, the trajectory of the

Russian-Ukrainian war continues to play a decisive role in shaping the patterns and scale of Ukrainian refugee movements abroad.

The rapid increase in the number of Ukrainian refugees across European countries has compelled national and local authorities to implement targeted socio-economic policies in response. The prolonged nature of the Russian-Ukrainian war, coupled with the relative stabilization of refugee numbers, has brought to the forefront the challenges of long-term adaptation and integration of Ukrainian refugees into their host societies. The integration process has evolved over time, exhibiting a range of developments, some of them significant, since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion. Crucially, the network of social communications accompanying this process plays a pivotal role in shaping the course of refugee integration abroad. Accordingly, a systematic application of the social-communicative approach is essential for the study of the lives of Ukrainian refugees in Europe. It is through the functions of social communication that the search for, collection, and processing of information, as well as decision-making regarding refugees' daily lives and integration, are carried out.

Romania was among the first European states to respond swiftly and unequivocally to the crisis, providing assistance to its neighboring and friendly state, Ukraine, through the coordinated efforts of civil society and central, regional, and local authorities. Nikolay Miroslav Petretskiy, the Chairman of the Union of Ukrainians in Romania and a representative of Ukrainians in the Romanian Parliament, emphasized the need to establish concrete measures for the integration of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society, including the incorporation of Ukrainian children into the national education system. In a parliamentary address, Petretskiy highlighted the importance of recognizing that the war in Ukraine and the subsequent reconstruction of its infrastructure are likely to be a long-term process. Therefore, he argued, the integration of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society must proceed in a natural, gradual, and coherent manner.

Since the onset of Russian aggression, the Union of Ukrainians in Romania (UUR), located in the historic and vibrant city of Timisoara, has served as a refuge for Ukrainian refugees. Each day, individuals and families from various regions and cities across Ukraine arrived at the Union's premises in search of support. Among them were myself, Larysa Nechaieva, my daughter Irina, and my granddaughters Milena and Amelia, residents of Odesa, a city on the Black Sea coast, often referred to as the "Southern Palmyra" of Ukraine. Like hundreds of

other refugees, including children, adults, large families, single mothers, pensioners, and individuals with disabilities, we received assistance, including psychological counseling, medical care, humanitarian aid, and access to bilingual libraries offering Romanian-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Romanian dictionaries, books, and periodicals. Children actively participated in educational and recreational activities organized by the dedicated staff of the UUR. Based on the Union's practical initiatives, direct observations, and analytical research, it was noted that the integration of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society, particularly in the historic region of Banat-Timis, has been remarkably dynamic. This successful integration can be attributed in part to the cultural and psychological characteristics of the Ukrainian people. National identity, emotional openness, ease of communication, tolerance, adaptability, hardworking nature, and a deep sense of community were all identified as key factors that facilitated the integration process. The welcoming attitude society and the effective support mechanisms in place further reinforced this positive trajectory.

In the context of the current issue, it is essential to clarify the concept of integration. Etymologically derived from the Latin integer (meaning "whole") and integratio (meaning "restoration" or "enrichment"), integration refers to a developmental process aimed at unifying previously distinct or heterogeneous components into a cohesive unity. Social integration, in particular, is understood as a natural stage in societal development that involves a collective re-evaluation—by both the state and society—of attitudes toward individuals from other countries. This process includes the formal and informal recognition of the rights of newcomers and the commitment to ensuring equal opportunities across various spheres of life. Romania provides a pertinent example of such integration in practice. Through this process, Ukrainian refugees are gradually incorporated into Romanian society and increasingly recognized as an accepted and integral part of the national community.

As direct participants in the broader historical process of Ukrainian refugee integration into Romanian society, my family and I experienced the challenges and opportunities of resettlement firsthand. Our integration journey began with language acquisition, a foundational step in adapting to a new sociocultural environment. With dedication and genuine interest, we attended Romanian language courses and participated in conversation clubs (Clubul de Conversație), which played a crucial role in expanding our vocabulary, fostering interactive

dialogue, and developing effective communicative competence in Romanian. At first, they engaged passively, simply observing and adjusting to the new setting. However, over time, they fully assimilated into the academic and social fabric of their institutions. Their natural sociability and the distinct cultural openness characteristic of people from Odessa helped them build meaningful relationships with Romanian students and teachers. Gradually, they assimilated into their new educational environment and formed genuine friendships with Romanian classmates. My granddaughters enthusiastically participated in a wide range of cultural and social activities organized by the UUR, as well as by charitable organizations such as LOGS, Salvați Copiii, and AIDRom. They took part in festive events and holiday concerts, performing Ukrainian songs, dances, and poetry, thereby maintaining a strong connection to their cultural heritage while actively engaging with the host society. In parallel, my daughter, Irina Bagalova—a professional speech therapist specializing in speech and communication disorders in children—successfully integrated into Romanian society. Since April 2022, she has been volunteering to support refugee children with speech difficulties. Irina approached each case with exceptional care, conducting thorough assessments to identify the causes, mechanisms, symptoms, and structures of speech and communication disorders. Based on these evaluations, she developed individualized therapeutic strategies tailored to each child's needs. Her sessions went beyond the articulation of sounds and words, incorporating activities aimed at enhancing children's cognitive functions such as attention, memory, and logical thinking. The specialized pedagogical and therapeutic methods employed in her practice contributed not only to the improvement of speech but also to the overall personal development of each child. During her time as a volunteer, Irina positively impacted the lives of dozens of Ukrainian children and their families. Her work brought tangible improvements to their well-being, earning their sincere gratitude, respect, and affection—a source of profound personal and professional fulfillment for her.

My process of integration unfolded through three distinct yet interconnected roles: that of an art specialist, an education professional, and a community activist.

During the period when Timișoara was designated the European Capital of Culture (2023), I began to know numerous Romanian musicians, including: pianist Elena Popa, Professor of Piano at the Ion Vidu National College of Arts; pianist Diana Vasiu, Professor of Piano at West University of Timișoara; and

pianist Aida Marc, also a Professor of Piano. It was through these professional relationships that my integration into Romanian cultural and academic life as a musician and art educator took place. At the invitation of my Romanian colleagues, I delivered a series of masterclasses entitled "Features of the Ukrainian Piano School in the Context of Musical Composition (Methods, Means, Techniques)" at the Ion Vidu College of Arts and the Faculty of Music and Theatre at West University of Timisoara, within their piano classes. During the masterclasses, I shared my musical and pedagogical experience, emphasizing effective methods for interpreting and teaching musical compositions. Particular attention was given to the process of knowledge transfer between teacher and pupil/student, with a focus on developing a deep understanding of genre, stylistic characteristics, and the structural form of musical works. I identified performance challenges among the participating students and provided individualized guidance by personally demonstrating a variety of methods, techniques, and strategies to address specific technical difficulties. The sessions concluded with interactive discussions and debates, during which the defining characteristics of the classical pianistic tradition were explored. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted, examining the pedagogical approaches and stylistic nuances of the Ukrainian and Romanian piano schools.

Over the past three years, our creative collaboration has fostered the development of joint artistic projects for both Romanian and Ukrainian children and adults. Notably, numerous collaborative concerts were organized under the cultural program "Pian – de la muzică la cultură", whose primary aim was to introduce Romanian and Ukrainian students to the world of classical music. Equally significant was the musical event "The Pianos", which featured a series of piano performances by school-aged students from the Ion Vidu College of Arts, alongside performances by professional pianists and professors, including Elena Popa, Diana Vasiu, Aida Marc, and myself, as a pianist and professor from a Ukrainian national university. In an innovative interdisciplinary approach, we invited participating children to incorporate two additional art forms: choreography and visual arts into their musical performances. This fusion stimulated the audience's imagination, enriched the musical experience through multisensory associations, and significantly enhanced the vibrancy and emotional resonance of the performances. Our use of multimedia tools and the integration of multiple artistic disciplines proved to be a remarkable success. Romanian and

Ukrainian children alike experienced joy, inspiration, and meaningful intercultural connection, leaving them with lasting memories and a strong desire to participate in future artistic collaborations.

My cooperation over the past three years with governmental, municipal, and charitable organizations in Timisoara has significantly contributed to my personal integration into Romanian society as a Ukrainian civic activist. A particularly important milestone in this process was my involvement in the Romanian-Ukrainian project "FACT: Fighting Misinformation About Ukraine in Romania and Moldova", conducted in collaboration with international partners such as Laolalta, Twchoup (Global Network), and Hive Mind. The project aimed to identify and critically address prevailing myths and disinformation surrounding the war in Ukraine and the situation of Ukrainian refugees. A key event within the project facilitated a dynamic exchange between Romanian journalists and representatives of the Ukrainian community. Notably, Brindusa Armanca, regional correspondent for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, discussed the pervasive influence of propaganda in media portrayals of Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, offering insights into strategies for combating such narratives. The discussion also broadened to encompass the global phenomenon of the "fake news" industry, the use and implications of artificial intelligence in media manipulation, and the challenges of defining the role and responsibility of digital technologies within the global information ecosystem.

Furthermore, in my capacity as a Ukrainian civic activist, I actively participated in a wide range of public events and demonstrations dedicated to significant national and international occasions. I delivered speeches commemorating the first, second, and third anniversaries of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as well as on World Refugee Day, International Women's Day (8 March), International Children's Day (1 June), among others. These engagements served not only to express solidarity with the Ukrainian community but also to raise awareness within Romanian society about the ongoing challenges faced by refugees and displaced persons.

As an education specialist and professor at the National University, I could not remain indifferent to the challenges surrounding the integration of Ukrainian refugee children into the Romanian educational system. This issue became the focus of numerous events and roundtable discussions organized by Professor Maria Sabo Condrei, Chair of the Timis branch of the UUR, in collaboration with

the charitable organization Save the Children Romania and its cultural coordinator, Irina Ignatieva. I participated in these initiatives as an expert with extensive psycho-pedagogical training and professional experience in education, particularly in the field of integrative learning. My involvement included offering consultation and guidance on the organization of an educational forum in Bucharest, for which preparations were led by Irina Ignatieva. The forum brought together Ukrainian students from various Romanian cities: Iasi, Constanta, Cluj-Napoca, Alba Iulia, Sibiu, and Timisoara, who expressed a shared commitment to improving educational access and conditions for Ukrainian refugee children. The event provided a valuable platform for dialogue, experience exchange, and collaborative problem-solving in the pursuit of more inclusive and responsive educational frameworks. The participants were selected through a casting process, based on the originality and quality of their educational projects, the creativity of their proposed solutions, and the relevance of their approaches to addressing challenges faced by Ukrainian refugee children in the Romanian school system. The selected delegates were invited to Bucharest for high-level meetings at the Romanian Ministry of Education. These meetings were conducted in a professional and constructive manner. Ministry representatives attentively considered the proposals presented by the Ukrainian delegation, and the exchanges were marked by thoughtful discussions and engaging debates. In addition to the formal proceedings, the delegation was offered a culturally enriching and well-organized entertainment program spanning three days.

It is worth noting that the educational ideas proposed by my youngest granddaughter, Amelia, were recognized for their originality and relevance, which led to her selection as a member of the Ukrainian delegation. She presented her proposals at the forum with confidence and clarity, earning the approval of the Ministry representatives.

The constructive and productive outcomes of the forum contributed to the adoption of several significant policy decisions at both the national level and within the Romanian Ministry of Education. In preparation for the new academic year, it was decided that Ukrainian schoolchildren would be granted the right to enroll in Romanian schools and gymnasiums as full pupils rather than merely as auditors. Furthermore, Romania implemented measures to provide Ukrainian children of pre-school and school age with monthly educational social assistance,

as well as academic scholarships for those achieving "good" or "excellent" academic performance.

The swift implementation of integration measures for Ukrainian children and youth within the Romanian education system, along with the introduction of various social support programmes for Ukrainian refugees, marked a historic milestone in the evolution of interethnic relations between Ukraine and Romania, elevating them to a new level of cooperation.

In light of the aforementioned developments, it is important to acknowledge that the process of interethnic communication, adaptation, and integration of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society was made possible through the tireless daily efforts of public authorities and the sincere dedication of the staff of the Union of Ukrainians of Romania. In particular, the contributions of Professor Maria Sabo Condrei, Chair of the Timis branch, along with First Deputy Chairs Michaeli Bumbuc, Sorin Shpilko, and Vasyl Drozd, were instrumental. Equally significant were the efforts of representatives from the Women's Organization, led by Bianca Hinda, and the Youth Organization, represented by Gabrielle Bilan, as well as the continuous support of charitable organizations such as LOGS, Save the Children, and AIDRom. Together, these actors played a vital role in initiating and sustaining the integration process of Ukrainian refugees in Romania.


## B. "Me, my family and friendly Romania"

by *Irina Bagalov*a,
speech therapist of the highest category, Odessa, Ukraine
Translated by ***Mariana Rosca***

Another Christian Easter was celebrated by me, Irina Bagalova, together with my daughters Milena and Amelia, in Timişoara, Romania. Just a year earlier, we had been confident that we would return home in time for the next Easter holiday. We dreamed of reuniting with our relatives and close friends, and of celebrating the holiday together in our native city of Odessa, located on the Black Sea coast and widely known as the "Pearl of the Black Sea" and the "Southern Palmira" of Ukraine. However, events did not unfold as we had hoped. Peace and stability were not restored to our homeland. On the contrary, Southern Ukraine experienced

significantly more attacks by Russian forces than during the previous Easter period.

Since the onset of Russian aggression, Ukrainian refugees have found refuge in one of Romania's most remarkable cities: Timisoara. From 2022 to the present, this vibrant city, supported by its municipal authorities, has continued to host and receive Ukrainian refugees arriving from various regions, cities, and provinces of Ukraine. Among those seeking safety were my daughters and myself. Like many others, we received psychological counselling, medical assistance, and humanitarian aid. Additionally, children had the opportunity to participate in a wide range of developmental and recreational activities organized by the staff of the Timisoara City Hall.

During our first days in Timisoara, we dedicated time to explore the city and learn about its rich, centuries-old history. We discovered that Timisoara is situated in western Romania, in the historic region of Banat, along the banks of the Bega River, which links the city to the Danube. In its charm and atmosphere, Timisoara reminded us of both our beloved Odessa and the elegance of a smaller Vienna. We were captivated by every aspect of the city: its temperate climate and picturesque landscapes, the flowing rivers and decorative fountains, the architectural splendor spanning styles from Baroque to Modern, the refinement and grace of its castles and churches, the vibrant facades of historic buildings, as well as its parks, open squares, greenhouses, and flowerbeds. The city's auditory landscape was equally enchanting—ranging from the early morning songs of birds to the resonant chimes of church bells, and from classical organ music to melodies and hymns that continually filled the air of Cathedral Square.

Another aspect of Timisoara that deeply impressed us was its designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2023. This recognition was both remarkable and unexpected for us. My daughters and I were captivated by every element: the history of the initiative itself, the various stages of its planning and implementation, the distinctiveness of the local traditions, and the thoughtful sequencing and complementarity of cultural and musical events. These elements combined to form an extraordinary synthesis of the arts, greatly enhancing the public's appreciation and experience of artistic works. During this period, the city was imbued with a palpable festival atmosphere. The influx of visitors to the Capital of Culture generated a significant surge in both the tourism and cultural sectors, further enriching the vibrant spirit of the city.

Each guest should have focused on their individual interests—whether to attend a particular event, listen to a specific musician or performance group, visit an art exhibition, or participate in a conference.

In our family, my daughters were introduced to piano, singing, dancing, and poetry recitation from an early age, and their passion for the arts has remained strong throughout their lives. As they grew older, their interest in the arts only deepened, they actively followed musical events, theatre premieres, the tours of their favourite musicians and vocalists, and regularly attended concerts, theatrical performances, and art exhibitions. However, the full-scale war in Ukraine has drastically altered these experiences. Access to music and theatre is now primarily limited to digital platforms such as YouTube and other multimedia tools. In this context, Timisoara's status as the European Capital of Culture offered a unique and invaluable opportunity for my daughters and me to once again engage directly with the arts, attending live cultural and musical events, experiencing artistic works firsthand, and enjoying personal interaction with performers.

The weekly cultural programme in Timisoara was exceptionally rich and diverse. One notable event was the JAZZx Festival, held from 28 June to 2 July 2023, which brought together some of the most prominent instrumentalists and jazz vocalists, including Jordan Rakei, Gogo Penguin, Roberto Fonseca, Jazzbois, Vandercris, among others. The cultural calendar also featured an Opera Week, during which we attended a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's Aida, and an Operetta Week, where we enjoyed the comedic operetta The Maid of Honour. In addition, we attended a chamber music concert featuring Antonio Vivaldi's The Four Seasons, as well as several piano recitals by distinguished contemporary pianists such as Reinis Zariņš (Latvia) and David Greilsammer (Jerusalem/Israel). These events left a profound impression on us. We were deeply moved by the performances and experienced immense aesthetic and emotional satisfaction from the opportunity to engage with such a vibrant cultural scene.

The festive atmosphere permeated every corner of Timisoara and resonated deeply within our hearts. Since the onset of Russian aggression, we had almost forgotten what it meant to experience joy or pleasure in life. Timisoara offered us that opportunity once again. Through its vibrant cultural life and warm environment, we were momentarily able to distance ourselves from the traumatic realities of war, the persistent worry for our homeland, and the sorrowful thoughts of our beloved Odessa, our family, and all that we were forced to leave behind.

After the extended and vibrant celebrations, the residents of Timisoara gradually returned to their daily routines and professional responsibilities. We, too, resumed our efforts toward integration into Romanian society. Our journey began with learning the Romanian language, which we approached with enthusiasm by attending language courses and conversation clubs (Clubul de Conversație). My daughters enrolled in both a gymnasium and a college, where they pursued their studies diligently. Meanwhile, I continued my professional work in speech therapy and became actively involved in the implementation of volunteer projects. Since April 2022, I have been offering my expertise as a volunteer speech therapist, focusing on the correction of speech disorders among Ukrainian refugee children. During initial consultations, I assessed the causes, symptoms, structure, and underlying mechanisms of each child's speech and communication challenges, subsequently developing individualized intervention strategies for their rehabilitation. The pedagogical methods I employed contributed not only to the correction of speech difficulties but also to the broader personal development of each child. Throughout my period of volunteer work, I had the opportunity to support dozens of Ukrainian children and their families, witnessing firsthand the positive transformations in their well-being and confidence. The children expressed deep appreciation and respect for my efforts, often acknowledging the individualized attention and professional care they received. This affirmation of my work reinforced the value of a tailored, empathetic approach in addressing both communicative and emotional needs.

My daughters enthusiastically participated in a wide range of activities and actively contributed to events and festive concerts organized by charitable organizations such as LOGS, Save the Children, AIDRom, and the Union of Ukrainians of Romania. During these occasions, they performed Ukrainian songs, showcased traditional dances, and recited poetry, thereby promoting Ukrainian culture and engaging meaningfully in the host community's cultural life.

For instance, the celebration of Ukraine's Independence Day on 24 August was vibrant and memorable. This national holiday holds deep significance, particularly today, as Ukrainians continue to defend their independence with extraordinary courage. The event took place in the city centre of Timisoara, where a series of cultural activities were held, in which my daughters and I actively participated. Together, we sang the Ukrainian national anthem; my granddaughter Amelia recited poetry, while Milena joined her and other girls in performing a

dance inspired by the beloved Ukrainian folk song "Oy u luzi chervona kalyna." The celebration concluded with a communal feast. As is already the custom, the charitable organizations offered a variety of delicious dishes to the Ukrainian community. In turn, Ukrainian women cooked traditional meals, proudly sharing their unique recipes. I, too, frequently participate in preparing food for holidays and community gatherings, always adding the distinctive "Odessa flavour" to my dishes. Over time, I have gained a circle of admirers who regularly inquire in advance about the specialties I plan to prepare for upcoming events.

In February 2023, we prepared to commemorate the anniversary of the war in Ukraine and to honour the memory of those who had lost their lives. As part of this commemoration, we handcrafted 400 sunflowers, treating them as powerful symbols of Ukraine, representing not only national identity but also the resilience of the Ukrainian people and their enduring hope for victory. These sunflowers were planted by Ukrainians in the Central City Park of Timisoara, where a solemn memorial gathering was held. The event continued with a funeral procession and a liturgical service in front of the Opera Theatre.

Life continued to unfold, bringing new moments of hope and celebration. One of the most vibrant events of 2024 was the joint Christmas and New Year celebration, where members of the Ukrainian community came together to mark the holidays. In keeping with tradition, our family contributed with a musical performance. Milena played the piano, accompanied by the violinist Stefa Nanu from West University, while Amelia delighted the audience with a vocal rendition of a popular Romanian song.

On 24 January 2025, we joined in the celebration of Romania's Unification Day—a national holiday commemorating the unification of the country and the formation of the modern Romanian state in 1918. As members of the Ukrainian community, we extended our heartfelt congratulations to the Romanian people on this significant occasion. In tribute to the event, we prepared a special musical performance for the residents of Timisoara. The atmosphere in the city's main squares was vibrant and welcoming, filled with the sounds of beloved Romanian folk songs, lively dancing, joyful laughter, and a spirit of shared festivity.

In concluding my life story, which is deeply intertwined with the welcoming and kind-hearted people of Romania, I would like to share the experiences of those I met along my journey in Timisoara, and how dear and close they have become to me. My friends represent a diverse range of nationalities, Romanians,

Moldovans, members of the Ukrainian diaspora, both women and men. They vary in age, character, and profession, yet all are united by the beauty and sincerity of their souls, their openness, and their deep love for others. They embody generosity and have shown an unwavering willingness to stand by me and my daughters during difficult times, offering support and assistance when we needed it most. For me, these individuals are the best people of Timisoara, and of Romania. Among them are Elena and Vladimir Lutic, Simona Stanjic, Ana Radu, Valentina Dodita, and Eduard Kebab. I am deeply grateful to God and fate for bringing these remarkable individuals into our lives. They extended their hands to us, enveloped us in their warmth, and restored our hope for the future.

## C. "Romania - living following the call of my heart"

by *Marina Verindeanu,*
primary school teacher, from Transcarpathian region, Ukraine
Translated by **Mariana Rosca**

My name is Marina, and I was born in a small, picturesque corner of Ukraine's Transcarpathian region, where I lived until the full-scale invasion of my homeland by Russian forces. From that moment on, my life split into two distinct parts: "BEFORE" and "AFTER." The life I refer to as "BEFORE" was filled with many beautiful and interesting moments, though not without its share of challenges and disappointments. Among the most cherished aspects of that time was my deep passion for music, a dream that brought light, inspiration, and purpose to my everyday life. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at music school, especially vocal lessons. I loved accompanying myself on a musical instrument during performances, writing poetry, and composing my own songs. I participated with great enthusiasm in various music competitions, where I performed original pieces, singing and accompanying myself, and often achieved outstanding results. One memorable highlight was winning the Miss Institute title during one of these events. Graduating from the Pedagogical Institute was another unforgettable milestone. Receiving my diploma as a primary school teacher filled me with pride and excitement for the future. However, after working for eight years in a secondary school, I began to feel the absence of my true passion, musical

performance, festive concerts, and the joy of solo appearances on stage. Eventually, an opportunity arose that rekindled that passion: I was offered the position of amateur art director at the local House of Culture. This role brought me immense joy, as it kept me constantly engaged in the creative process and allowed me to grow in many artistic directions. I organized and hosted public events, wrote scripts, prepared children's workshops, and more. Each of these activities fueled my creative development, leading to the composition of new songs, poems, and music, as well as the exciting experience of recording my own work in a professional studio. I obtained copyrights for my original songs and adopted the stage name Mari Nice, officially recognized by certificate. I began participating in an increasing number of new musical projects and competitions. As a frequent winner, I started gaining popularity, and the recognition filled me with indescribable happiness. I truly felt like I was on "cloud seventh", because music is my inner voice, my source of inspiration, strength, and joy!

Another significant happening of my life before the war was my marriage, an event that, despite its importance, unfortunately did not bring lasting happiness and did not endure over time. The onset of full-scale Russian aggression and military actions in Ukraine marked the beginning of a new and challenging phase in my life: the "after."

When the war began, the once lively atmosphere of our beloved House of Culture fell suddenly completely silent. In that moment, I realized I had no choice but to take action and start a new path in my life. Like so many Ukrainians, my family, my parents, my daughter, and I, faced the difficult decision of where to seek refuge. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians were fleeing to different EU countries, and we found ourselves asking the same question: Where do we go? Ultimately, we chose Romania. It was the first EU country to extend a helping hand to Ukrainian refugees and, geographically, it is close to us.

Together with other Ukrainian women, I arrived in Romania, in the beautiful city of Timişoara, nestled along the banks of the Bega River. Surrounded by picturesque parks, elegant architecture, stunning squares, fountains, and greenhouses brimming with fresh flowers, Timişoara immediately captivated me. This extraordinarily charming city is home to a philharmonic orchestra, numerous theatres, museums, exhibitions, universities, cheerful and always-smiling students, and people of many nationalities. The people of Timisoara are always warm, generous, and always ready to lend a helping hand. The spirit of Timişoara

inspired and awakened the most unforgettable feelings in the soul of a musician. I felt emotionally overwhelmed, my heart filled with joy and a powerful desire to share this newfound beauty with my beloved daughter.

At the same time, my journey toward integration into Romanian society was pretty hard and challenging. In the spring of 2022, I began working in the kitchen of a restaurant. However, just two weeks after, I was told that due to no knowledge of Romanian, I would be assigned solely to dishwashing duties. My heart sank, tears streamed down my face, and did not stop. I was crying because of frustration, humiliation, and injustice. I was a trained teacher, a musician by vocation, and yet there I was, standing at the sink for thirteen hours a day, with only one day off a week. This was hard both physically and mentally. Yet despite the hardship, I was fortunate to have kind, friendly, and patient colleagues who treated me with warmth. I did my best to resist and keep a positive mind. Even as I washed endless piles of dirty dishes, melodies and verses would born in my mind, that transformed into new songs that I was writing down during my work breaks.

But life often unfolds in unexpected ways, where hardship is followed by moments of unexpected joy. I still vividly remember the day I received my first salary. A wave of relief washed over me, knowing that my long, exhausting hours of work had been recognized. With that money, I was finally able to buy the essentials my daughter and I needed. That sense of dignity and self-sufficiency became a powerful motivation to keep going. I was very much looking forward to my day off, especially to visit the Christian Orthodox Cathedral. There, I offered heartfelt thanks to God for His guidance, blessings, and constant support. After all, it was essential to preserve my willpower and inner strength this period of trials and hope.

One of the most significant events in my life "after" was meeting my new destiny. It happened just as my three-month stay in Romania, as a tourist, was coming to an end. I had captured countless unforgettable moments in Timişoara, and I wanted to share them by posting photos on my Facebook page. To my surprise, these photos caught the attention of a Romanian man. As it turned out, we had already been connected on social media. He had added me as a friend at the very beginning of the war, reaching out with kind words and an offer to help. At the time, I didn't pay much attention, he lived far away, and any connection felt unrealistic amidst the chaos. Still, I remember thinking he looked sincere and kind in his photos. When he saw my photos from Romania months later, he

messaged me again. Through our renewed correspondence, he learned about my life in Timişoara and suggested we meet for coffee. That meeting marked the beginning of our love story. From the very first moment, I felt a deep and special connection, a sense of inner calm and warmth that told me I was in the right place, with the right person. My heart didn't mislead me; I knew I had made the right choice. The only real barrier between us was language, specifically, my lack of knowledge of Romanian. But rather than discouraging me, this challenge became a strong motivation to learn. It wasn't easy, given my demanding work schedule and inability to attend formal courses, but I found a way. I began learning Romanian through video lessons and audio recordings, which I listened to with headphones while working. I immersed myself in Romanian music, translating the lyrics to understand their meaning. Far from interfering with my work as a dishwasher, this practice uplifted my moral and gave me joy on reaching my target. Within three months, I had acquired a solid grasp of the Romanian language. My efforts paid off, not only was I promoted at work, but my partner also proposed to marry me. Life began to feel seem well once again. Soon after, we decided to bring my daughter to Timişoara. She was very happy by the news. Together, my husband and I built a strong, loving family. We do everything as a team: learning the language, helping with schoolwork, singing, playing the synthesizer, dancing, and even learning traditional Romanian dances. We celebrate holidays together and spend cherished moments with my husband's parents and extended family. My soul began to sing once more time, and with it, the desire to create returned. I felt the urge to write music, compose poetry, and craft something new and unique. Not long after, I discovered the Union of Ukrainians in Romania, based in Timişoara. I had the pleasure of meeting its staff, many of whom were fellow creatives. After hearing my daughter and me sing, they invited us to perform at a Christmas concert. Standing on stage again, singing with my daughter, was magical. I felt a rush of joy and excitement, with butterflies in my stomach. I was incredibly grateful that I can continue to create, write, and perform my songs again. I dedicate my music to my daughter, my children, my mother, my beloved Ukraine, the stunning beauty of my native Transcarpathia and of course about love! Music has become an inseparable part of our lives! My daughter knows all of my songs, and we often perform together as a duet.

I recently had the chance to visit Ukraine again, and I deeply felt the atmosphere of my native land. My love for our country, our language, and our

culture runs deep it's woven into my heart and my very blood, something that can never be taken away. Singing in Ukrainian brings a unique joy to my soul. It is a powerful connection to my roots, a reminder of who I am. From the bottom of my heart, I wish for Ukraine's victory and prosperity. We are a strong, courageous, and talented nation, deserving of a bright future and lasting peace on our land.

I am deeply grateful to the welcoming nation of Romania, to the wonderful city of Timișoara, and to the compassionate people of Romania who opened their hearts and homes to Ukrainian refugees, offering their support during one of the most challenging times in our lives. I also thank God and the heavens for the miracles that have touched my destiny and for the fulfillment of the happiness I, as a woman, had longed for. These blessings have filled my life with hope and gratitude, and I will forever cherish them.


## Instead of Conclusions

The first (A) refugee narrative presents a profound and multifaceted account of the Ukrainian refugee experience in Romania, weaving together historical context, personal testimony, and socio-political analysis. It opens by framing the refugee crisis as a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, now in its fourth year. This conflict is portrayed not only as a geopolitical event but also as a catalyst for the largest wave of forced migration in Europe since the Second World War. The author emphasizes how this migration has reshaped European societies, with Ukrainian refugees becoming both a humanitarian concern and a significant factor in international relations.

Romania emerges as a model of rapid and compassionate response. The involvement of various governmental levels, central, regional, and local, is matched by the proactive efforts of civil society organizations. The Union of Ukrainians in Romania plays a particularly central role, offering immediate assistance and long-term support structures for arriving refugees. Through this lens, the integration of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society is portrayed as a dynamic, evolving process, supported by both formal institutions and informal community networks. This process is anchored in a conceptual understanding of integration as enrichment and unification, a mutually transformative journey for both host and refugees.

The narrative is grounded in the personal story of Larysa and her family, who fled from Odesa to Timișoara. Their experience of integration begins with essential support and extends into language acquisition, cultural adaptation, and civic engagement. Language learning is described not just as a technical necessity but as a gateway to full participation in Romanian society. The family actively pursued language education, participating in conversation clubs and gradually building communicative competence, which enabled deeper social and academic integration.

The cultural dimension of integration is richly detailed. As a music educator and pianist, the author found common ground with Romanian colleagues, joining in collaborative teaching and performance projects. These engagements went beyond professional exchange, fostering intercultural dialogue and creating spaces where Ukrainian and Romanian children could connect through shared artistic experiences. Initiatives like masterclasses, joint concerts, and interdisciplinary performances highlighted the value of culture as a bridge between communities. The family's involvement in such projects reinforced their integration and helpes challenge the narratives of refugees as passive consumers of aids.

Education is presented as another crucial domain for integration. The author's daughter, a professional speech therapist, volunteered to assist refugee children with speech and communication challenges. Her work, grounded in pedagogical expertise and emotional sensitivity, made a tangible impact on the lives of dozens of children and their families. These contributions underline the idea that refugees can be active participants in strengthening host communities, not only receiving assistance but also offering knowledge, skills, and care.

Civic engagement emerges as a powerful theme throughout the narrative. The author's collaboration with initiatives aimed at combating misinformation, particularly about Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees, illustrates the broader political dimension of integration. By participating in public discussions, media literacy projects, and roundtables with Romanian journalists, she contributed to a more accurate and empathetic understanding of the refugee experience. Such efforts reflect a commitment to shaping public discourse and resisting the dehumanization of displaced people.

The narrative also emphasizes policy engagement, particularly in the field of education. The family's participation in a national educational forum, including presentations at the Romanian Ministry of Education, highlights the potential of refugee voices to influence institutional change. The recognition of their youngest

granddaughter's ideas, and the subsequent policy shifts allowing full enrollment and academic support for Ukrainian students, reflect the effectiveness of this advocacy. These developments are presented not only as administrative milestones but as symbolic steps in deepening Romanian-Ukrainian relations.

Throughout the account, the integration of Ukrainian refugees is portrayed as a collaborative process. The sustained efforts of Romanian authorities, civic organizations, and community leaders are acknowledged as essential to this success. The work of key figures and institutions is celebrated, suggesting that integration is not an abstract policy objective but the result of countless individual acts of empathy, organization, and perseverance.

Ultimately, this narrative reframes the refugee experience from one of displacement and loss to one of rebuilding, contribution, and mutual transformation. It highlights how integration can become a shared societal project rooted in dialogue, respect, and cultural exchange. By combining personal reflection with broader societal analysis, the narrative offers a hopeful yet grounded vision of how displaced people and host societies can shape a more inclusive future together.

The second narrative (B) offers a deeply personal and emotionally rich account of life as a Ukrainian refugee in Romania. It blends themes of loss, adaptation, cultural resilience, and the transformative power of community and art.

The story begins with a moment of emotional contrast, the celebration of Easter in a foreign land, away from the familiar warmth of Odessa, which sets the tone of lingering sorrow and hope. The war's impact is immediately clear: what was once a temporary displacement becomes an extended, uncertain exile. Yet, this grief is interwoven with gratitude for the safety and support offered by Romania, and in particular, Timişoara city.

Timişoara is described not just as a place of refuge but as a city of cultural and spiritual healing. The author offers a vivid and almost lyrical description of the city's beauty, its architectural elegance, musical ambiance, and natural charm. This poetic imagery contrasts starkly with the trauma of war, emphasizing how space and atmosphere can aid in psychological recovery.

A central theme in this narrative is the healing power of culture. The city's status as the 2023 European Capital of Culture is portrayed not only as a historical milestone but as a lifeline for Irina and her daughters. Their engagement with live music, theatre, and visual arts is a return to normalcy, to joy, and to a sense of

identity beyond their status as refugees. These experiences are not merely recreational; they serve as tools of emotional survival and cultural continuity.

Irina's professional contribution as a speech therapist offers another dimension to the narrative, one of active participation and mutual benefit. Rather than being passive recipients of aid, she and her daughters become contributors to Romanian society. Her detailed explanation of her work with refugee children underlines both the professional rigor and the human empathy involved in integration. It also reinforces the idea that refugees bring valuable skills and dedication, often becoming community builders in their host countries.

Her daughters, too, are portrayed as active cultural ambassadors. Their performances, recitations, and volunteerism demonstrate how younger generations of refugees can serve as bridges between cultures. Through their participation in public events like Ukraine's Independence Day, Christmas concerts, and Romanian national holidays, they affirm a dual identity: proudly Ukrainian, and respectfully engaged with Romanian culture.

Community is a recurring motif in this narrative. The friendships Irina develops with locals and other refugees are presented as transformative. These relationships are more than social connections, they are emotional anchors that offer stability, belonging, and hope. By naming the individuals who supported her, she adds a layer of personal authenticity, showing how integration is achieved not through policy alone, but through kindness, solidarity, and shared humanity.

The narrative is also a quiet but potent form of advocacy. It challenges stereotypes of refugees as burdens or outsiders. Instead, Irina's story illustrates that integration is a two-way process: when host communities are welcoming, and refugees are empowered to participate, the result is mutually enriching.

Therefore, this is a profoundly human story of displacement, resilience, and cultural affirmation. It conveys the emotional reality of war without sentimentality and offers a clear example of how personal agency, community support, and the arts can coalesce to foster healing and integration.

The *third narrative* (C) is a deeply personal and emotionally rich, as well, it accounts of how her life was split in two by the war in Ukraine. She frames her story around the powerful division of "Before" and "After," which serves as the central structure for the journey she recounts. This division underlines the profound rupture caused by the war, marking the end of a fulfilling life and the beginning of a painful but transformative new chapter.

Before the war, Marina lived in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, immersed in a life that, while not without its challenges, was deeply dear to her. Music was the thread that connected every part of her existence. It gave her joy, identity, and purpose. From music school to composing her own songs, from participating in competitions to performing on stage, Marina flourished as an artist. Her role as an amateur art director at the House of Culture reignited her creative spirit after a period of feeling disconnected while teaching. She found herself in a cycle of creation and growth, writing songs, recording in a studio, and gradually building recognition under her stage name, Mari Nice. This identity as an artist was deeply intertwined with her sense of self and her vision of the future.

The war shattered that life instantly. The House of Culture, once filled with music and celebration, fell silent. Faced with uncertainty and danger, Marina and her family made the difficult decision to leave Ukraine. They fled to Romania, seeking refuge in the city of Timișoara. Despite its beauty and welcoming atmosphere, integration into a new society was not easy. Marina found herself working in a restaurant kitchen, soon demoted to washing dishes due to her lack of Romanian language skills. This was a moment of deep humiliation and despair, going from respected teacher and celebrated musician to someone whose talents were unrecognized and whose work was physically draining and emotionally painful.

Yet even in those moments, music did not leave her. While scrubbing dishes for hours, melodies and verses would appear in her mind. This internal world of creativity remained alive, serving as a quiet defiance against the hardship around her. Her first paycheck brought a glimmer of dignity and the motivation to continue. She began learning Romanian during work breaks using audio lessons and music, driven by the desire to integrate and reclaim agency over her life.

As she started to rebuild, life took a surprising turn. A Romanian man who had once offered support online reconnected with her through social media. What began as a virtual conversation blossomed into a real-life relationship filled with warmth, trust, and love. Marina's sense of belonging grew, not only in her romantic relationship but also in her community. She was promoted at work, married her partner, and brought her daughter to Romania. Together, they formed a new family rooted in shared experiences, cultural exchange, and mutual support. Their life became a blend of music, tradition, and hope.

The turning point came when Marina was invited to perform again, this time in Timişoara, with her daughter, through the Union of Ukrainians in Romania. Being back on stage revived a long-lost part of her identity. The performance wasn't just a return to her passion; it symbolized the return of her voice, her spirit, and her place in the world. Marina continued composing and performing, dedicating her songs to her daughter, her homeland, and her love for life.

Her recent visit back to Ukraine reaffirmed her unbreakable connection to her roots. Singing in her native language brought her joy and a powerful sense of belonging. Though displaced, her love for Ukraine and its culture remains intact and essential to who she is. Her gratitude to Romania, to the city of Timişoara, and to those who welcomed her is heartfelt and sincere. She sees her journey not just as one of survival, but as one of transformation, made possible by music, faith, community, and the miracle of finding love in the unlikeliest of times.

Marina's story is a moving testament to the resilience of the human spirit. It speaks to how creativity can serve as a lifeline, how love can offer redemption, and how even in exile, one can reclaim joy, purpose, and identity. Her narrative stands out for its lyrical style, emotional candor, and its emphasis on personal rebirth through both hardship and grace.

*Analyzing the three refugee narratives* together reveals a rich tapestry of personal transformation, resilience, and identity preservation in the face of war-induced displacement. While each story is deeply individual, they are connected by overarching themes such as loss, adaptation, inner strength, and the power of creativity and community. The narratives present deeply personal yet universally resonant stories of loss, transformation, and resilience in the face of war and displacement. Each of the storytellers speaks from a unique perspective, yet their journeys are united by shared themes of trauma, adaptation, identity, and hope.

All three narratives begin by marking a clear emotional and psychological division in life: a "before" and "after" the war. Life before the invasion is portrayed with warmth and detail, filled with family, professional achievements, and personal dreams. There is a sense of rootedness and purpose in their home country, Ukraine, whether through careers, creativity, or community ties. The war's outbreak abruptly severs this continuity, forcing each of them into exile and thrusting them into a painful and uncertain "after."

The act of leaving home is described as disorienting and heart-wrenching. The refugees had to make rapid decisions with little information, often traveling long distances with children, and arriving in countries where they had no personal ties. Their early experiences in their host countries are marked by cultural dislocation, loneliness, and the painful realization of how much they had lost, not just homes, but also professional identities and social recognition. Where they were once teachers, musicians, or skilled workers, they suddenly found themselves doing menial jobs or struggling to communicate in an unfamiliar language.

Yet despite the hardship, each narrator shows remarkable perseverance. They begin to adapt, slowly, imperfectly, but with determination. Learning the host country's language becomes a vital first step, not just for survival but for reclaiming agency and dignity. For some, this process is humiliating and emotionally taxing; for others, it becomes a surprising source of strength and motivation. In each case, language acquisition represents a turning point in their integration and recovery.

Work, too, plays a significant role in their rebuilding. Although the jobs they initially take are often far below their skill levels, such as dishwashing or labor-intensive service roles, they approach them with determination. These jobs offer a sense of self-sufficiency, even pride, when the first paycheck arrives. That moment of financial independence is described as a milestone that reaffirms their worth and ability to support their families, even in drastically altered circumstances.

Creativity and self-expression are especially prominent in one of the narratives, where music becomes both a coping mechanism and a means of reconnection with the past self. The narrator channels her emotional pain into writing songs and poetry, eventually returning to performance. This return to art is not just a personal victory, it symbolizes the restoration of identity and purpose. Her creativity enables her to transform sorrow into beauty and to inspire others through her resilience.

Relationships and love are essential anchors for all three individuals. Whether in the form of family, children, or new romantic partners, these connections provide emotional support and the motivation to endure. In one particularly moving case, a new romantic relationship blooms unexpectedly from the ashes of war. It becomes a source of joy and new beginnings, helping the

narrator to embrace her new life and to build a loving home where music and tradition are shared and celebrated.

Faith, whether religious or in humanity itself, also emerges as a sustaining force. Gratitude is expressed frequently, not just toward God but toward the host country and its people, who offered safety and kindness when it was most needed. This gratitude coexists with a deep, unshakable love for Ukraine. Returning home, even briefly, evokes powerful emotions and reaffirms cultural identity. Singing in Ukrainian, visiting the land of their ancestors, or teaching their children about their heritage become ways to remain connected to who they are, despite being physically distant.

Taken together, the three stories offer a powerful composite of the Ukrainian refugee experience. They show the devastating impact of war but also illuminate the extraordinary human capacity to adapt, rebuild, and flourish.

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**CONCLUSIONS**

The war in Ukraine has fundamentally altered the landscape of humanitarian governance and regional security, creating a watershed moment for how states respond to forced displacement and geopolitical instability. This book has examined the responses of Romania and the Republic of Moldova—two countries sharing geographical proximity and deep historical connections with Ukraine—to one of the most significant refugee crises in recent European memory. In doing so, it has traced both countries' efforts to navigate an unprecedented humanitarian emergency while highlighting broader transformations in migration governance, legal frameworks, and societal values.

One of the central findings of this study is that crises, while disruptive and devastating, also act as powerful catalysts for institutional and policy innovation. Faced with an urgent need to act, both Romania and Moldova rapidly expanded and adapted their legal and institutional frameworks. Romania benefited from access to EU structures and support, enabling a relatively swift and coordinated response. Meanwhile, Moldova, despite facing considerable economic and political constraints, demonstrated remarkable institutional agility and a deep-seated civic willingness to respond with solidarity. This contrast reveals how different levels of integration within European frameworks influence crisis management capacities, while also emphasizing the agency of smaller states operating under intense pressure.

The crisis has also brought into sharper focus the growing importance of human security as a guiding principle in both humanitarian and migration policy. The responses examined in this book illustrate a transition from a state-centric conception of security—focused primarily on borders and sovereignty—to one that centers on the protection and well-being of individuals and communities. This shift, increasingly visible across Europe, reflects the urgent need to reconceptualize security through human rights, social inclusion, and the protection of vulnerable populations.

Integration has emerged as one of the most enduring challenges in the aftermath of emergency response. While both countries initially demonstrated high levels of solidarity and mobilization, the long-term integration of Ukrainian refugees has revealed systemic difficulties. In Romania, structural barriers such as limited access to housing, employment, and social services have hindered

sustainable inclusion. In Moldova, weaker economic infrastructure and fewer institutional resources have exacerbated these challenges. Integration, as shown throughout this book, cannot be achieved solely through humanitarian goodwill; it requires coordinated policies, long-term planning, and the political will to address underlying inequalities.

A particularly significant aspect of this study is the role played by civil society and grassroots actors. In both Romania and Moldova, non-governmental organizations, volunteer groups, and local communities stepped in to fill gaps left by state institutions. Their responsiveness and proximity to affected populations proved vital in the initial phase of the crisis. These developments signal an important shift in humanitarian governance, with non-state actors increasingly positioned as legitimate and necessary partners in the implementation of refugee and migration policy. However, for their role to remain effective and sustainable, formal recognition, adequate funding, and long-term partnerships are essential.

The book has also engaged critically with the digitalization of migration management. While digital technologies—such as biometric databases and AI-driven systems—promise increased efficiency in border control and refugee registration, they also introduce a new set of legal and ethical dilemmas. The growing reliance on digital tools raises questions about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and access to rights. The analysis suggests that technological solutions must be grounded in robust legal safeguards to avoid reinforcing systemic discrimination or creating new forms of exclusion.

In placing refugee voices at the center of the analysis, particularly through the narratives presented in the final chapters, this book underscores the importance of a participatory and human-centered approach to migration studies. Personal testimonies of displacement and resettlement challenge dominant top-down models of governance and provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of integration processes. These stories reveal not only the hardships faced by refugees but also their agency, resilience, and aspirations—elements that are often overlooked in policy debates and academic discourse alike.

Beyond the immediate humanitarian response, the refugee crisis has far-reaching geopolitical implications. It has tested the cohesion of the European Union, revealed the fragility of regional alliances, and accelerated Moldova's aspirations for closer alignment with the EU. Romania's role as both a frontline state and EU member has highlighted the delicate balance between national

interests and collective European responsibilities. These developments reaffirm that refugee protection cannot be viewed in isolation; it is deeply intertwined with foreign policy, regional security, and long-term stability.

Ultimately, the refugee crisis examined in this book offers important lessons for the future of humanitarian governance. It demonstrates that preparedness, flexibility, and cross-sector collaboration are essential for effective crisis management. Furthermore, it affirms that migration policies must be integrated into broader development and social inclusion strategies if they are to succeed. Above all, the experiences of Romania and Moldova reveal that sustainable responses to displacement must rest on a foundation of shared responsibility, human dignity, and ethical commitment.

This book concludes by affirming that the events unleashed by the war in Ukraine are not merely a test of institutional resilience but a profound challenge to the values that underpin democratic societies. The widespread displacement and the suffering caused by war force us to confront the fragility of peace, the limits of political will, and the urgency of rethinking solidarity in the twenty-first century. As such, the lessons drawn here serve not only as an academic reflection but also as a call to action—toward a more humane, inclusive, and responsive framework for migration and security in an increasingly unstable world.