Romania:
Management of Consular Crises.
Case Studies and Perspectives (2020–2023)

Valentin MACEC, Cătălin BABA

Abstract. Consular crises are exceptional events that require rapid and effective interventions to protect Romanian citizens abroad who are in danger. These crises can be triggered by various factors, including natural disasters, armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, or global security events. In recent years, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) has faced the challenge of managing multiple crises simultaneously, coordinating diplomatic efforts and evacuation operations in collaboration with international partners and EU structures. Between 2020 and 2023, Romania dealt with a series of major international crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, evacuations from Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine, earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, conflicts in Sudan and Niger, and the escalation of violence in Israel and the Gaza Strip. The purpose of this study is to analyze Romania's response to consular crises, focusing on intervention mechanisms, interinstitutional coordination, and collaboration with international partners. The study aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) and their impact on protecting Romanian citizens in high-risk areas. The methodology includes an analysis of official documents, MAE reports, and public statements, alongside relevant case studies for each major crisis. This approach evaluates the response capacity of the Crisis Cell and the Consular Department, as well as the effectiveness of European mechanisms such as the Civil Protection Mechanism and the Integrated EU Crisis Response Mechanism.

The results indicate a substantial increase in Romania's intervention capacity, highlighted by the

Valentin MACEC

PhD Student, Doctoral School of Administration and Public Policies, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
E-mail: valentinmacec@gmail.com

Cătălin BABA

Professor, Doctoral School of Administration and Public Policies, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
E-mail: baba@fspac.ro

repatriation of thousands of Romanian citizens, the facilitation of transit through humanitarian corridors, and enhanced collaboration with international organizations. Interinstitutional cooperation and decision-making flexibility were essential to the success of these operations. The MAE's management of consular crises during 2020–2023 demonstrated the importance of a rapid, well-coordinated response supported by international partnerships. The experience gained underscores the need for continuous adaptation and improvement of crisis intervention procedures. Romania's efforts during this period serve as an example of best practices in consular crisis management and may serve as a model for other EU member states facing similar challenges.

Keywords: Consular crisis, Romanian consular crisis, civil protection, international cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

JEL Classification: F51, F52, H84, K33, R41

Introduction

Consular crises were significant points of tension in international relations, particularly during the 19th century, when diplomatic conflicts among major powers intensified amid disputes over the protection of citizens abroad (Hofius, 2022). These crises were often triggered by the arrest or allegedly unjust treatment of foreign nationals, prompting governments to exert pressure on host states to protect their citizens and safeguard national interests.

During this period, competition among the major powers—France, Great Britain, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire—led to numerous consular incidents that served as pretexts for diplomatic or even military interventions (Ozavci, 2023). A notable example is the Ottoman Empire, where European great powers exploited their consular status to interfere in the empire's internal affairs under the guise of protecting Christians or their own citizens. These conflicts frequently escalated into international crises that tested the regional balance of power.

Another key aspect of consular crises was their use as tools for propaganda and political legitimization (Chernobrov, 2022). States involved in these crises often used them to strengthen their positions on the international stage or to justify expansionist or influence-driven actions. While diplomacy and negotiation played a vital role in resolving these crises, the lack of swift solutions sometimes led to armed conflicts or the imposition of coercive measures on the affected states (Rosyidin & Dir, 2021).

As international law solidified and diplomatic relations became more firmly regulated, the frequency and severity of consular crises diminished (Butt, 2024). However, such situations continue to arise in the contemporary world, albeit in different forms, still reflecting the

complexities of international relations and the ongoing need for effective mediation and negotiation mechanisms.

In Romania, consular crises marked tense moments in the country's foreign relations, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries and the early 20th century, when the state's political and legal status was heavily influenced by the major powers. These crises stemmed from foreign consular interventions in domestic affairs, the protection of foreign citizens and merchants, and the conflicts between empires vying for influence over the Romanian Principalities.

The purpose of this study is to analyze Romania's response to consular crises within the framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) during the period 2020–2023, focusing on intervention mechanisms, interinstitutional coordination, and collaboration with international partners. The study aims to provide a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures adopted by the MAE and their impact on safeguarding Romanian citizens in high-risk areas.

The methodology used involves analyzing official documents, MAE reports, public statements, and case studies from each major crisis. This approach assesses the response capacity of both the Crisis Cell and the Consular Department, as well as the effectiveness of European mechanisms, such as the Civil Protection Mechanism and the Integrated EU Crisis Response Mechanism.

Historical Context and Causes of Consular Crises

Before the formation of the modern Romanian state, Wallachia and Moldavia were under Ottoman suzerainty, yet they enjoyed significant autonomy (Berindei, 2011). Amid the influence of the Habsburg and Russian Empires, the European great powers used the consular institution both to protect their subjects and to expand their political and economic control over the region (Ardeleanu, 2025).

Consulates from France, Britain, Russia, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire became key players in the political and economic life of the Romanian Principalities (Jelavich, 2004). These consulates not only represented their respective states' interests but also exerted influence over local rulers, intervening in their appointments and managing internal affairs. Conflicts among these consulates often led to diplomatic crises, some of which had significant consequences for Romania's political status.

Table 1 summarizes the main consular crises in the Romanian space from the 18th to the 19th century, highlighting the actors involved, the causes of the conflicts, and their consequences. These diplomatic episodes mirror the competition among major powers for influence in the Romanian Principalities, the role of foreign consuls in crisis management, and their impact on the region's political and territorial evolution.

Table 1. Consular Crises in the Romanian Space

Period	Consular Crisis	Actors Involved	Causes	Consequences
18th c. – early 19th c.	Russo–Ottoman Consular Crisis in the Romanian Principalities	Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, local rulers	The Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca (1774) allowing Russia to protect Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire; tensions over privileged treatment for Russian merchants	Increased Russian consular influence; repeated conflicts with the Ottomans and Austrians; pretexts for Russian military interventions and occupation of the Principalities
First half of the 19th c.	British and French Consular Crisis during the Organic Regulations period	France, Great Britain, Russia, Ottoman Empire	Increased Russian influence after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829); accusations of abuses by the Russian administration against British and French merchants	Diplomatic conflicts; support for liberal reforms and 1848 revolutionary movements (e.g., Edouard Thouvenel); tensions between Russia and Western powers
1859	Consular Crisis during the Union of the Principalities	France, Russia, Austria, Ottoman Empire	Austria's and the Ottoman Empire's opposition to the double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza; France's support for the union	Diplomatic pressure and consular interventions; France's contribution to the international recognition of the Union
1877–1878	Consular Crisis during the War of Independence	Romania, Russia, Ottoman Empire	Russia's attempts to maintain influence over Romania; disputes over territories south of the Danube (Cahul, Bolgrad, Ismail)	Tensions between Russia and Romania after independence was achieved; diplomatic negotiations over new borders of the Romanian state

1. The Russo-Ottoman Consular Crisis in the Romanian Principalities (18th–19th Century)

One of the most tense diplomatic episodes of this period was the conflict between the Russian and Ottoman Empires over the protection of Orthodox Christians in Wallachia and Moldavia. The Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca (1774) granted Russia the right to intervene on behalf of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, thereby increasing Russian consular influence in the Principalities (Mischevca, 2023).

Russian consuls became involved in numerous conflicts with Ottoman authorities and local rulers, demanding preferential treatment for Russian merchants and settlers (Meyer, 2007). This stance led to tensions not only with the Ottomans but also with the Austrians, who were also vying to maintain their influence in the region. These consular conflicts often served as pretexts for military intervention, as evidenced by the Russo-Turkish wars, which resulted in repeated Russian occupations of the Principalities.

2. The British and French Consular Crisis in the Organic Regulations Period

In the first half of the 19th century, following the establishment of Russian administration under the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), France and Great Britain became increasingly concerned about Russia's growing influence over the Romanian Principalities (Ciachir, 2017). French and British consuls in Bucharest and Iași were frequently involved in diplomatic disputes with Russian and Ottoman authorities, accusing them of mistreating their merchants and subjects (Mitea & Mitea, 2025).

A notable example is the case of British consul Robert Gilmour Colquhoun, who exposed corruption within the Russian administration in the Principalities and supported the liberal reforms proposed by Romanian boyars (Jianu, 2011). French consul Edouard Thouvenel also actively supported the 1848 revolutionary movements, which led to direct conflicts with Russian and Ottoman authorities, who sought to limit French influence in the region (Arıkanlı, 2022).

3. The Consular Crisis during the Union of the Principalities (1859)

The process of uniting Wallachia and Moldavia under the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza was marked by significant consular tensions, particularly among France, Russia, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire. Napoleon III's France supported the union, while Austria and the Ottoman Empire opposed it (Özesmer, 2022). Austrian consuls pressured local leaders to prevent Cuza's double election, while French consuls actively supported the unionists. After the union of 1859, foreign diplomats continued to play a crucial role in securing international recognition of the new state, leading to several diplomatic crises among the major powers.

4. The Consular Crisis during the War of Independence (1877–1878)

Another major diplomatic point of tension arose following the 1877–1878 Russo–Turkish War, when Romania sought international recognition of its independence (Florescu, 2021). Russia, determined to maintain its influence over Romania, saw its consulates clash with Romanian authorities over the status of southern Danubian territories, specifically Cahul, Bolgrad, and Ismail.

In the contemporary international context, marked by political instability, armed conflicts, pandemics, and natural disasters, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) has been tasked with managing multiple consular crises simultaneously. These situations required rapid interventions to protect Romanian citizens abroad, coordination of diplomatic efforts at the international level, and cooperation with European Union (EU) structures and strategic partners.

State of Emergency vs. Consular Crisis

The term *"state of emergency"* applies to exceptional non-military events that endanger people's lives, health, the environment, or material and cultural assets (Art. 2, Para. 1, Letter a, of Government Emergency Ordinance 21/2004 on the National Emergency Management System). To return to normality, urgent measures and actions are needed, involving specialized resources and coordinated management of the forces involved. This concept is regulated by GEO 21/2004 on the National Emergency Management System, under which the MAE's Center for Operational Coordination of Emergency Situations (COSSU) operates.

A *"consular crisis"* refers to a situation caused by natural disasters, armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, or other events simultaneously affecting a significant number of people, including Romanian citizens or nationals of other EU member states. Defined in Law No. 62/2019 on consular activity, the concept is employed in the process of granting consular assistance and protection. The notion of *"state of emergency"* also appears in this law, referring to the plans of the General Directorate of Consular Affairs for Emergencies (MDOC) and to individual cases requiring consular protection.

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emergency situations are categorized primarily as:

1. Those affecting Romanian and European citizens abroad.

2. Those concerning Romania's own missions, delegations, and consular offices (MDOC) and their personnel.

3. Those relating to diplomatic missions and consular offices accredited in Romania, including foreign citizens for whom diplomatic procedures are being undertaken.

Phases in Managing a Consular Crisis

Managing a consular crisis involves several key steps, including monitoring and issuing warnings, providing public information, handling the crisis itself, and offering consular assistance. Specialized bodies such as COSSU, the GSD (Group for Special Situations), the Consular Department (DCons), and DICC-UCPPC (Department for Interinstitutional Coordination and Crisis Management—Unit for Coordination of Policies and Consular Programs) play distinct roles in executing these tasks during both crisis situations and routine monitoring periods.

At the European level, consular coordination is administered by the Consular Affairs Division—ISP.4 through the COCON working group, which sets out the EU's approaches to consular matters. This group ensures consular dialogue with states such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, analyzes consular crises, monitors cooperation initiatives, and reviews relevant legislative proposals.

An essential component of crisis management is the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism, which supports decision-making at the EU level and ensures a coordinated response to major crises. This mechanism includes roundtable meetings for information exchange, Integrated Situation Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) reports, and a web platform for sharing information. IPCR can be activated in full mode or limited to information exchange, depending on the severity of the situation. Currently, IPCR remains active for the war in Ukraine and the migration crisis, while the mechanisms for COVID-19 and the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria have been deactivated and placed under monitoring status.

These structures and mechanisms underscore the importance of efficient management of consular crises and emergency situations, both nationally and at a European level, to protect citizens and maintain diplomatic stability.

Managing Consular Crises in EU Member States

EU member states adopt various organizational models for managing consular crises, according to each state's institutional arrangements. Some countries have specialized crisis centers at the ministerial level, while others handle such situations through consular departments or specialized structures. Table 2 compares the primary consular crisis management structures across six European countries, highlighting responsibilities, operational models, and available human resources.

As shown in Table 2, France's Crisis and Support Center operates as a distinct entity under the direct supervision of the minister's office, with exclusive responsibility for managing major events affecting French citizens. The Consular Department plays a secondary role, focusing on individual cases rather than crisis management. The staffing structure includes

Table 2. Managing Consular Crises in EU Member States

Country	Crisis Management Structure	Operation	Staff/Resources
France	Crisis and Support Center (a distinct entity under direct ministerial coordination)	Manages exclusively major crises, separate from the Consular Department	90 people in the Crisis Center + 110 in the Consular Department
Germany	Crisis Response Center within the Federal Foreign Office	Operates 24/7, monitors events, issues travel advisories, coordinates with other ministries	Includes a Citizen Services Unit for detailed assistance
Belgium	Separate Crisis Center under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Coordinates repatriations and manages international crises	Call center with 15 operators; staff increases for exceptional circumstances (e.g, COVID-19 pandemic)
Estonia	Monitoring Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs + Consular Department	Continuous monitoring of international events; 24/7 emergency hotline	Responsibility shared between two departments, each with specialized divisions
Poland	Operational Center within the Consular Affairs Department	24/7 operation, coordinates consular interventions	2 designated coordinators; staff added as needed
Spain	Consular Emergencies Division (in process of developing a Crisis Center)	Handles emergency situations, rapid personnel mobilization	24/7 helpline staffed by 150 volunteer diplomats

90 people in the Crisis Center and 110 in the central administration of the Consular Department.

In Germany, the Crisis Response Center within the Federal Foreign Office ensures 24/7 operation, monitoring potentially escalating events and coordinating interventions. It also manages travel advisories and oversees cooperation with other ministries and international partners. An attached Citizen Services Unit handles detailed consular assistance requests.

Belgium has a separate Crisis Center within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for managing international crises and coordinating repatriations. In emergencies, a call center with up to 15 operators can be activated, and staffing levels may be significantly increased in exceptional circumstances, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Estonia's Monitoring Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs monitors international developments and operates a 24/7 emergency phone line outside normal working hours. In times of crisis, responsibilities are shared between the Monitoring Department and the Consular Department, which includes two specialized divisions.

Poland does not have a dedicated crisis center at the ministerial level, but its Consular Affairs Department houses an Operational Center that operates 24/7 to monitor global events and coordinate crisis responses. Two coordinators are specifically appointed for crisis management, with staffing levels adjustable as needed.

Spain has not yet established a fully developed crisis center within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but a specialized structure is under development. Currently, the Consular Emergencies Division responds to urgent matters and can deploy additional staff rapidly if required. During recent emergencies, a 24/7 helpline, staffed by 150 volunteer diplomats, was activated to manage high call volumes.

The institutional organization for managing consular crises varies significantly across EU member states. Some countries, such as France, Germany, and Belgium, have well-defined, dedicated structures, while others, such as Poland and Spain, rely on consular departments with expanded responsibilities or flexible mechanisms that can be activated in emergencies. This diversity reflects each country's specific approach to crisis management and citizen protection abroad.

Institutional Structure for Managing Consular Crises

The Crisis Cell

The Crisis Cell of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the main body responsible for managing emergency situations involving Romanian citizens abroad. It is activated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and coordinated at the secretary of state level. Its operations are closely linked to international events, requiring it to respond swiftly, effectively, and according to the specifics of each situation.

A key responsibility of the Crisis Cell is to monitor international risk situations. This involves ongoing global analysis, identifying potential threats, and evaluating their potential impact on Romanian nationals abroad. Information is collected from official sources, diplomatic channels, security agencies, and international organizations to ensure responses are accurate and well-grounded. Based on these assessments, the Crisis Cell may issue alerts, travel advisories, or evacuation warnings for high-risk areas.

Another critical aspect of the Crisis Cell's work is maintaining constant communication with Romania's diplomatic missions and consular offices. This global network serves as a crucial support system for Romanian citizens in distress, providing real-time updates on unfolding events. Embassies and consulates play a pivotal role in evacuation operations by offering logistical resources, coordinating with local authorities, and serving as official communication channels for affected individuals.

In addition to working with national structures, the Crisis Cell maintains continuous interaction with international institutions such as the European Commission, NATO, and the UN. These partnerships create a broader framework for cooperation, allowing Romania to receive logistical support, expert assistance, and access to international protection and consular mechanisms. In numerous crises—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, and evacuations from Ukraine—this collaboration significantly enhanced the repatriation of Romanian citizens, utilizing the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

Carrying out evacuation and repatriation operations is one of the most complex tasks managed by the Crisis Cell. These operations require meticulous planning, immediate transport solutions, ensuring the safety of evacuees, and coordinating with local authorities in affected areas. Depending on the nature of each crisis, evacuations may be conducted by air, land, or sea, utilizing Romania's own resources, bilateral agreements, or international support mechanisms.

The effectiveness of the Crisis Cell relies on its ability to swiftly mobilize necessary resources, make flexible decisions, and collaborate closely with both governmental and international structures involved in crisis management. Its continuous operation and adaptability to diverse contexts have made it a cornerstone in providing consular protection to Romanian citizens facing critical situations across the globe.

The Consular Department and the Group for Special Situations (GSD)

The Consular Department and the Group for Special Situations (GSD) are fundamental structures within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensuring the protection and support of Romanian citizens abroad, particularly in emergencies or crises. Their work is continuously adapted to global developments to respond promptly and effectively to the needs of those affected by unforeseen events (Figure 1).
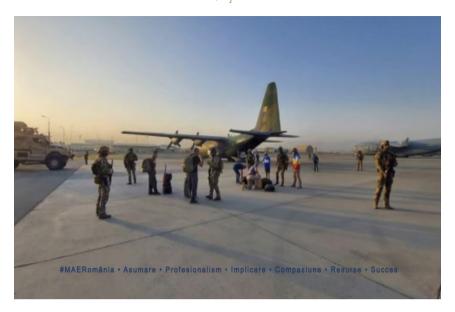
Figure 1. The Consular Department and the Group for Special Situations (GSD)

Within the MAE, the Consular Department plays a central role in coordinating all consular services and overseeing procedures for assisting Romanian citizens abroad. These services encompass issuing travel documents, providing legal assistance, and responding to crises. Maintaining constant communication with Romania's diplomatic missions and consular offices is crucial for the department's success, ensuring quick information exchange and timely intervention when necessary.

A key component of this department is the Group for Special Situations (GSD), a specialized body that deals with urgent or exceptional cases that do not reach the level of triggering the Crisis Cell but still require a swift and coordinated response. GSD interventions cover a variety of critical scenarios:

– **Supporting Romanian citizens affected by natural disasters or accidents abroad.** These interventions involve quickly identifying those at risk, offering consular assistance, and, if necessary, facilitating repatriation. In serious incidents, GSD collaborates with local authorities and international organizations to ensure safe evacuation and access to medical care or essential resources.

– **Assisting Romanian seafarers stranded on foreign vessels.** Such individuals face significant risks amid armed conflicts, commercial disputes, or administrative hurdles that prevent them from returning home. GSD monitors these cases and, via Romania's embassies and consulates, works to repatriate affected crews. Occasionally, negotiations with local authorities or involved companies are necessary to resolve legal or logistical barriers preventing release of the seafarers.

– **Medical evacuations and emergency repatriations.** Romanian citizens overseas who suffer serious accidents, critical health issues, or who fall victim to crises receive

assistance for transportation back to Romania or to suitable medical facilities in other countries. Depending on the severity, GSD may coordinate flights, air ambulances, or other logistical solutions to ensure proper transport in optimal conditions.

Through these combined efforts, the Consular Department and GSD play an essential role in safeguarding Romanians abroad and illustrate the state's capacity to intervene effectively during emergencies. By working closely with diplomatic missions, international partners, and domestic institutions, these bodies bolster the consular assistance system and protect the rights and safety of Romanian citizens regardless of their circumstances overseas.

Managing Consular Crises from 2020 to 2023

Between 2020 and 2023, Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed a series of major consular crises, requiring swift, complex interventions to protect and evacuate Romanians from areas affected by conflicts, natural disasters, or public health emergencies. Notable events included the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, the war in Ukraine, the catastrophic earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, armed conflicts in Sudan and Niger, and the escalation of tensions in Israel and the Gaza Strip.

These crises required the activation of the MAE Crisis Cell, coordination with international partners, and the allocation of significant diplomatic and logistical resources. Evacuation and repatriation operations were conducted under high-risk conditions, involving special flights, humanitarian corridors, and extensive consular support.

Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of the main consular crises managed by Romania from 2020 to 2023, including the measures taken and their impact on the Romanian citizens affected.

The COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2021)

The period between 2020 and 2023 presented significant challenges for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) in managing consular crises, testing its ability to respond quickly and effectively when Romanian citizens were endangered abroad. Some of the most notable challenges included the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, the war in Ukraine, the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria, armed conflicts in Sudan and Niger, and the escalating violence in Israel and Gaza.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, was one of the biggest tests. The pandemic affected millions of people worldwide, and the resulting travel restrictions created a significant crisis for Romanian nationals stranded abroad. The sudden suspension of flights and closure of borders led to an overwhelming number of requests for consular assistance, many of which were urgent and required immediate intervention to facilitate the repatriation of Romanian citizens.

Table 3. Analysis of Evacuation Operations and Consular Crisis Management (2020–2023)

Period	Crisis	Context	Measures Taken	Impact
2020–2021	COVID-19 Pandemic	Severe travel restrictions, closed borders, suspended flights, global health crisis	Activation of MAE Crisis Cell, organization of special air flights, activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, negotiation of transit corridors, transfer of severe COVID-19 patients to EU hospitals	12,500 Romanian citizens repatriated, 11,000 citizens assisted in transit, 86 COVID-19 patients transported and treated in European hospitals
2021	Evacuation of Romanian citizens from Afghanistan	Withdrawal of international forces, collapse of Afghan government, Taliban takeover	MAE Crisis Cell activated, evacuation of Romanian citizens and Afghan collaborators, international coordination	49 Romanian citizens evacuated, 156 Afghan collaborators rescued, 7 citizens of other states assisted
2022–2023	Crisis in Ukraine	Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, deteriorating security, refugees, urgent evacuations	Security alert, repatriation of diplomats and citizens, support for Romanian sailors and workers, activation of consular task force	76 Romanian diplomats repatriated, 15 members of international organizations evacuated, 14 Romanian sailors rescued, 11 workers repatriated
2023	Earthquake in Turkey and Syria	7.8 Mw quake followed by a 7.7 Mw aftershock, extensive destruction, humanitarian crisis	MAE Crisis Cell activated, swift situational assessment, air evacuation, consular support	10 Romanian citizens evacuated from Kahramanmaraş, 8 Romanian citizens + 2 Poles evacuated from Adana, 50 consular assistance requests handled
2023	Crisis in Sudan	Civil war between Sudanese forces and paramilitary groups, collapsed infrastructure, blocked transport	MAE Crisis Cell activated, evacuations in collaboration with partner states (France, Sweden, Greece, Saudi Arabia, UK)	40 Romanian citizens evacuated, 7 family members of other nationalities, extensive logistical and diplomatic support
2023	Escalation of the Conflict in Israel and Gaza	Attacks and bombings in Israel and Gaza, thousands of civilians at risk	Coordinated air evacuation, diplomatic dialogue with Israeli and Egyptian authorities, extensive consular assistance	2,220 Romanian citizens repatriated from Israel (28 air flights), 250 Romanian citizens registered for Gaza evacuation, facilitation of crossing at Rafah

In response, the MAE launched one of its largest-ever repatriation operations, involving close coordination between the Crisis Cell, diplomatic missions, and international organizations. Over 12,500 Romanian citizens were successfully repatriated from both EU and third countries, often via special flights and humanitarian corridors. This complex operation addressed a wide range of challenging situations, including stranded seasonal workers, merchant ship crews, tourists, and students unable to continue their studies due to border closures and travel disruptions. The success of this operation highlighted the MAE's ability to respond swiftly and effectively under extreme pressure.

To enhance the efficiency of evacuations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, a crucial instrument that enabled Romania to collaborate with other EU member states for organizing joint repatriation flights. This mechanism proved invaluable in facilitating the repatriation of Romanian citizens. Many Romanians were able to secure seats on special flights organized by other countries, while Romania, in turn, facilitated the repatriation of citizens from other nations on flights operated by Romanian carriers.

The successful use of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism not only assisted Romanian citizens but also underscored the importance of European solidarity during times of crisis. This cooperation ensured that stranded individuals had options for returning home despite the global lockdowns and restrictions.

Another critical aspect of this operation involved negotiating special transit corridors. These corridors were instrumental in helping Romanian citizens who were stranded in transit countries or who had lost access to transportation options. By providing these corridors, more than 11,000 Romanians were able to travel across closed borders and receive the necessary support to return home.

Furthermore, one of the most pressing concerns was the transfer of critically ill COVID-19 patients to medical facilities in the EU. With Romania facing overwhelming pressure on its healthcare system, 86 seriously ill Romanian patients were transferred to hospitals across Austria, Poland, Hungary, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, and other European nations. This collaborative effort required meticulous coordination between the MAE, foreign health ministries, air ambulance services, and local healthcare units to ensure the patients received timely and appropriate medical care.

Through these collective actions, Romania demonstrated its commitment to the safety and well-being of its citizens abroad, while also showcasing the importance of international cooperation and preparedness in responding to global crises.

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the importance of a rapid response and a well-organized infrastructure for managing consular emergencies. Through effective resource mobilization and close cooperation at the national and international levels, Romania provided support to its citizens in need, demonstrating its ability to handle large-scale crises and protect Romanian nationals abroad, no matter where they were located.

Evacuation of Romanian Citizens from Afghanistan (2021)

The withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan and the sudden collapse of its government in August 2021 led to one of the most severe humanitarian and security crises of recent years. Amid mounting violence and the Taliban takeover, thousands of foreign nationals and Afghans sought to leave the country, and Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport became the focal point of complicated evacuation operations. Against this backdrop, Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) activated its interinstitutional Crisis Cell to evacuate Romanians remaining in Afghanistan, as well as vital Afghan collaborators—those who had worked alongside Romanian forces deployed in the area of operations.

The operations carried out by Romania successfully evacuated 49 Romanian citizens, including diplomatic personnel, employees of international organizations, and Romanians working in Afghanistan. These evacuations took place in an extremely uncertain and perilous environment, requiring robust diplomatic efforts to guarantee safe passage to the airport.

Additionally, Romania placed great emphasis on evacuating crucial Afghan collaborators, including translators, guides, security personnel, journalists, human rights activists, and judges who faced severe reprisal risks from the Taliban. In total, 156 Afghan citizens were rescued with Romanian assistance and transported out of Afghanistan, later joining relocation or protection programs.

A key factor in the success of these operations was cooperation with international partners to secure safe exit routes and adequate logistics for evacuees. Romania also supported the evacuation of seven foreign nationals from allied states, reinforcing the shared efforts to handle this crisis.

These operations were highly complex, demanding coordination among many domestic and international institutions, including the Ministry of National Defense, which provided aircraft for transporting evacuees. Romania's embassies in the region were critical in facilitating evacuations and providing essential logistical support.

The Afghanistan crisis highlighted the necessity for an immediate, effective reaction to emergencies, as well as seamless collaboration among state institutions and global partners. Romania's actions reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding its citizens and the local partners who had supported its missions, giving them a chance for a fresh start in a safe environment.

The Crisis in Ukraine (2022–2023)

The crisis in Ukraine, sparked by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, represents one of the most severe European security crises in decades. This conflict directly affected Romanian citizens living in Ukraine, including diplomats, members of

the Romanian ethnic community, and others temporarily in the country. Faced with a large-scale war, Romania's MAE had to implement swift, effective measures to protect and evacuate its citizens while ensuring consular assistance.

From the outset of the escalating conflict, Romania issued a travel warning advising its citizens to leave Ukraine as soon as possible. On February 21, 2022, the alert level was raised to its highest—an urgent "Leave the country immediately" notice. This decision was based on security analyses by the MAE Crisis Cell, working with Romanian intelligence, security services, and international partners. Romanian embassies and consulates in Ukraine stayed in constant contact with Romanian citizens, offering updates and logistical support for evacuation.

As hostilities escalated, Romania evacuated its diplomatic personnel from Kyiv and Odessa due to heightened security risks. This step was taken to protect their lives and allow consular activities to continue from safer locations, including border regions. Even after evacuation, Romania's Embassy in Ukraine and Consulate General in Odessa continued assisting ethnic Romanians and citizens who needed help, maintaining dialogue with local authorities and international bodies engaged in the humanitarian response.

Alongside diplomatic protection, Romania assisted in the evacuation and repatriation of a significant number of Romanian citizens and international organization staff. Between February 14 and March 6, 2022, 76 Romanian diplomats and 15 staff members of international organizations such as the OSCE, UN, EUAM, and EUBAM were repatriated under strict safety conditions and in close cooperation with Ukrainian, European, and international partners to identify secure routes.

A particularly challenging aspect of these efforts was rescuing Romanian sailors stranded aboard ships in Ukrainian ports, many of which were targeted by attacks on maritime infrastructure. Through careful coordination among the MAE, Romania's Embassy in Kyiv, the Consulate General in Odessa, and maritime authorities, 14 Romanian sailors, plus a Bulgarian sailor, were evacuated safely from Ukraine. Romania also helped repatriate 11 Romanian employees from the Krivoy Rog mining plant, securing safe corridors and arranging transportation home.

In parallel, the MAE activated a specialized task force within the Consular Department, operating continuously to address evacuation requests and assist Romanian citizens in distress. Working closely with diplomatic missions in the region and with European and international bodies, this task force supported evacuations and humanitarian relief efforts.

The Ukraine crisis underscored the value of fast, well-coordinated responses to major security threats. By efficiently mobilizing diplomatic, logistical, and consular resources, Romania managed to protect its citizens and evacuate them from an active war zone, demonstrating its growing capability to respond to international emergencies.

The Earthquake in Turkey and Syria (2023)

The devastating earthquake of February 6, 2023, with a magnitude of 7.8 Mw, followed by a 7.7 Mw aftershock, severely impacted southern and central Turkey, as well as northern and western Syria. This natural disaster caused extensive loss of life, infrastructure destruction, and a large-scale humanitarian crisis. In this dramatic context, Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) activated emergency mechanisms to identify, protect, and evacuate Romanian citizens in the affected areas.

From the earliest hours following the earthquake, the MAE Crisis Cell went into operation, maintaining constant contact with the Romanian Embassy in Ankara and the Romanian Consulates General in Istanbul and Izmir. This swift mobilization allowed a rapid assessment of the situation of Romanian citizens in the affected regions and the launch of procedures needed for evacuation and consular assistance.

One of the primary actions undertaken by the MAE was the urgent evacuation of Romanian citizens from the hardest-hit areas. In Kahramanmaraş, located at the epicenter of the earthquake, several Romanian citizens requested assistance for evacuation. Thanks to Romanian authorities' intervention, they were safely evacuated with support from the Romanian Air Force, which provided transport aircraft via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. A total of 10 Romanian citizens were evacuated from this region (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Emergency Evacuation of Romanian Citizens from the Most Affected Areas

Another evacuation operation took place in Adana, where a group of eight Romanian citizens and two Polish citizens found themselves in difficulty due to the destruction caused by the earthquake. The Romanian Embassy in Ankara, working with local authorities and supported by logistical assistance from Romania, organized their transport to safe zones and, later on, their repatriation under secure conditions.

In addition to these evacuations, the Romanian Embassy in Ankara handled a considerable number of consular assistance requests from Romanian citizens affected by the

earthquake, as well as from their families in Romania. In total, over 50 such requests were registered, including inquiries about relatives in Turkey, repatriation assistance, or help recovering documents lost in the disaster.

Romania's response to this crisis took place in close cooperation with Turkish authorities and international intervention mechanisms, including the European Union, which activated its crisis-response mechanism to coordinate aid for Turkey and Syria. Romanian diplomatic and consular efforts proved critical in facilitating the safe evacuation of Romanian citizens and in providing help to those affected by this tragedy.

The earthquake in Turkey and Syria once again highlighted the importance of a rapid, coordinated reaction in managing consular crises, demonstrating the MAE's capacity to intervene effectively in emergency situations and protect Romanian citizens in difficulty abroad.

The Crisis in Sudan (2023)

In April 2023, violent clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and paramilitary groups triggered a severe security crisis in Sudan, affecting both the local population and foreign nationals within Sudanese territory. Intense fighting in Khartoum and other cities led to the collapse of basic infrastructure, blocked transportation, and closed borders, making the evacuation of foreign nationals extremely difficult. Against this backdrop, the MAE activated the Crisis Cell to coordinate the evacuation of Romanian citizens in Sudan and ensure a safe route back to Romania.

The MAE received 51 evacuation requests from Romanian citizens and their family members. Thanks to complex logistical and diplomatic efforts, Romania was able to evacuate 40 Romanian citizens and seven family members of other nationalities, organizing their departure in several stages, following different routes and relying on collaboration with international partners. Some citizens were evacuated with help from the French authorities, who operated a special flight to Djibouti. Nine Romanian citizens and one Sudanese family member boarded this flight overnight on April 23–24, 2023, while two other Romanian citizens were evacuated on a Swedish-organized flight and transported to Djibouti, where Romanian authorities subsequently took over repatriation arrangements.

Further cooperation with international partners—Greek, Swedish, British, and Saudi Arabian authorities among others—ensured that multiple groups of Romanian citizens could either fly out of Sudan or leave by sea via Port Sudan. Romania's Embassy in Riyadh, along with the Saudi Arabian authorities, also played an essential role in assisting citizens who reached Jeddah by boat. By April 26, yet another group of Romanian evacuees reached Athens on a Greek-organized flight and was safely repatriated soon thereafter.

The Sudan crisis emerged as one of the most complex evacuations the MAE managed in 2023, given the extremely difficult security conditions and the lack of safe evacuation

corridors. By effectively mobilizing resources and closely cooperating with international partners, Romania demonstrated its ability to protect and evacuate its own citizens from a conflict zone, providing them the assistance needed to return home safely.

Escalation of the Conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip (2023)

The escalation of the conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip in October 2023 produced one of the most complex and urgent consular crises handled by Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the face of violent attacks and bombings in both Israeli territory and Gaza, thousands of Romanian citizens found themselves in danger—whether residing permanently in the region or there temporarily as tourists, workers, or students. In this environment, the MAE activated its Crisis Cell and initiated several measures to protect Romanian citizens and repatriate them safely.

One of Romania's most extensive evacuation operations in this context was the repatriation of a large number of Romanian citizens located in Israel. Through coordinated efforts among the MAE, airline companies, and Israeli authorities, a total of 2,220 Romanian citizens were repatriated from Israel via 28 special and commercial flights. Air transport was provided through collaboration with multiple airlines, including TAROM, El Al, and private operators. These flights were scheduled in a short timeframe, requiring careful coordination of reservations, takeoff and landing clearances, and boarding processes to ensure citizens' safe evacuation.

For Romanian citizens located in the Gaza Strip, the process was far more complicated due to heightened conflict, a lack of secure corridors, and severe movement restrictions. From the onset of hostilities, the MAE, through the Romanian Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Romanian Representation Office in Ramallah, maintained ongoing contact with Israeli and Egyptian authorities, as well as with international organizations involved in humanitarian response efforts. The goal was to secure passage out of Gaza for Romanian citizens and facilitate their transit via the Rafah crossing point. Despite difficulties and delays caused by the intense conflict, around 250 Romanian citizens signed up for evacuation from Gaza, and the MAE worked continuously to ensure their safe transfer into Egypt and subsequent repatriation.

In parallel, the MAE provided consular assistance to a considerable number of Romanian citizens in Israel and Gaza, offering updated information on repatriation options and issuing the necessary travel documents. The Romanian Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Representation Office in Ramallah operated around the clock to meet the large volume of requests from citizens in distress.

Romania's rapid and well-coordinated response underscored the state's ability to act effectively in international emergencies, protecting and supporting Romanian citizens exposed to high risks. Equally, close cooperation with international partners—especially

Egyptian and Israeli authorities—was crucial to successful evacuation operations and the creation of a safe corridor enabling the repatriation of Romanian citizens affected by the conflict.

International Cooperation and EU Mechanisms

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism

International cooperation constitutes a core pillar of consular crisis management, and Romania has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to collaborate effectively with European and international bodies to protect its citizens abroad. During major emergencies—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, the war in Ukraine, and natural disasters like the Turkey–Syria earthquake—Romania has relied on European Union mechanisms to enhance its response capacity, making use of shared EU resources and expertise.

A key tool employed by Romania in these operations is the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Coordinated at a European level, it aims to support member states in managing significant emergencies. The mechanism allows for quick activation of logistical, humanitarian, and transportation resources during crises, supporting citizen evacuations from high-risk zones and the delivery of essential aid in critical situations.

Romania has used the EU Civil Protection Mechanism on multiple occasions to coordinate evacuations and repatriations, closely cooperating with European and international partners to secure the safety of Romanian citizens stranded in conflict or disaster areas. For instance, it was pivotal during:

– **The COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2021):** Romania activated the mechanism to organize special flights for repatriating Romanian citizens and assisting other EU nationals stranded around the world due to travel restrictions.

– **The Afghanistan Crisis (2021):** The mechanism helped coordinate with EU countries conducting similar evacuation efforts from Kabul.

– **The War in Ukraine (2022):** Romania facilitated EU humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and assisted refugees crossing the Romanian border. This included leveraging logistical and financial support available through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

– **The Earthquake in Turkey and Syria (2023):** Romania again activated the mechanism to evacuate Romanian citizens from the affected areas and to provide humanitarian aid.

By actively participating in this mechanism, Romania has both safeguarded its citizens and strengthened cooperation with fellow EU member states, exemplifying mutual solidarity in critical moments. Its successful use of the mechanism underlines the importance of a unified European approach to managing international crises and reaffirms Romania's capability to respond decisively and effectively to global challenges.

IPCR – The EU Integrated Political Crisis Response Mechanism

The Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism of the European Union (EU) is one of the most significant instruments by which the EU coordinates member states' responses to major crises, whether political, military, humanitarian, or public health-related. This mechanism was created to ensure a rapid, coherent EU-level political response by bringing together affected states, EU institutions, and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate decision-making and mobilize resources as needed in crisis situations (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The IPCR Portal—a Temporary Validation Authority Supporting National Response to Different Types of Crises (Migration, War, Pandemics, etc.)

The IPCR can be activated in full or partial modes, depending on the severity of an event. In full activation, the EU can convene roundtable meetings, produce Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) reports, and use specialized online platforms to share information among EU institutions and member states. This enables a swift, coordinated political and operational approach. Partial activation focuses primarily on information exchange among states and institutions, with limited policy measures.

Romania has supported the IPCR mechanism's activation in various situations, including the Ukraine war and migration crises, recognizing that close coordination among EU institutions and member states is vital to effective, unified responses. Although the IPCR mechanisms related to COVID-19 and the Turkey–Syria earthquakes were deactivated and placed under monitoring mode, they remain ready for reactivation if necessary.

By actively participating in the IPCR, Romania affirms its commitment to collective crisis management and strengthens its operational ties with EU partners. This collaboration improves the country's access to essential resources, strategic insights, and political support, allowing for more robust responses to emergencies.

Conclusions

The management of consular crises between 2020 and 2023 demonstrated Romania's capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to complex emergency situations abroad, safeguarding Romanian citizens in danger outside national borders. Prompt, well-coordinated interventions by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—through its Crisis Cell, Consular Department, and Group for Special Situations—proved crucial in repatriation and evacuation operations conducted across multiple continents.

The experience acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic, evacuations from Afghanistan, the Ukraine crisis, the Turkey and Syria earthquake, as well as armed conflicts in Sudan and Israel, highlighted the importance of a well-prepared consular structure capable of handling multiple crises at once. International cooperation and the use of European mechanisms, such as the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR), were key factors in the success of these interventions.

Adaptability and flexibility in decision-making were essential to ensure the safety of Romanian citizens. Swift interventions, quick arrangements for air and ground transport, and close coordination with international partners showed that Romania can respond effectively even under the most difficult circumstances.

In the long term, reinforcing rapid-response mechanisms, improving consular infrastructure, and developing more detailed crisis action plans will be critical to enhancing the efficiency of future crisis responses. Increased capacity for collaboration with other states and international institutions will remain a core component of Romania's consular policy.

The experience of recent years has proven that managing consular crises requires not only an immediate reaction, but also a strategic, integrated approach based on collaboration, professionalism, and efficiency. Romania has strengthened its standing as an active player in international emergency management, proving it can deliver effective support to its citizens, regardless of their location or the challenges they face.

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