

# Romania: The Crisis of Ukrainian Refugees. Political and Humanitarian Perspectives

Valentin MACEC, Cătălin BABA

**Abstract:** The Ukrainian refugee crisis, triggered by Russia's military aggression in February 2022, has produced one of Europe's largest migratory flows in recent decades. As a border state of the EU and NATO, Romania has played a vital role in managing this influx, facilitating the transit and integration of millions of displaced persons. Between 2022 and 2023, over 15 million refugees crossed Ukraine's borders, with many arriving in Romania and receiving humanitarian aid, temporary protection, and integration support. This study analyzes Romania's response to the crisis, focusing on national and international measures. It examines the organization of border checkpoints, reception centers, socio-economic integration efforts, diplomatic initiatives, and cooperation with international partners, including the EU and NATO. The methodology draws on official documents, institutional reports, and data from Frontex (2024), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and humanitarian organizations. The study highlights both challenges and opportunities stemming from refugee integration into the labor market and local communities. Findings reveal Romania's enhanced responsiveness through rapid deployment of protection mechanisms, inter-institutional coordination, and administrative flexibility. Additionally, EU and NATO financial and logistical support played a crucial role in reinforcing reception infrastructure and regional security.

Lessons from this crisis emphasize the need for more efficient refugee management systems, improved international cooperation, and sustainable long-term integration policies.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian refugees, humanitarian crisis, temporary protection, Romania, European Union, NATO, forced migration

**JEL Classification:** F22, F52, H84, K37, R23

**Valentin MACEC**

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

**Cătălin BABA**

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

**Conflict Studies Quarterly**  
Issue 52, July 2025, pp. 69–91

DOI: 10.24193/csq.52.4  
Published First Online: July 04, 2025

## **1. Introduction**

Refugees are individuals forced to flee their home countries due to imminent threats such as war, persecution, violence, or severe human rights abuses (Bali, 2023). Unable to safely return, they are entitled to international protection under the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees (McAdam & Wood, 2021).

A crisis is a severe situation marked by sudden, significant challenges that impact individuals, communities, or states, demanding urgent solutions and potentially causing long-term social, economic, and political instability (Ferrara & Kriesi, 2022). The refugee crisis stands as one of the most complex global challenges today, driven by armed conflicts, political persecution, human rights violations, climate change, and extreme poverty. These factors compel millions to seek safety and improved living conditions elsewhere (Brumat *et al.*, 2022).

Massive refugee flows strain host countries' infrastructure and resources, igniting intense political debates over management strategies (Bali, 2023). Border nations often serve as transit or destination points, struggling to meet refugees' needs (Kriesi *et al.*, 2021). Across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, states face challenges in social integration, employment, education, and healthcare access for displaced populations (Drescher *et al.*, 2021).

International organizations, including the UN, UNHCR, and numerous NGOs, provide humanitarian aid, shelter, and legal protection, though their resources often fall short amid growing demand (Harrell-Bond, 2022; Ozkul & Jarrous, 2021). Meanwhile, developed countries vary in their refugee policies, with some demonstrating openness and solidarity, and others enforcing restrictive and deterrent measures (Spiegel & Mhlanga, 2022).

The socio-economic impact of the refugee crisis varies across countries, presenting both challenges and opportunities. While refugees can boost local economies through labor and entrepreneurship, their presence sometimes sparks social tensions and conflicts over resources and jobs (Schmich & Mitra, 2023).

Long-term solutions to the refugee crisis include stabilizing conflict zones, establishing efficient international protection systems, and improving living conditions in countries of origin (Akilova *et al.*, 2022). Managing this complex issue requires a coordinated global effort grounded in solidarity and respect for fundamental human rights to ensure a safer and more equitable future for all affected populations (Garlick & Inder, 2021).

Romania has strengthened its international standing through active foreign policy and strategic partnerships (The Presidential Administration, 2020). Amid the security crisis triggered by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, Romanian diplomacy has adapted to evolving regional and global dynamics, focusing on three key pillars: enhancing influence within the European Union, reinforcing its role in NATO, and deepening its Strategic Partnership with the United States (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b).

Refugee crises are intrinsically linked to armed conflicts and the international humanitarian response. Wars, persecution, and political instability displace millions, creating complex global challenges. Beyond loss of life and destruction, conflicts produce large-scale humanitarian emergencies where affected populations lack access to essential resources, safety, and fundamental rights.

Humanitarian efforts are critical in protecting refugees and providing immediate support. International organizations, states, and civil society collaborate to deliver aid in security, health, education, and socio-economic integration. However, managing refugee flows remains challenging for both transit and destination countries, which must balance solidarity, security, and economic sustainability.

Situated at the conflict's border, Romania has played a direct role in managing the refugee crisis through emergency responses and integration policies. At both national and international levels, including partnerships with the European Union and other organizations, Romanian authorities have implemented measures to support displaced individuals, highlighting the importance of coordinated and efficient action in such crises.

This study aims to analyze Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, focusing on measures implemented at both national and international levels. It reviews the organization of border checkpoints, reception centers, socio-economic integration efforts, and diplomatic support, alongside collaboration with key partners such as the European Union and NATO. The methodology includes analysis of official documents, institutional reports, and data from Frontex (2024), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and humanitarian agencies. Additionally, the study assesses the economic and social impacts of the crisis, highlighting both challenges and opportunities arising from refugee integration into the labor market and local communities.

## **1.1 Romania's Role in NATO and the Bucharest Summit**

Between 29–30 November 2022, Romania hosted the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting, a strategically significant event (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b). This was the first high-level NATO meeting held in an Eastern Flank state since the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the first formal gathering of NATO foreign ministers following the Madrid Summit.

Key topics discussed in Bucharest included strengthening deterrence and defense postures on the Eastern Flank, implementing NATO's New Strategic Concept, and providing multidimensional support to Ukraine. Ministers also focused on accelerating the full integration of Finland and Sweden into NATO, emphasizing the need for greater cohesion amid emerging security challenges.

Another central theme was the Black Sea region, where Romania stressed the importance of concrete security measures. Given its geostrategic position, Romania has become a key

player in advancing NATO's strategy in the area, with the Bucharest discussions shaping the agenda for the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius.

### **1.2 Romania's Accession to the Schengen Area and OECD**

Accession to the Schengen Area has been a key diplomatic goal for Romania in 2022. Although Romania has met the technical criteria since 2011, its entry has been blocked by opposition from some member states, notably Austria. Romanian diplomacy has involved intensive bilateral talks, further evaluations of Schengen *acquis* implementation, and political negotiations at the European level.

Romania gained support from previously reluctant countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland. However, Austria blocked the unanimous decision needed for full Schengen integration, citing concerns over illegal migration (Șancu, 2024). According to data from Frontex (2024), Romania is not on the primary illegal migration route from the Western Balkans, and Romanian authorities effectively manage the EU's external borders.

Alongside its Schengen ambitions, Romania has stepped up efforts to join the OECD. A significant diplomatic achievement came on 25 January 2022, when the OECD Council agreed to start accession negotiations with Romania. The process demands meeting stringent criteria in economic governance, rule of law, and administrative transparency. Romania advanced the process by submitting its Initial Memorandum to the OECD in December 2022, marking a key milestone.

### **1.3 Consular Reform and Support for the Diaspora**

Modernizing consular services has remained a consistent priority for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The consular reform launched in 2020 focused on digitizing services, streamlining procedures, and expanding the network of consular offices.

In 2022, Romania opened new consulates-general in Chișinău, London, Madrid, Paris, and Rome, while accelerating plans to establish offices in Valencia and Salzburg (Fodor, 2022). Key improvements included an upgraded online scheduling system, the introduction of document submission via courier, and a reduction in the paperwork required for various consular services.

A central aspect of the reform was the deployment of mobile consulates, enabling access to consular services in locations without permanent representation. In 2022 alone, 151 such missions were conducted, processing over 33,000 applications.

### **1.4 Assistance Policy and International Cooperation**

Romania has remained an active donor in development assistance, with a focus on supporting Ukraine and Moldova.

In 2022, Romania provided significant humanitarian aid to Ukraine, including financial contributions to UNHCR and UNICEF, as well as logistical support for managing refugee flows (UNICEF, 2022). Additionally, Romania backed Ukraine's reconstruction efforts and initiatives to enhance resilience against external threats.

Moldova received over 10 million euros in non-reimbursable financial aid through the Moldova Support Platform, a joint initiative by Romania, France, and Germany, which helped secure essential resources for Moldova's economic and energy stability. Beyond Ukraine and Moldova, Romania continued its development assistance in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, supporting projects in education, healthcare, and emergency management.

### **1.5 Public Diplomacy and Cooperation with the Academic Sector**

Romanian diplomacy prioritized strengthening ties with the academic community and international think tanks. In 2022, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-organized the Munich Leaders' Meeting in Bucharest, a key event within the Munich Security Conference (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a).

The Ministry also actively participated in major international forums, including the World Economic Forum, Munich Security Conference, and gatherings hosted by the Atlantic Council and New Strategy Center. These engagements helped promote a coherent strategic outlook in Romania's foreign policy.

## **2. Dynamics of the Ukrainian Refugee Flows**

According to Frontex (2024), by early 2023, over 15 million people had crossed Ukraine's borders into neighboring countries. Poland, Romania, Hungary, and Slovakia were the primary destinations, serving as critical transit and reception points (see Figure 1).

The distribution of refugees by nationality demonstrates significant diversity among those affected by the conflict. Of the 15 million people who left Ukraine:

- 13.19 million were Ukrainian citizens
- 1.61 million were citizens of European Union countries who had been residing in Ukraine prior to the conflict
- 4.48 million were citizens of third countries, including students and foreign workers

In addition to the massive departures from Ukraine, a significant number of returns were recorded. By January 2023, approximately 10.37 million Ukrainians had returned to the country—either to reunite with families remaining in Ukraine or to contribute to defense and reconstruction efforts. (Chart 1).

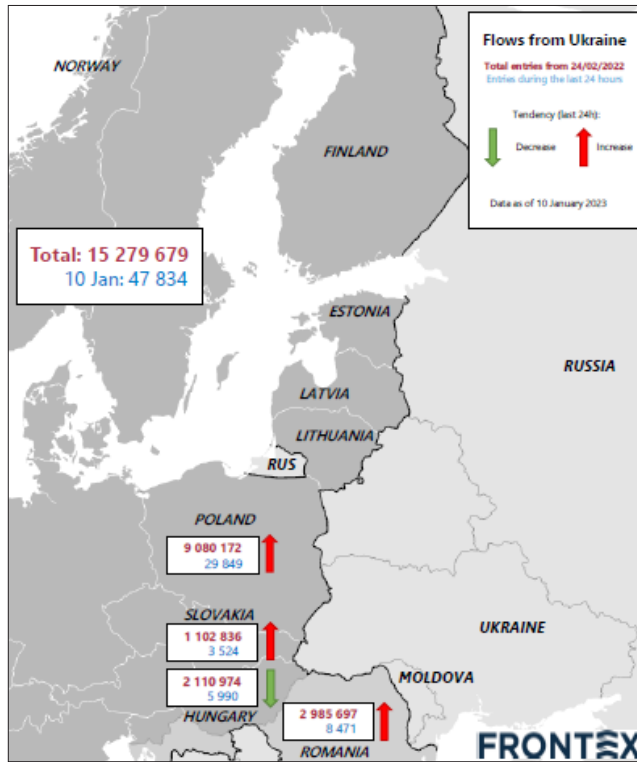


Figure 1. Dynamics of the Ukrainian Refugee Flows



Chart 1. Weekly flows of Ukrainian citizens

This bidirectional flow created significant pressure on transportation infrastructure and the administrative capacity of European states to manage migration.

## **2.1 Romania as a Strategic Transit and Reception Point**

Due to its geographical location near southern Ukraine—particularly Odessa and Izmail—Romania has played a vital role in managing refugee flows. From the onset of the crisis, Romanian authorities swiftly implemented support measures, including establishing border crossing facilities, reception centers, and humanitarian corridors.

Key border checkpoints such as Siret (Suceava County), Sighetu Marmației (Maramureș County), Isaccea (Tulcea County), and Halmeu (Satu Mare County) quickly became major entry points. These local efforts were bolstered by international organizations and support from the European Union (European Network on Statelessness, 2023).

Beyond immediate humanitarian aid, Romania also launched long-term integration initiatives, offering refugees temporary housing, medical care, education, and employment opportunities.

## **2.2 International Response and Euro-Atlantic Solidarity**

The European Union, NATO, and international organizations mobilized substantial resources to assist countries affected by the refugee influx. At the EU level, the Temporary Protection Mechanism was promptly activated, granting Ukrainian citizens extended rights such as access to employment, education, and social services across member states (Carrera & Ineli-Ciger, 2023). Romania collaborated closely with its European and transatlantic partners to ensure effective management of the humanitarian crisis. In addition to providing direct support to refugees, Romania facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to Ukraine via the Suceava Humanitarian Hub—a critical logistical center for distributing supplies and essential equipment to conflict-affected regions.

## **2.3 Return of Refugees and Long-Term Perspectives**

Although millions of Ukrainians fled the country during the initial months of the conflict, data show that a significant number chose to return to Ukraine throughout 2022 and early 2023. Motivations for returning included the desire to reunite with family members still in Ukraine, perceptions of stabilization in certain areas, and the wish to participate in reconstruction efforts. However, the return of refugees does not signal the end of the humanitarian crisis. Extensive infrastructure damage, persistent insecurity, and economic difficulties continue to present major challenges to sustainable reintegration. Consequently, ongoing international support for Ukraine remains crucial, both in terms of humanitarian aid and post-conflict rebuilding.

### 3. Romania's Response to the Refugee Crisis

#### 3.1 Management of Border Checkpoints and Evacuations

Romania was among the first countries to respond promptly to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, implementing emergency measures to support the massive refugee influx.

This early response granted Romania a significant role in facilitating the transit of foreign citizens and diplomatic personnel affected by the conflict (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Romania's Strategic Position and Humanitarian Contribution

Aspect	Details
Humanitarian evacuations	Over 30,000 foreign citizens from more than 100 countries evacuated via Romania
International cooperation	Partnerships with OSCE, NATO, UN, UNICEF
Global recognition	Romania has become a logistical and humanitarian hub for international organizations

Through these efforts, Romania reaffirmed its commitment to protecting human rights and fulfilling its international obligations. The participation of nine international organizations and global bodies highlights Romania's status as a trusted partner in the crisis response. This collaboration demonstrates that Romania not only reacted swiftly but also became a crucial strategic hub in managing the humanitarian situation.

Border checkpoints, including key entry points such as Siret, Sighetu Marmației, and Isaccea, were transformed into vital transit and reception centers where administrative procedures were streamlined and logistical support facilitated rapid evacuations (Incăltărau & Mocernac, 2024).

Additionally, humanitarian corridors were established to transport refugees to major Romanian cities like Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, and Timișoara, or directly onward to other European countries where long-term assistance was available.

#### 3.2 Involvement of the Government and Local Authorities

The Romanian government acted promptly to mobilize the necessary resources for managing the refugee influx. Coordinated by the Ministries of Internal and Foreign Affairs along with the Department for Emergency Situations, a national intervention plan was established to ensure an effective humanitarian response.

Prefectures in border counties were tasked with providing administrative assistance to refugees, facilitating documentation processes and supporting their integration into local communities. Temporary accommodation networks were set up in sports halls,



guesthouses, and private homes offered by volunteers. Major cities also implemented rapid integration measures, ensuring access to education and social services.

A central component of the government's strategy was close cooperation with the European Union and international organizations. By activating the EU's Temporary Protection Mechanism, Romania secured essential funding and logistical support for refugees. Additionally, partnerships were forged with UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF to address the specific needs of refugee women and children.

### **3.3 Role of Civil Society and Volunteers**

In addition to institutional efforts, non-governmental organizations, volunteer groups, and local communities played an essential role in managing the crisis. NGOs such as the Romanian Red Cross, Save the Children, World Vision, and the National Council for Refugees mobilized resources to support thousands of refugees daily (UNHCR, 2025).

Volunteers provided translation services, guidance, and distributed food and basic necessities, while offering emotional support to those fleeing the conflict. In major cities, donation centers became key distribution points for humanitarian aid, and many churches, companies, and private individuals offered shelter and logistical assistance.

A notable example of solidarity was the initiative of online platforms that directly connected refugees with families or individuals willing to offer free accommodation. This support network greatly facilitated the rapid integration of refugees and demonstrated the extraordinary mobilization capacity of Romanian society in the face of an unprecedented crisis.

### **3.4 Long-Term Integration of Refugees**

As the conflict continued, Romania implemented measures aimed at the long-term integration of Ukrainian refugees into society. A key focus was access to education, with special programs established in schools for Ukrainian children. Romanian language courses were offered in several cities, while universities expanded enrollment opportunities for refugee students.

Labor market integration was supported through legislative changes allowing Ukrainians to work without special permits. The Romanian government, together with employers and trade unions, developed professional training programs to help refugees find employment across various sectors, including IT, healthcare, construction, and agriculture.

Access to healthcare and psychological support also became a priority. The Romanian health system adapted to include refugees in national insurance schemes, providing access to free medical treatments and services. Additionally, initiatives addressing mental health were launched to support refugees coping with the trauma of displacement.

### **3.5 International Cooperation and EU Involvement**

Romania did not manage the refugee crisis alone but worked closely with international partners to ensure a coordinated response. The European Union played a central role by funding humanitarian assistance programs and facilitating the relocation of refugees to other member states.

Within NATO, Romania supported regional security efforts and collaborated with allies to address the geopolitical implications of the crisis. Romanian diplomatic missions also secured additional financial and logistical support to strengthen reception infrastructure.

## **4. Reception Centers and Refugee Integration**

In response to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Ukraine, Romania swiftly established a comprehensive network of temporary reception centers to address refugees' urgent needs. Beyond border checkpoints where initial aid and referrals were provided, special centers were set up in major cities including Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Iași, Brașov, and Constanța.

These centers operated in sports halls, community centers, mobile camps, and buildings managed by local authorities or NGOs. Many hotels and guesthouses generously offered free accommodation, while numerous Romanian families opened their homes to shelter refugees temporarily.

Each reception center was equipped with beds, mattresses, blankets, and personal hygiene products. Refugees received daily hot meals, water, essential medicines, and free medical services. In addition to logistical and material support, these centers provided refugees with information on medium- and long-term options, whether they planned to settle in Romania or continue to other European countries.

### **4.1 Integration of Refugees into Romanian Society**

With the protraction of the Ukrainian conflict, many refugees decided to remain in Romania, prompting the authorities to implement long-term integration measures. Consequently, the Romanian government launched several initiatives to facilitate the adaptation of refugees to the new socio-economic context, supporting them in critical areas such as healthcare, education, and employment.

### **4.2 Access to the Healthcare System**

The Romanian government guaranteed Ukrainian refugees free access to the national healthcare system by exempting them from social insurance contributions. Consequently,

those fleeing the conflict could receive emergency medical care, treatment for chronic illnesses, subsidized medications, and free vaccinations.

To address the specific needs of refugees—particularly children and the elderly—hospitals and clinics nationwide allocated additional resources, while reception centers were staffed with mobile medical teams. Additionally, specialized hotline services were established to provide medical advice in the Ukrainian language.

A vital part of the healthcare response involved psychological support to address the trauma caused by the war. NGOs and public institutions organized counseling sessions for both children and adults, offering access to psychologists and therapists trained in treating post-traumatic stress.

#### **4.3 Access to Education for Refugee Children**

Ensuring the continuity of education for refugee children was a critical component of their integration. The Ministry of Education issued special regulations allowing Ukrainian children to enroll in Romanian schools and kindergartens without requiring official documents verifying their previous educational level.

Schools were encouraged to provide Romanian language courses to refugee students, easing their adaptation to the new academic environment. Additionally, some institutions introduced bilingual programs, supported by volunteer teachers from established Ukrainian communities in Romania.

Beyond primary and secondary education, several Romanian universities offered special placements for Ukrainian students, enabling them to continue their studies tuition-free or with scholarship assistance.

#### **4.4 Labor Market Integration**

To facilitate the integration of adult refugees, Romania amended labor legislation to allow Ukrainian citizens to work without the need for a work permit. This measure simplified the hiring process and provided refugees with opportunities to secure a stable income.

Employment agencies in various counties organized job fairs specifically targeting Ukrainian refugees, and numerous companies from sectors such as IT, construction, and healthcare employed Ukrainians under flexible contract arrangements. Additionally, free vocational training and retraining courses were organized to help refugees more easily access jobs in high-demand areas in the Romanian market. For refugee women with children, day centers and specialized kindergartens were established to allow them to work without worrying about the safety of their children.

#### **4.5 Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Integration Process**

NGOs played a crucial role in supporting refugees and facilitating their integration into Romanian society. Key initiatives included:

- **Language Courses:** Numerous NGOs organized free Romanian and English language courses to help refugees improve their communication skills and enhance their employment prospects.
- **Legal Assistance:** Volunteer lawyers provided free consultations to explain refugees' rights in Romania and assist them in obtaining temporary protection status or other official documents.
- **Psychological Support:** Many organizations deployed teams of psychologists and therapists to help refugees cope with war-induced trauma and the challenges of relocation.
- **Donation Centers:** Several NGOs collected and distributed food, clothing, medications, and other essential products to ensure that refugees maintained a decent standard of living.
- **Children's Programs:** Recreational activities, camps, and non-formal education programs were organized to help refugee children integrate more smoothly.

### **5. Diplomatic and Consular Support**

#### **5.1 Consular Assistance for Ukrainian Refugees**

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs played an essential role in managing the Ukrainian refugee crisis by providing extensive diplomatic and consular support. With the massive influx of people crossing Romania's borders due to the war, diplomatic missions and consular offices were mobilized to facilitate the processing of necessary documents, ensuring legal entry and assistance with relocation.

The Romanian government implemented special measures to streamline bureaucratic procedures, enabling Ukrainian citizens to quickly obtain identity documents, residence visas, and work permits. A key aspect of this effort was the removal of complex administrative requirements, allowing Ukrainians to enter Romania with just a biometric passport—or, in exceptional humanitarian cases, even without complete documentation.

Romanian embassies and consulates experienced a record number of requests for temporary document issuance, document legalization, and processing of temporary protection applications. Additionally, Romanian authorities worked closely with other European countries to facilitate the transfer of refugees, assisting them in obtaining long-term visas and work permits in their destination states.

## **5.2 Protection and Facilities for Ukrainians in Romania**

A key measure adopted by Romania was the implementation of temporary protection status in line with EU directives. This status granted Ukrainian refugees access to healthcare, education, and the labor market without the need to apply for formal asylum.

To enhance the management of refugee flows, Romania established specialized counseling centers in major cities with significant Ukrainian populations—including Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iași, and Timișoara. Operated in cooperation with local authorities and international organizations, these centers provided assistance with document registration, legal status acquisition, and access to essential services.

Additionally, the Romanian government launched emergency hotlines and online platforms to offer Ukrainian citizens information about required documentation, the relocation process, and their rights while residing in Romania.

## **5.3 Romania's Role in the Transit of International Humanitarian Aid**

In addition to directly assisting refugees, Romania became a strategic transit point for international humanitarian aid destined for Ukraine. From the early days of the conflict, Romania opened its infrastructure to facilitate the rapid transport of food, medicines, medical equipment, and other essential goods to the affected regions in Ukraine.

Romanian border checkpoints were transformed into logistical hubs for quickly distributing aid to Ukraine. International organizations such as the UN, UNICEF, the Red Cross, and various European agencies used Romanian transit routes to dispatch critical supplies to conflict zones.

The port of Constanța, in particular, emerged as a key asset in Ukraine's supply chain by enabling the export of Ukrainian cereals when Black Sea ports were disrupted by hostilities. In addition to cereal exports, essential medical equipment - including ventilators, medications, and surgical materials - was also transported through Romania to Ukrainian hospitals facing severe shortages.

## **5.4 Collaboration with International Organizations and External Partners**

Romania worked closely with the European Union, NATO, and various international organizations to manage the refugee crisis and facilitate the transport of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The EU provided significant financial support to Romania to help manage the refugee influx, with European funds used to expand reception center capacities, purchase medical equipment, and organize the transportation of supplies to Ukraine.

NATO offered logistical support and coordination for the movement of military equipment and supplies to Ukrainian armed forces. In this regard, Romania was a strategic

partner in facilitating these operations by providing the necessary infrastructure for the rapid and secure movement of military convoys.

Additionally, through cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Romania developed programs to relocate refugees to other European states, ensuring they received adequate support and access to essential resources.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian Embassy in Bucharest and Ukrainian consulates in Romania worked closely with Romanian authorities to streamline the documentation process for refugees and to ensure that they were informed of their rights and available options.

## 6. Involvement of the European Union and NATO

The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs undertook an extensive diplomatic effort to assist Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war. In collaboration with embassies and consulates, Romanian authorities facilitated the issuance of necessary documents for entry, residence, and transit through Romania and other EU member states.

A key aspect of this support was the simplification and acceleration of procedures for issuing long-term residence visas and permits. Ukrainians arriving in Romania benefited from special derogations from standard visa requirements, in accordance with exceptional measures adopted at the European level. Additionally, legal counseling centers were established where refugees received comprehensive information regarding their legal status and options for relocation or temporary protection.

To address the urgent needs of Ukrainian citizens, Romania expanded consular services in countries hosting large refugee populations. Romanian consulates in Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, and other European states actively supported refugees by facilitating document issuance and ensuring access to international protection. Concurrently, Romanian authorities cooperated closely with the IOM and UNHCR to uphold refugee rights and implement effective measures for managing displaced populations.

International aid provided to Ukraine can be categorized into three main types: emergency humanitarian aid, crisis response measures, and recovery assistance. The total amounts allocated to each category are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Analysis of International Aid for Ukraine (2014–2023)

Category	Total Amount (EUR)
Total humanitarian aid	550.6 million
Crisis response measures (NDICI)	1.79 billion
Recovery assistance	1.47 billion
TOTAL (all categories)	16.52 billion
Under contracting/planning	118.1 million

According to Table 2, humanitarian aid was lower compared to the amounts dedicated to economic recovery and crisis response measures. The funds allocated for recovery are essential for rebuilding infrastructure and basic services, while the funds for crisis response are aimed at providing immediate support to the population and ensuring economic stability.

In Table 3, we can observe that aid for Ukraine comes from both European institutions and individual countries, reflecting a strong commitment to supporting the country affected by the conflict.

**Table 3.** Top 5 Donors by Allocated Amounts

Country/Organization	Total Amount (EUR)
European Union (EU)	12.5 billion
ECHO (EU Humanitarian Aid)	717.1 million
Germany	2.11 billion
Sweden	93.5 million
Netherlands	60 million

The European Union is the largest donor, providing over 12 billion EUR in grants and loans. Germany has provided the largest national support, followed by Sweden and the Netherlands. The EU humanitarian mechanism, ECHO, contributed nearly 720 million EUR for emergency interventions.

Regarding Table 4, we can see that international aid has been directed towards several key areas essential for Ukraine's stability, ranging from humanitarian support to economic recovery and infrastructure reconstruction.

**Table 4.** Distribution of Aid by Priority Areas

Field	Description
Emergency humanitarian aid	Food, water, medicines, medical equipment
Protection and refugees	Support for displaced persons
Health and hospitals	Medical supplies, equipment, medicines
Energy and infrastructure	Generators, rehabilitation of power networks
Demining	Clearing minefields and unexploded ordnance
Education and social support	Scholarships for Ukrainian students, educational materials

Humanitarian aid and support for refugees were priorities in the early stages of the conflict. After the attacks on electricity networks, the energy infrastructure and health became critical funding areas. Demining programs are essential for post-conflict safety, and support for education helps maintain access to schooling for young people affected by the war.

According to Table 5, several countries have provided significant support, either through direct funding or through deliveries of essential equipment and goods.

**Table 5.** Notable Contributions

Country	Amount (EUR)	Type of Aid
Belgium	19 million	Equipment for refugees, aid via the B-FAST mechanism
Croatia	4 million	UNDP project for demining
Denmark	178 million	Mobile hospitals, equipment for firefighters
Finland	43.4 million	Humanitarian and recovery aid
Hungary	67 million	Vaccines, scholarships for Ukrainian students
Italy	157 million	Medical equipment, direct budget contributions
Spain	37 million	Energy generators, medical equipment

Belgium and Denmark provided logistical support and essential equipment for refugees and infrastructure. Croatia focused on demining—a vital area for civilian safety. Hungary invested in education and health by offering scholarships for students and providing medical equipment.

International support for Ukraine increased significantly after 2022, reflecting the severity of the situation and the need for a coordinated intervention. The European Union and Germany are the main donors, playing an essential role in ensuring the economic and social stability of the country.

While humanitarian aid was critical in the early years of the conflict, as the war prolonged, support expanded to include infrastructure reconstruction and economic stabilization. Priority areas now include energy infrastructure, health, civil protection, and demining programs, all of which are essential for the safety of the population and the return to normalcy. This trend suggests that international support will continue, adapting to the evolving situation in Ukraine and to the new challenges the country will face.

### **6.1 Romania – Strategic Corridor for Humanitarian Aid**

Beyond serving as a transit and reception country for refugees, Romania has become a crucial hub for the distribution of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The Romanian government, in partnership with international actors, facilitated the transport of food, medicines, medical equipment, and other essential supplies through its national transport infrastructure.

The port of Constanța played a pivotal role, acting as a key outlet for Ukrainian cereal exports. Due to the blockade of Ukrainian ports caused by the conflict, Romania emerged as the primary route for exporting agricultural products, helping to mitigate the risk of a global food crisis.

Moreover, Romania supported the delivery of humanitarian aid via its rail and road networks. Designated trains and truck convoys carrying vital supplies transited through Romania en route to Ukraine, ensuring that international assistance reached the most affected areas.



The Romanian government also worked closely with organizations such as the Red Cross and the World Food Programme to guarantee the fair and efficient distribution of aid. Additionally, Romania actively participated in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, coordinating joint efforts among member states to support Ukraine.

## **6.2 The Temporary Protection Mechanism and EU Support**

The European Union implemented the Temporary Protection Mechanism, an essential tool that enabled member states to provide Ukrainian refugees with a clear legal status and immediate access to essential services. This mechanism streamlined the bureaucratic process for granting international protection, bypassing individual asylum procedures, and granting Ukrainians the right to residence, work, education, and social services in all member states.

Through this legislative framework, Romania was able to rapidly integrate refugees into society, granting them access to healthcare, education, and the labor market without the need for a lengthy asylum process. In addition, Ukrainian refugees benefited from freedom of movement within the EU, allowing them to choose the country where they would settle either temporarily or permanently.

To support states that received a high number of refugees, including Romania, the EU mobilized additional funds through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and other financial mechanisms. These resources were allocated for:

- Improving reception infrastructure – building and modernizing refugee centers and expanding accommodation capacities.
- Supporting local communities – funding integration programs, social assistance, and education for refugees.
- Facilitating access to employment – organizing vocational training courses and supporting employers who hired Ukrainian citizens.

Through these measures, the EU demonstrated its solidarity and ability to manage the humanitarian crisis in a coordinated and effective manner, reaffirming its commitment to human rights and humanitarian assistance.

## **6.3 NATO Support and Romania's Security**

In addition to humanitarian responses, the conflict in Ukraine prompted a reevaluation of security strategies within NATO. The Alliance supported Romania by reinforcing its military presence on the Eastern Flank, deploying additional troops and equipment to deter any attempts at regional destabilization.

A significant number of NATO forces, including American, French, German, and British troops, were stationed in Romania, participating in joint exercises and air surveillance missions. This military support served a dual purpose: ensuring the security of Romania and other regional states, and enabling Romania to continue its humanitarian commitments without compromising national security.

NATO also strengthened security in the Black Sea region given its strategic importance in the context of the conflict. Naval vessels and aircraft were deployed for surveillance, while the Alliance supported Romania in modernizing its defence infrastructure. Furthermore, Romania actively participated in logistical support for Ukraine, facilitating the transit of military aid through its territory and contributing to the overall resilience of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression.

#### **6.4 The Impact of the Refugee Crisis on Romania**

The refugee crisis has posed significant challenges for Romania, putting pressure on its infrastructure, public services, and financial resources. However, efficient management of the displaced population combined with the solidarity shown by Romanian society has not only mitigated negative impacts but also generated positive economic and social effects.

One of the major consequences has been the integration of refugees into Romania's labor market. In sectors experiencing labor shortages, many Ukrainians have found employment opportunities in industries such as hospitality, agriculture, transport, and IT. Romanian companies, previously facing recruitment challenges, have benefited from this additional workforce, while the state streamlined administrative processes and expedited the recognition of qualifications.

Moreover, the financial support from the European Union for states hosting large numbers of refugees has helped ease budgetary pressures. EU funds were directed toward improving social and educational infrastructure, facilitating the integration of Ukrainians into local communities. Numerous international organizations and NGOs also invested in refugee assistance programs, further bolstering the social sector.

Beyond economic effects, the crisis has significantly impacted social solidarity and cohesion in Romania. The Romanian population mobilized extensively to support refugees, offering shelter, food, transportation, and other essential resources. This response strengthened the ties among civil society, authorities, and international organizations, demonstrating Romania's capacity to manage a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

On the international stage, Romania has reinforced its image as a responsible and solidary actor in managing refugee flows. Its active involvement in supporting Ukrainians was highly appreciated by European and transatlantic partners, consolidating its status as a pillar of stability in the Black Sea region.

## **7. Challenges and Perspectives**

### **7.1 Challenges in Managing the Refugee Crisis**

The Ukrainian refugee crisis presented a multifaceted challenge for Romania, necessitating a rapid and coordinated response from national authorities, European institutions, and international organizations. Although the management of displaced persons was largely effective, several difficulties persisted throughout the process.

One of the greatest challenges was the limited capacity of reception and accommodation infrastructure. While transit centers were essential during the initial months of the crisis, they were not designed to handle such large numbers of refugees over the long term. Integrating these individuals into communities required significant expansion of available resources, including social housing, education systems, and healthcare services.

Another major obstacle was the integration of refugees into the labor market. Despite many Ukrainians finding employment in Romania, language barriers and the recognition of qualifications proved to be significant challenges. Romanian employers had to adapt their recruitment processes, and the state had to implement special programs to facilitate economic integration.

In addition to economic aspects, the crisis also placed pressure on the healthcare system. The sudden increase in demand for medical services tested the capacity of Romanian healthcare institutions, particularly in border regions. Moreover, managing the psychological trauma experienced by refugees required additional resources for counseling and mental health support.

Social cohesion was also tested. Although Romanian society demonstrated exemplary solidarity with refugees, over time tensions emerged due to competition for resources and employment. In some communities, the perception that refugees were receiving more support than disadvantaged Romanian citizens led to frustration and reluctance.

### **7.2 Perspectives for Managing the Refugee Situation**

In the long term, Romania must adopt sustainable policies for the integration of Ukrainian refugees, especially considering that some may remain permanently. A strategic approach should include several key directions.

First, developing educational programs for refugee children is essential so that they can continue their studies without significant interruptions. Adapting school curricula, providing Romanian language courses, and supporting teachers in managing cultural diversity are vital measures.

Economic integration is another critical area. Facilitating access to jobs through the rapid recognition of qualifications, organizing vocational training, and supporting

entrepreneurship among refugees can help transform them into active contributors to the Romanian economy.

Regarding the healthcare system, reinforcing the capacity of hospitals and clinics, as well as developing specialized programs for psychological support, is essential. Romania may also benefit from EU support to improve healthcare services for displaced persons.

Maintaining international support and close cooperation with the European Union and NATO remains crucial. EU funds allocated for the refugee crisis should be used efficiently, and Romania must continue to play an active role in mechanisms for managing migratory flows.

Finally, Romania has the opportunity to use this crisis to improve its own migration management structures. Developing a flexible legislative framework, creating more efficient integration mechanisms, and strengthening diplomatic relations with neighboring states are necessary steps for the future.

The Ukrainian refugee crisis demonstrated Romania's capacity to manage complex humanitarian situations but also highlighted the need for reforms to better adapt to future challenges. Through a combination of effective public policies, international support, and social solidarity, Romania can transform this crisis into an opportunity for strengthening its national resilience.

## **8. Long-Term Impact and Lessons Learned**

### **8.1 Long-Term Impact of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis on Romania**

The Ukrainian refugee crisis has had a significant impact on Romania economically, socially, and geopolitically. In the long term, this crisis will shape Romania's policies regarding migration, security, and the integration of foreigners into Romanian society.

A major long-term effect is the demographic change. Although a large portion of Ukrainian refugees returned to their country, many decided to remain in Romania temporarily or permanently. This contributes to the diversification of Romanian society and necessitates effective integration policies. Particularly in major cities with large Ukrainian communities, authorities must ensure access to education, employment, and healthcare for these populations.

Economically, the presence of refugees has brought both challenges and opportunities. Their integration into the labor market can help alleviate labor shortages in sectors such as hospitality, construction, agriculture, and IT. However, if integration measures are not effective, there is a risk that some refugees may remain marginalized, potentially leading to social tensions.

Another important aspect is the impact on infrastructure and public services. Rapid population growth in certain regions has strained healthcare, education, and social

assistance systems. In the long term, Romania will need to invest in modernizing these services to be better prepared for future similar challenges.

Geopolitically, the crisis has reinforced Romania's role as a key actor in the Black Sea region and highlighted the importance of international cooperation. Romania's active participation in supporting Ukrainian refugees and facilitating the transport of humanitarian aid has influenced its strategies regarding regional security and diplomatic relations with its neighbours.

## **8.2 Lessons Learned from Managing the Refugee Crisis**

The experience of managing such a large number of refugees has underscored both the strengths and vulnerabilities of Romania's crisis response system. Several important lessons can be drawn for the future.

An essential aspect is the importance of administrative flexibility. Romania was able to quickly eliminate bureaucratic barriers to allow refugees to enter the country and access support. This demonstrates that in crisis situations, administrative mechanisms must be agile enough to respond promptly.

Another key lesson is the need for well-developed reception infrastructure. Although transit centers were useful in the early months, Romania must enhance its capacity for long-term accommodation and support of migrants and refugees to efficiently respond to future large-scale movements.

Long-term integration is another area that requires improvement. Programs for learning the Romanian language and the rapid recognition of qualifications are vital to ensure that refugees can fully participate in economic life. Furthermore, supporting vocational training and entrepreneurship among refugees will help turn challenges into opportunities.

Finally, the crisis highlighted the necessity of international solidarity and coordinated responses. The collaborative efforts of national authorities, the EU, NATO, NGOs, and civil society were fundamental to managing the crisis effectively. These experiences should guide future strategies for migration management and humanitarian responses.

## **9. Conclusions**

The Ukrainian refugee crisis has represented one of the most significant humanitarian challenges for Romania and Europe at large. The sudden, massive influx of people seeking safety demanded a swift and coordinated response from Romanian authorities, the European Union, and NATO. Romania demonstrated both solidarity and administrative capacity by mobilizing resources and streamlining procedures to support those affected by the war.

The efficient management of border checkpoints, the establishment of reception centers, and the integration of refugees into Romanian society were accomplished through the collaborative efforts of state institutions, international organizations, and civil society. These measures not only safeguarded the lives of refugees but also enhanced Romania's standing as a responsible actor in the Black Sea region.

Diplomatic and consular services were vital in facilitating refugees' access to rights and essential services, while support from the EU and NATO provided crucial logistical, financial, and security assistance necessary to manage the crisis effectively. Mechanisms such as Temporary Protection enabled Ukrainian refugees to quickly access healthcare, education, and employment in Romania, helping to alleviate the economic and social pressures caused by forced migration.

Although significant challenges persist, Romania's overall response underscores the resilience of its institutions and society. The lessons learned—especially in administrative adaptability, infrastructure development, and international cooperation—will inform improvements in future migration and security policies.

## Bibliography

1. Akilova, M., Borh, K. J., & Marzouk, H. A. (2022). Durable solutions: Return and reintegration of displaced populations and reconstruction in post-conflict societies. In N. J. Murakami and M. Akilova (Eds.), *Integrative social work practice with refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced persons* (pp. 199–228). Springer International Publishing.
2. Bali, S. (2023). Migration and refugees. In P. D. Williams and M. McDonald (Eds.), *Security studies* (pp. 552–567). Routledge.
3. Brumat, L., Geddes, A., & Pettrachin, A. (2022). Making sense of the global: A systematic review of globalizing and localizing dynamics in refugee governance. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 35(2), 827–848.
4. Carrera, S., & Ineli-Ciger, M. (2023). *EU responses to the large-scale refugee displacement from Ukraine: An analysis on the Temporary Protection Directive and its implications for the future EU asylum policy*. European University Institute.
5. Drescher, A., Kiselev, N., Akhtar, A., Acarturk, C., Bryant, R., Ilkkursun, Z., von Känel, R., Miller, K., Pfaltz, M., Schick, M., Schnyder, U., Sijbrandij, M., Spaaij, J., & Morina, N. (2021). Problems after flight: Understanding and comparing Syrians' perspectives in the Middle East and Europe. *BMC Public Health*, 21, 1–12.
6. European Network on Statelessness. (2023, April 7). *Romania: Information for stateless people and those at risk of statelessness fleeing Ukraine*. European Network on Statelessness.
7. Ferrara, F. M., & Kriesi, H. (2022). Crisis pressures and European integration. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(9), 1351–1373.
8. Fodor, S. (2022, July 28). Romania to open more consulates in Europe. *Romania Insider*. Retrieved from <https://www.romania-insider.com/ro-consulates-europe-jul-2022>.
9. Frontex. (2024, June 12). Management Board Decision 24/2024 adopting the annual activity report 2023 and its assessment. Frontex.

10. Garlick, M., & Inder, C. (2021). Protection of refugees and migrants in the era of the global compacts: Ensuring support and avoiding gaps. *Interventions*, 23(2), 207–226.
11. Harrell-Bond, B. (2022). Can humanitarian work with refugees be humane? In G. İnanc and T. Lewis (Eds.), *Forced displacement and NGOs in Asia and the Pacific* (pp. 1–32). Routledge.
12. Incăltărau, C., & Mocernac, A. (2024). Political institutions and society's reaction to the Ukrainian war refugees in Romania. *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, 15(SI), 52–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47743/ejes-2024-SI03>.
13. Kriesi, H., Altiparmakis, A., Bojar, A., & Oana, I. E. (2021). Debordering and re-bordering in the refugee crisis: A case of “defensive integration”. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(3), 331–349.
14. McAdam, J., & Wood, T. (2021). The Concept of “international protection” in the global compacts on refugees and migration. *Interventions*, 23(2), 191–206.
15. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2022a, November 17). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-organizes the Munich Leaders' Meeting, a format of the Munich Security Conference, prior to the Meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Bucharest [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/60212>.
16. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2022b, November 29). The first day of the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bucharest: Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu presented Romania's efforts to ensure security in the Black Sea region and support for Ukraine [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.mae.ro/node/60415>.
17. Ozkul, D., & Jarrous, R. (2021). How do refugees navigate the UNHCR's bureaucracy? The role of rumours in accessing humanitarian aid and resettlement. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(10), 2247–2264.
18. The Presidential Administration. (2020). The National Defense Strategy of the Country for 2020–2024. The Presidential Administration.
19. Şancu, S. (2024, December 12). Romania knocked on the doors of Schengen for 14 years. Why was accession so complicated and who opposed it. *Radio Free Europe Romania*. Retrieved from <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/parcursul-romaniei-spre-aderarea-la-spatiul-schengen/33237357.html>.
20. Schmich, M., & Mitra, J. (2023). Can entrepreneurship enable economic and social integration of refugees? A comparison of the economic, social, and policy context for refugee entrepreneurship in the UK and Germany. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Emerging Economics*, 9(1), 9–32.
21. Spiegel, S. J., & Mhlanga, J. (2022). Refugee policy amidst global shocks: Encampment, resettlement barriers and the search for “durable solutions”. *Global Policy*, 13(4), 427–441.
22. UNHCR. (2025). Romania: Ukrainian refugees situation update. *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. Retrieved from <https://reporting.unhcr.org/romania-ukrainian-refugees-situation-update-10337>.
23. UNICEF. (2022). UNICEF's Ukraine refugee response in 2022: Results achieved for the safety, education, and health of children forced to flee the war. *UNICEF Romania*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/romania/stories/unicefs-ukraine-refugee-response-2022>.