

THE WAR BEYOND THE BORDER: ROMANIA'S RESPONSE TO THE ARRIVAL OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

Abstract:	<p><i>Since the start of the war, in February 2022, almost three million Ukrainians have crossed the border to Romania, out of which 146.507⁵⁵³ are currently registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes. Such a massive inflow of people in need of assistance and protection demands an institutional organized response, which has been provided by the Romanian state, in cooperation with civil society, and benefitting from the support of international organizations. The public-private model of cooperation employed in this response has been unprecedented, starting with the mobilization of Romanian citizens in offering housing and food to the refugees, and continuing with the involvement of non-governmental organizations.</i></p> <p><i>This article aims to assess the systemic reaction to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Romania and to investigate the role of systemic cooperation in providing this reaction. Based on data available from the main public institutions involved in this response, combined with information provided by non-governmental organizations and international organizations, the study evaluates, from the system theory perspective, the types of cooperation and collaboration that emerged and their effectiveness in this situation.</i></p>
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Introduction

In the migration literature, Romania is commonly regarded as an emigration country, and numerous studies document the massive exodus following the transition to democracy and the accession to the European Union⁵⁵⁴. However, during the past years, this situation has started to change, and Romania is becoming a more and more attractive destination, partly due to the labor force gaps, but also because of the regional and global geopolitical environment, which is characterized by insecurity and threats leading to displaced people in search of international protection. As one of the countries sharing a border with Ukraine, after the beginning of the Russian aggression on February 24th, 2022, Romania was targeted by the inflow of refugees trying to escape the war and is currently undergoing the largest immigration period in its recent history. Thus, since the conflict started, over three million Ukrainians⁵⁵⁵ have crossed the border to Romania, and, according to the official data⁵⁵⁶, 146.507 of them are currently registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes.

⁵⁵³UNHCR, *Ukraine Refugee Situation. Romania*, 2023 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782> (05.11.2023)

⁵⁵⁴ Livia Dana Pogan, *Mapping integration. Understanding immigration*, "Sociology and Social Work Review", No. 2/2020, pp. 79-86

⁵⁵⁵UNHCR, *Ukraine Refugee Situation. Romania*, 2023 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10782> (05.11.2023)

⁵⁵⁶ *Idem*

In this context, it is important to underscore the input of Romanian actors, including both the public institutions and the civil society, in addressing this situation, and how the parties involved in managing this crisis have performed. Such a massive inflow of people in need of assistance and protection demands an institutional organized response, which has been provided by the Romanian state, in cooperation with private entities, and benefitting from the support of international organizations.

Thus, the aim of this article is to present and assess the systemic reaction to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, starting from the moment of the beginning of the conflict, and observing the evolution of this reaction throughout time. Furthermore, an investigation of the role of systemic cooperation in providing this reaction is proposed, to evaluate, based on the systems theory perspective, the types of cooperation and collaboration that emerged and their effectiveness in this situation.

The paper is divided into five main parts, starting from explaining the context in which the Ukrainian refugee crisis started to unfold in Romania and its current situation and ending with the conclusions and discussion part, where the impact of the high level of uncertainty in the decision-making process, the Romanian institutional system limitations and the implications of civil society were explored. The theoretical framework, represented by the systems theory is described in the third part of the article, while the fourth consists of an analysis of the legal response, the governmental response, and the non-statal contributions in assisting and managing the largest inflow of refugees Romania has welcomed.

Context

The influx of individuals seeking assistance and protection has prompted a need for a well-organized institutional response, a demand effectively met by the Romanian state. In a collaborative effort with civil society and with the support of international organizations, Romania has demonstrated an exemplary public-private model of cooperation to address this humanitarian crisis. Unprecedented in scale, this cooperative approach began with the remarkable mobilization of Romanian citizens who generously offered housing and food to the arriving refugees. This spirit of solidarity continued with the active involvement of non-governmental organizations, showcasing a comprehensive and inclusive response framework.

What sets this refugee influx apart is the unique demographic composition of the group originating from Ukraine^{557,558}. Distinct from other refugee waves, a notable factor is the implementation of martial law, resulting in a situation where a significant majority of men within the conscription age range (18 to 60 years) are prevented from leaving the country. Consequently, in nearly all host countries, at least 70%⁵⁵⁹ of adult refugees are women, and over a third of the total refugee population consists of children.

In the post-Cold War global context⁵⁶⁰, the regional setting of Romania and Ukraine, sharing a common border, links their international interests and prompts Romania with the moral, if not legal, obligation to assist the displaced Ukrainian population fleeing the war. The seeds of this conflict had long been planted, and the events in 2013-2014⁵⁶¹ might be considered a prologue to the current unfolding of the war.

These circumstances introduce distinct challenges and considerations in aiding and protecting a population characterized by specific demographic constraints. Nonetheless, the collaborative efforts of the Romanian state, civil society, and international organizations reflect a commitment to addressing these challenges head-on, underscoring the adaptability and resilience of the response framework. Furthermore, associated threats underscore the importance of the events in the neighboring country for Romania's national

⁵⁵⁷ Anotolie Cosciug, Alexandra Porumbescu, Andriana Cosciug, Viktoriia Kyrychenko, *Labour market assessment on Ukrainian refugees in Romania*, 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375497242_Labour_market_assessment_on_Ukrainian_refugees_in_Romania/stats#fullTextFileContent, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.30455.80803 (07.11.2023)

⁵⁵⁸ Oksana Mikheieva, Marta Jaroszewicz, *Editorial Introduction: Migration Dynamics, Trajectories and Policies in the Context of Russian Full-Scale Aggression against Ukraine*, "Central and Eastern European Migration Review", Vol. 12, No. 1, 2023, p. 118; Vol. 12, No. 1, 2023, pp. 115–126 doi: 10.54667/ceemr.2023.16 (30.10.2023)

⁵⁵⁹ OECD, *What are the integration challenges of Ukrainian refugee women?*, 2023 <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/what-are-the-integration-challenges-of-ukrainian-refugee-women-bb17dc64/> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁶⁰ Joseph Nye Jr., David A. Welch, *Understanding Global Conflict & Cooperation: Intro to Theory & History. Ninth Edition*, Pearson, New Jersey, 2014, p. 220

⁵⁶¹ Alexandra Porumbescu, *Theoretical approaches to international security in the European post-communist space*, "Analele Universității din Craiova. Istorie", Year XXI, No. 2(30)/2016, pp. 119-126

security, including the wave of fake news and disinformation⁵⁶², or the restricted access to some resources⁵⁶³. In navigating the complexities of this situation, the collective response has not only met the immediate needs of the refugees but has also set a precedent for effective collaboration and solidarity in the face of unprecedented circumstances.

A study carried out at the European level⁵⁶⁴ identified the main problems of Ukrainians who left Ukraine because of the ongoing conflict. These challenges encompass a range of issues, including a notable low level of employment opportunities, hurdles in accessing essential care services for children aged 0 to 4 within the host country, and complications in obtaining necessary medical services. A noteworthy trend has emerged, indicating a growing proportion of refugees expressing their intention to remain outside Ukraine⁵⁶⁵. This shift is primarily attributed to heightened security concerns, the availability of temporary protection, and increased accessibility to employment opportunities in select European nations.

Furthermore, it has been emphasized that a significant number of individuals are grappling with the task of independently resolving their accommodation challenges. This self-initiated approach underscores the resilience and resourcefulness of the refugee population in addressing their immediate needs. The evolving dynamics of the situation indicate a shift towards self-sufficiency, as people gradually take charge of their housing situations. As these individuals navigate the complexities of life as refugees, the ability to proactively address accommodation concerns becomes a notable aspect of their adaptation and integration into new environments.

In summary, the multifaceted challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees, spanning employment, childcare services, and healthcare accessibility, are being met with a combination of individual initiative and external support. The increasing inclination of refugees to establish a more permanent presence outside Ukraine is influenced by factors such as security considerations and improved prospects for temporary protection and employment in select European destinations. In addition to this, the continuously changing landscape in Romanian migration, and its steady evolution⁵⁶⁶ from a country of emigration to a country of immigration prompts a deeper understanding of the welcoming and integrating mechanisms available for migrants, be they voluntary or displaced. This comprehensive understanding of the evolving circumstances highlights the resilience, adaptability, and self-sufficiency demonstrated by those affected by the conflict.

Theoretical Framework - Systems Theory

The fundamental principle guiding the comprehension of the constituent elements within a system emphasizes the necessity of understanding them concerning one another and their interactions with other systems, as opposed to isolating them. This principle underlies the framework of systems theory, which is dedicated to elucidating the organizing principles inherent in all types of systems. According to this theory, all systems share six fundamental qualities: wholeness, hierarchy, self-regulation, openness, adaptability, and a balance between stability and flexibility. Wholeness underscores the interconnectedness of system components, emphasizing that understanding the entirety is crucial for comprehensive insight. Hierarchy acknowledges the structured organization within systems, recognizing levels of importance and functionality. Self-regulation highlights a system's ability to autonomously maintain balance and stability. Openness emphasizes the dynamic exchange of information and energy between systems and their environments. Adaptability signifies a system's capacity to adjust to varying conditions. Lastly, the delicate equilibrium between stability and flexibility underscores the crucial balance systems must strike to navigate change while maintaining coherence. In essence, systems theory provides a holistic framework to analyze and comprehend

⁵⁶² Georgiana Stanescu, *Ukraine conflict: the challenge of informational war*, "Social Sciences and Education Research Review", Vol. 9, No.1/2022, p. 146

⁵⁶³ Nataliia Stukalo, Anastasiia Simakhova, *Social and economic effects of the war conflict in Ukraine for Europe*, "Geopolitics under Globalization", Vol. 2, No. 1, 2018, pp. 11-18, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.21511/gg.02\(1\).2018.02](https://doi.org/10.21511/gg.02(1).2018.02) (30.10.2023)

⁵⁶⁴ Oleksandra Kapinus, Oleh Pylypchenko, Yuliia Kobets, Elena Kiselyova, Vitalii Turenko, *Migration Problems on the European Continent Related to the War in Ukraine*, "Review of Economics and Finance", No. 21, 2023, pp. 962-970

⁵⁶⁵ Mikael Elinder, Oscar Erixson, Olle Hammar, *Where Would Ukrainian Refugees Go if They Could Go Anywhere?* "International Migration Review", 57(2)/ 2023, pp. 587-602, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221131559> (01.11.2023)

⁵⁶⁶ Remus Gabriel Anghel, Anatolie Coşciug, *Introduction to the Special Issue: Debating Immigration in a Country of Emigration*, "Social Change Review", 2018, Vol. 16(1-2), pp. 3-8, DOI: 10.2478/scr-2018-0006 (03.11.2023)

diverse systems by emphasizing their interrelated nature and shared organizational principles. Migration and refugee studies propose a slightly different understanding of the concept of “systems”⁵⁶⁷, focusing rather on the structural or agency approach⁵⁶⁸ and their impact on the decision-making process⁵⁶⁹. The type of systems approach this paper is concerned with focuses more on the interaction of different actors at the national level and the roles each of them undertakes in addressing migratory challenges.

System theory, as explained in Encyclopedia Britannica, is “also called social systems theory, in social science, the study of society as a complex arrangement of elements, including individuals and their beliefs, as they relate to a whole (e.g., a country)”⁵⁷⁰. Thus, it is explained that society is to be understood as a whole “that is sustained by the various processes that support its function and survival”, or that “stabilizations in social systems occur not because of any rational plan of overall survival but simply because they happen to work”⁵⁷¹. In addition to this, systems theory also has a part in the assessment of how societies adapt to the context by “adjustments in its structure, with important implications for the understanding of social order”⁵⁷².

Analysis

Legal Response

On February 24, 2022, Russia initiated a military aggression against Ukraine, prompting millions to flee the war, seeking refuge in European Union countries and the Republic of Moldova. Responding to this crisis, the European Union activated the Temporary Protection Directive on March 4, 2022⁵⁷³. This directive, established in 2001 following widespread displacements in the European Union due to armed conflicts in the Western Balkans, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, aims to provide collective protection for displaced persons and alleviate pressure on the national asylum systems of European Union countries. The European Union expressed full solidarity with Ukraine and its people in response to Russia's aggression. In the face of this aggression, the European Union has demonstrated unity and strength, offering coordinated humanitarian, political, financial, and material support to Ukraine. The activation and extension of the Temporary Protection Directive underscore the European Union's commitment to addressing the immediate needs of displaced individuals and managing the complexities arising from the conflict in Ukraine.

On September 27, 2023, ministers reached a political agreement to extend temporary protection until March 4, 2025, with the decision officially adopted on October 19, 2023. The evolving situation necessitated these adjustments to cope with the ongoing challenges posed by the conflict⁵⁷⁴.

Temporary protection, as an emergency mechanism of the European Union, is activated in exceptional circumstances marked by a massive influx. Its objectives include offering collective protection to displaced individuals and easing the strain on the national asylum systems of European Union countries. The scope of beneficiaries encompasses Ukrainian citizens and their family members, individuals from other countries and stateless persons granted international protection in Ukraine (such as refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) and their families, as well as individuals from other countries holding a permanent residence permit and unable to return safely to their home country⁵⁷⁵.

⁵⁶⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The modern world system II: Mercantilism and the consolidation of the European world-economy, 1600–1750*, New York, Academic, New York, 1980

⁵⁶⁸ Anna Triandafyllidou, *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies*, Taylor & Francis, 2015, pp. 5-6

⁵⁶⁹ Oliver Bakewell, *Relaunching migration systems*, “Migration Studies”, Volume 2, No. 3, November 2014, pp. 300–318, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnt023> (25.10.2023)

⁵⁷⁰ Barry Gibson, *Systems theory*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 10 September 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/systems-theory> (7.11.2023)

⁵⁷¹ *Idem*

⁵⁷² *Idem*

⁵⁷³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en#:~:text=Following%20the%20call%20of%20the%20home%20affairs%20ministers%2C,war%20in%20Ukraine%20to%20right%20to%20temporary%20protection (8.11.2023)

⁵⁷⁴ Council of the EU, *Ukrainian refugees: EU member states agree to extend temporary protection, 2023*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/09/28/ukrainian-refugees-eu-member-states-agree-to-extend-temporary-protection/> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁷⁵ Maja Łysienka, *Following the EU Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine? The Implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive in Poland*, “Central and Eastern European Migration Review”, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2023, pp. 183–200 doi: 10.54667/ceemr.2023.14 (29.10.2023)

The system may also apply to other individuals, including Ukrainians who fled shortly before February 24, Ukrainians present in the European Union just before the date for reasons like vacation or professional obligations, and individuals from countries other than Ukraine holding a temporary residence permit and facing unsafe conditions in their home country.

Irrespective of the category, all individuals fleeing Ukraine are received in the European Union before considering a return to their place of origin. Beneficiaries are entitled to rights such as residence and housing, access to the labor market, social protection, and medical assistance. Unaccompanied children and adolescents additionally receive legal guardianship and access to education.

The status of temporary protection does not preclude beneficiaries from applying for refugee status or other available forms of protection in European Union countries. While temporary protection is granted automatically, beneficiaries must apply for a residence permit in the European Union country where they choose to live. Ukrainian citizens, who can travel visa-free, have the flexibility to move within the European Union without restrictions for 90 days and select the member state where they wish to avail themselves of the rights ensured by temporary protection⁵⁷⁶.

Governmental Response

In response to the escalating humanitarian crisis resulting from the influx of Ukrainian refugees, a multifaceted approach was initiated by the Romanian government⁵⁷⁷. A pivotal element of this response was the establishment of a decision-making task force, chaired by the Prime Minister, to coordinate the various aspects of the crisis management strategy. Concurrently, an operational Task Force, named the "Ukraine Commission," was instituted, with the head of the Prime Minister's Office at its helm⁵⁷⁸. This specialized commission was tasked with overseeing the diverse activities of the ministries involved in managing the refugee flow across all areas of intervention.

At the core of strategic coordination within the Prime Minister's Chancellery, the Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Coordination Group emerged. This group, led by a State Counsellor, assumed the responsibility of crafting the overarching strategic framework for humanitarian response. Its mandate extended to facilitating collaboration among governmental agencies and external partners at local, national, European Union, and international levels.

In the initial phase of response, according to the information provided by the Romanian Government⁵⁷⁹, emergency assistance took precedence and was spearheaded by the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The DSU's efforts manifested in the strategic deployment of resources and capabilities at primary border crossing points, facilitating humanitarian transport, providing emergency shelter, ensuring access to food, and delivering basic healthcare services. Simultaneously, various ministries within the Romanian Government engaged in legislative and administrative initiatives to address the urgent needs of the refugees, as elaborated further in subsequent sections of this narrative.

In tandem with governmental efforts, local authorities played a pivotal role by aligning their actions with government agencies and formulating independent operational plans tailored to local needs assessments. Similar cooperation schemes were observed in other European countries hosting significant refugee communities, such as Poland, Germany of The Czech Republic⁵⁸⁰. The synergy between central and local initiatives amplified the effectiveness of the overall response.

Crucially, the public response was bolstered by the active engagement of Romanian civil society, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, and private entities. Their collective contributions served as a force multiplier, supplementing the government's endeavours, and creating a comprehensive network of support for the affected population.

⁵⁷⁶ European Commission, *Fleeing Ukraine: Travel inside the EU*, https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/fleeing-ukraine-travel-inside-eu_en (15.10.2023)

⁵⁷⁷ Romanian Government, *Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis*, 2023, p.6, https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf (10.11.2023)

⁵⁷⁸ Romanian Government, *Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis*, 2023, p. 6, https://www.gov.ro/fisiere/stiri_fisiere/ANNUAL_STATUS_REPORT_ROMANIA_DEC_2022.pdf (10.11.2023)

⁵⁷⁹ Romanian Government, *Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Government taskforce*, 2023 <https://www.gov.ro/ro/pagina/ukraine-together-we-help-more> (10.11.2023)

⁵⁸⁰ Oksana Mikheieva, Marta Jaroszewicz, *Op. cit.*, p. 118

Transitioning to the second phase of intervention, the focus shifted towards protection measures designed to ensure the medium and long-term well-being and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees opting to remain in Romania. To facilitate this, the government established six working groups tasked with formulating policies related to health, education, job security, housing, as well as the specific needs of vulnerable individuals, children, and young people. These groups functioned as specialized units, tailoring their efforts to address the unique challenges posed by each facet of refugee protection and inclusion⁵⁸¹.

In summary, the Romanian government's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis unfolded through a meticulously crafted and coordinated approach. The establishment of decision-making and operational task forces, coupled with strategic coordination at various administrative levels, underscored the commitment to a comprehensive and effective crisis management strategy. The dual-pronged response, addressing both immediate emergency needs and long-term protection measures, reflected a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges posed by the crisis. Moreover, the collaboration between governmental bodies, local authorities, and a diverse array of stakeholders showcased the importance of a collective and inclusive approach in mitigating the impact of the humanitarian crisis and fostering the well-being of the displaced population.

Non-Statal Contributions

Over an extended period, the concerted efforts of two prominent organizations, the Romanian National Council for Refugees, and the UN Refugee Agency, have been instrumental in providing sustained support to refugees. This commitment gained further momentum with the mobilization of Romanian civil society, culminating in collaborative partnerships between diverse entities. One noteworthy initiative in this regard is the creation of the platform dopomoha.ro⁵⁸² by Code for Romania⁵⁸³, in collaboration with the Department for Emergency Situations of the Ministry of Internal Affairs⁵⁸⁴, UNHCR⁵⁸⁵ (The UN Refugee Agency), the International Organization for Migration⁵⁸⁶, and the Romanian National Council for Refugees⁵⁸⁷. This platform serves as a comprehensive resource, furnishing pertinent information about various services available for those seeking protection in Romania, including employment opportunities.

The active involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been pivotal in assuming multiple facets of the reception and integration of refugees. Programs like "50/20"⁵⁸⁸ exemplify how civil society can be engaged in addressing the complexities associated with managing the refugee influx. By encouraging the participation of the general population in handling the challenges posed by the refugee flow, such initiatives not only contribute to immediate relief efforts but also foster a broader understanding and empathy within the community.

Despite the observable collaboration between public and private actors at the local level, a cautionary note emerges concerning the potential diffusion of responsibility. While cooperation is evident, the dispersion of accountability among various stakeholders could lead to suboptimal outcomes. It is essential to navigate the delicate balance between shared responsibilities and clearly defined roles to ensure a cohesive and effective response to the multifaceted challenges of refugee integration. Striking this equilibrium becomes particularly crucial as the complexity of the refugee crisis requires a well-coordinated and synergized approach from all involved entities.

⁵⁸¹ Romanian Government, *Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Government taskforce*, 2023 <https://www.gov.ro/ro/pagina/ukraine-together-we-help-more> (10.11.2023)

⁵⁸² <https://dopomoha.ro/ro> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁸³ <https://www.code4.ro/ro> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁸⁴ <https://www.mai.gov.ro/en/situatii-de-urgenta/> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁸⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁸⁶ <https://www.iom.int/> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁸⁷ <https://cnrr.ro/index.php/en/> (15.11.2023)

⁵⁸⁸ Romanian Government, *Ordonanta de Urgenta nr. 15 din 27 februarie 2022 privind acordarea de sprijin și asistență umanitară de către statul român cetățenilor străini sau apatrizilor aflați în situații deosebite, proveniți din zona conflictului armat din Ucraina (Emergency Ordinance No. 15 of 27 February 2022 on the provision of support and humanitarian assistance by the Romanian state to foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations, coming from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine)*, 2022 <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/251954> (15.11.2023)

The Romanian National Council for Refugees and the UN Refugee Agency stand as stalwart pillars of support, leveraging their expertise and resources to address the multifarious needs of refugees. The collaborative initiatives spurred by the mobilization of Romanian civil society underscore the power of collective action in facilitating the integration of Ukrainian refugees. The creation of the *dopomoha.ro* platform⁵⁸⁹, a collaborative endeavor involving Code for Romania, the Department for Emergency Situations, UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, and the Romanian National Council for Refugees, exemplifies the synergy that can be achieved when diverse entities pool their resources and knowledge.

Non-governmental organizations play a pivotal role in shaping the reception and integration landscape for refugees. Programs like "50/20" showcase the innovative ways in which civil society can actively contribute to managing the complexities associated with refugee flows. By engaging the broader population in these initiatives there is not only an immediate impact on relief efforts but also a broader societal understanding of the challenges faced by refugees. This heightened awareness fosters empathy and solidarity within the community, creating a more conducive environment for refugee integration.

However, amid these positive developments, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential pitfalls of diffuse responsibility. While local cooperation between public and private actors is commendable, the lack of clearly defined roles and responsibilities may result in less-than-optimal outcomes. Striking a delicate balance between shared responsibilities and well-defined roles is imperative to ensure a seamless and effective response to the multifaceted challenges of refugee integration. The complexity of the refugee crisis demands a synchronized effort from all stakeholders, necessitating a strategic approach that maximizes the strengths of each contributing entity while mitigating the risks associated with the diffusion of responsibility.

In conclusion, the collaborative efforts of the Romanian National Council for Refugees, the UN Refugee Agency, and various civil society organizations represent a commendable response to the pressing challenges posed by the influx of Ukrainian refugees. The creation of platforms and programs, coupled with the active engagement of the broader population, showcases the potential for collective action in addressing the multifaceted dimensions of refugee integration. Nevertheless, as these initiatives unfold, it is paramount to maintain a vigilant eye on the distribution of responsibilities, ensuring that collaborative efforts lead to optimal outcomes and a more resilient and inclusive society for both the displaced and the host communities.

Discussion

Uncertain intentions

Recent studies indicate that “the majority of refugees relied on remittances and social benefits from Ukraine as well as humanitarian assistance as main sources of income”⁵⁹⁰, while in terms of plans, research⁵⁹¹ conducted by UNHCR and partners in the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia between mid-May and mid-June 2022 with refugees from Ukraine reveals that, for the respondents located in Romania, 31% of the people intend to return to Ukraine, 42% wish to remain in Romania, 16% want to move to another host country, and 11% are uncertain. The uncertain intentions of Ukrainian refugees in Romania pose significant hurdles to their integration process. From education and employment to social cohesion and bureaucratic procedures, the lack of clarity regarding the future plans of refugees introduces complexities that require thoughtful and adaptable solutions⁵⁹². Recognizing and addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and effective integration process for refugees in Romania, ensuring that support systems align with the diverse needs and aspirations of those seeking refuge in the country.

One of the primary obstacles arising from uncertain intentions is the difficulty in tailoring support services to the specific needs of refugees. Integration programs typically operate on the assumption that refugees have a relatively stable, long-term presence in the host country⁵⁹³. When intentions are unclear, the ability to design targeted initiatives, such as language courses, vocational training, and cultural assimilation

⁵⁹⁰ REACH, UNHCR, *Multi-Sector Needs Assessment Romania*, December 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/romania/romania-multi-sector-needs-assessment-december-2022> (02.11.2023)

⁵⁹¹ UNHCR, *Lives on hold: profiles and intentions of refugees from Ukraine*, 2022 <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176> (26.10.2023)

⁵⁹² Elinder, M., Erixson, O., & Hammar, O., *Op. cit.* (01.11.2023)

⁵⁹³ Oksana Mikheieva, Marta Jaroszewicz, *Op. cit.*, p. 117

programs, becomes compromised. The lack of a clear trajectory for their stay in Romania makes it challenging to provide resources that align with the refugees' evolving needs. Education, a key component of successful integration, is particularly impacted by uncertain intentions. Academic institutions and support organizations may find it challenging to develop appropriate curricula or language programs when the duration of a refugee's stay remains uncertain. This uncertainty can deter refugees from actively engaging in educational opportunities, as they may question the relevance of investing time and effort in learning the language or acquiring skills if their stay is temporary.

The labor market is another arena where the uncertain intentions of Ukrainian refugees pose obstacles to integration. Many integration programs aim to facilitate employment opportunities and career advancement. However, when refugees are unsure about the duration of their stay, they might be hesitant to commit fully to the local job market. This ambiguity can create a mutual hesitancy between employers and refugees, limiting the effectiveness of job placement initiatives and hindering economic integration.

Furthermore, the uncertain intentions of Ukrainian refugees can strain social cohesion within host communities. Residents and institutions may be more reluctant to invest time, resources, and emotional energy in supporting refugees when faced with the uncertainty of their long-term presence. This can lead to a sense of disconnect and hinder the formation of meaningful relationships between refugees and their host community members.

Legal and bureaucratic processes are also impacted, as the lack of clarity regarding refugees' intentions can complicate administrative procedures. From residency permits to accessing social services, the uncertainty surrounding their future may result in delays and inefficiencies in addressing the legal requirements for integration. This bureaucratic complexity can, in turn, contribute to the feeling of uncertainty among refugees, creating a cyclical challenge that impedes their ability to fully integrate.

Addressing the issue of uncertain intentions requires a nuanced approach. Governments, NGOs, and international agencies involved in refugee support should prioritize flexible and adaptive strategies that can accommodate the diverse trajectories refugees may follow. Integration programs should be designed with modularity, allowing for adjustments based on the evolving needs and intentions of the refugee population. Additionally, efforts should be made to communicate the importance of clarity in intentions to the refugees themselves, emphasizing the mutual benefits of active participation in integration initiatives.

Institutional system limitations

Numerous bureaucratic obstacles were streamlined to facilitate the assimilation of Ukrainian refugees into Romanian society. While there has been a discernible trend of improvement in the legislative landscape, certain challenges endure. The legal framework governing the integration of refugees in Romania is not only marked by frequent modifications but also plagued by incompleteness and ambiguity. Substantial gaps persist in delineating the rights of refugees and fostering institutional awareness of their corresponding duties.

The efficacy of the laws dictating the integration of refugees in Romania is hampered by several shortcomings. Instances of institutions transferring responsibilities among themselves are not uncommon, contributing to a lack of cohesion in the implementation of integration measures. Furthermore, the accessibility of integration services is frequently constrained, limiting refugees' ability to avail themselves of crucial support mechanisms.

Amid efforts to simplify bureaucratic processes, there remains a palpable need for a more comprehensive and coherent legal framework that addresses the multifaceted aspects of refugee integration. The ongoing evolution of legislative provisions must prioritize not only the streamlining of procedures but also the eradication of ambiguities, ensuring a solid foundation for the integration process. It is imperative to bridge existing gaps in the legal apparatus, fortify institutional awareness, and rectify the shortcomings in the practical application of integration laws⁵⁹⁴. Furthermore, there is need for advancement from the crisis status to long-term integration programs of Ukrainian refugees, which include education, labor market integration⁵⁹⁵ and access to services. Only through a concerted and holistic approach can Romania truly offer a conducive environment for Ukrainian refugees to adapt and thrive within its societal fabric.

⁵⁹⁴ Armağan Teke Lloyd, Ibrahim Sirkeci, *A Long-Term View of Refugee Flows from Ukraine: War, Insecurities, and Migration*, "Migration Letters", Vol. 4, No. 19/2022, pp. 523-535

⁵⁹⁵ Alexandra Porumbescu, *Integration Challenges: Labour Inclusion of Third Country Nationals (TCNs)*, "Studia Securitatis", 2022, volume 16, no.2, pp. 32-42

Civil society implication

NGOs step in when institutional responsibilities are shifted from one entity to another. The allocation of support for refugees is shrouded in uncertainty, exacerbated by the mobilization of civil society amidst the ongoing war through numerous organizations that operate on a more localized, rather than national, scale, particularly at border regions. The abdication of responsibilities by state authorities prompts the engagement of diverse support actors, whether on a temporary or long-term basis, further complicating the overall mapping of the situation.

As state agencies relinquish their duties, the void is filled by a multitude of actors within the support ecosystem, including non-governmental organizations. The situation in Romania mirrors that in other European countries, where the involvement of local communities in addressing the incoming refugees from Ukraine was crucial⁵⁹⁶. These NGOs play a crucial role in bridging the gaps left by the shifting landscape of responsibilities among institutions. The intricate web of support mechanisms becomes increasingly complex due to the dynamic nature of these transitions, making it challenging to comprehensively understand the scope and depth of assistance provided to refugees.

The mobilization of civil society in response to the war introduces a layer of intricacy, with various organizations, often less nationally recognized and more regionally oriented, actively participating in support efforts. This decentralized approach, particularly prevalent in border areas, emphasizes the localized response to the crisis, making it imperative to navigate through a network of diverse organizations to establish an accurate portrayal of the support landscape.

In essence, the interplay between institutional responsibilities, the involvement of NGOs, and the mobilization of civil society introduces a degree of complexity that necessitates a nuanced understanding of the support dynamics in place for refugees. A comprehensive mapping of these multifaceted interactions is crucial for effectively addressing the evolving needs of displaced populations in the wake of the war

Conclusions

Although Romania's legal framework for managing the substantial influx of Ukrainian refugees post-February 24, 2022, aligns with European Union standards, the dynamic nature of the situation has necessitated frequent legislative modifications, and further changes are anticipated. The prevailing circumstances underscore enduring challenges demanding a more systematic and coordinated response. Enhancements to Romanian legislation are imperative to foster a more cohesive strategy in navigating the intricate interplay between the state and civil society when addressing the complexities associated with refugee flows of this magnitude.

The legal apparatus in Romania, in alignment with its European Union counterparts⁵⁹⁷, has undergone adaptations to accommodate the evolving landscape of the refugee crisis triggered by events after February 24, 2022. However, the current scenario on the ground underscores persistent issues that call for a strategic and organized response. The existing legal framework, while a foundation for managing refugee inflows, reveals shortcomings that necessitate refinement and further adjustments. However, the experience of numerous Romanian families in dealing with migration⁵⁹⁸ provides them with insight which enables them to better understand the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced families.

Addressing the intricacies of the relationship between the state and civil society in handling refugee flows requires a more comprehensive and nuanced legislative approach. The evolving nature of the situation underscores the need for continuous evaluation and refinement of legal provisions to ensure that they remain effective and responsive to the multifaceted challenges posed by large-scale refugee movements. By prioritizing improvements in Romanian legislation, the country can better position itself to navigate the complexities of managing and supporting significant refugee populations while upholding the principles of collaboration between the state and civil society.

⁵⁹⁶ Natalia Beldyga, *The Role of Community Resilience Dimensions of Agency and Resources in Community Resilience to Crises and Uncertainty in Polish Border Communities*, "European integration studies", No. 17, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.eis.1.17.33991>

⁵⁹⁷ Maja Łysienka, *Op. cit.*, p. 65

⁵⁹⁸ Alexandra Porumbescu, Livia Pogan, *Social Change, Migration and Work-Life Balance*, "RSP", No. 60/2018, pp. 16 – 26

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