



# Study of EU Resettlement Policies for Ukrainian Migrants in the Case of Romania

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**Abstract.** As the Russian-Ukrainian conflict continues, the EU launches a temporary protection policy to deal with a large number of Ukrainian refugees. Romania has also been active in helping Ukrainians, including opening new border crossings and establishing refugee protection agencies. This paper analyzes the reasons why Romania is not a preferred destination for Ukrainian refugees in terms of economy, policy, geography, and language in comparison with Poland and Moldova. Romania's positive response to Ukrainian refugees is fragile due to economic pressures, social integration problems, and the impact of the illegal migration crisis. There is also an emotional desire for Ukrainians to return to their homeland.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian refugees, Romania, EU Refugee Policies, Russia-Ukraine conflict.

## 1 Introduction

Due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, there is an increasing influx of Ukrainian refugees into EU countries. According to statistics, until March 2023, there were 8,157,230 Ukrainian refugees displaced in Europe <sup>[1]</sup>. European Union countries, such as Romania, have made various efforts to deal with the refugee problem. This paper will present the Temporary Protection for refugees in EU and Romanian refugee policies. It will also be analyzed why refugees do not prefer Romania as their destination, compared with Poland and Moldova, and the future of Ukrainian refugees, who are forced to survive in foreign countries for long.

## 2 Temporary Protection of Refugees in the EU

The Temporary Protection adopted after the conflict in the former Yugoslavia provided the EU with a tool to address this situation in 2001. In March 2022, the EU re-launched the Temporary Protection <sup>[2]</sup>, an EU emergency scheme for exceptional situations of mass influx. The temporary protection scheme provides rights, which include residence, housing, access to the labour market, health care, assistance and education for children. Until March 2023, 4,946,920 refugees from Ukraine are registered for

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S. Yacob et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2023 7th International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences (ISEMSS 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 779, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-126-5\\_39](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-126-5_39)

temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe <sup>[1]</sup>. This is a decision the EU took after anticipating the number of refugees, assessing the potential risks, and improving the efficiency of asylum procedure applications.

Temporary Protection was reintroduced in 2022 and became the mechanism for medium- and long-term arrangements for incoming refugees, whereas it was not applied in its entirety in refugee policy before. First, Temporary Protection defines mass influx in a rather vague way. There are no clear objective indicators of mass influx.

In addition, it is difficult for member states to agree on the resolution. It is difficult to seek the agreement and attention of all countries for something that affects the interests of only a few. At the same time, the complex and lengthy Temporary Protection Order (TPO) procedure can still handle a large number of refugee arrivals in most countries when it is not activated <sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, EU member states could be more motivated to initiate the procedure.

The objective reason why Ukrainian refugees were able to prompt the EU to initiate Temporary Protection was the violent and sudden development of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which led to an influx of Ukrainian refugees into neighboring countries. For example, many refugees choose to enter neighbouring Poland (5.4 million), Hungary (1.2 million), and Romania (1 million) <sup>[4]</sup>. The rapid and massive scale of refugee arrivals in countries with inherently limited carrying capacity justified the activation of Temporary Protection.

The emotional reason why Ukrainian refugees were able to motivate the EU to activate the Temporary Protection lies in the self-identification of Europeans. They consider Ukrainians to be Europeans, unlike Syrians, a country from Asia <sup>[3]</sup>. Historically and culturally, many countries have sympathy and empathy for Ukraine, for example, Romania and Ukraine have similar feelings toward Russia. Romania also hopes that by taking a positive stand on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it will strive to develop relations between Romania and Moldova further.

### 3 Refugees Policies of the Romanian Government

Since the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Romania's geographical proximity to Ukraine and the positive attitude of the Romanian government have led to Romania accepting an increasing number of Ukrainian refugees. Romania has accepted few refugees for long, and the number of Romanians living abroad is relatively high. Following the political changes in Romania in 1989, 96,919 Romanians settled permanently abroad in 1990 <sup>[5]</sup>. Since then, with Romania's accession to the European Union, the number of Romanians emigrating abroad increased significantly between 2000 and 2010, from 1.1 million to about 3.4 million <sup>[6]</sup>. Since the opening of the Eastern Bloc to capitalism, Romanian migrants have become a stable labor force in Western Europe. Romania is experiencing a "demographic catastrophe" and has the second-highest proportion of citizens abroad, just after Syria <sup>[7]</sup>.

For a long time, Romania has accepted a low number of migrants from other countries, but there are a certain number of refugees in need of asylum. The number of asylum applications in Romania shows a year-on-year increase until 2022, but the total is

far less than the number of Ukrainian refugees brought in by this Russian-Ukrainian conflict. According to the EU, the number of asylum applications in 2021 reached 9,591, an increase of 36% compared to 2020. Many of these asylum seekers come from Afghanistan (4,260), Syria (1,243), and Bangladesh (875) <sup>[8]</sup>. However, according to the latest assessment of reality by the Romanian government, 107,241 Ukrainian displaced persons (including 47,851 children) were registered in Romania as of 5 January 2023. Of these, 4,397 are asylum seekers, but the majority have been granted temporary protection <sup>[9]</sup>.

According to Law n146/1991, Romania joined the 1951 Geneva Convention and its Protocol of 1967 without reservations, and Romania complies with international standards with regard to the granting of asylum and the fundamental rights enjoyed by applicants <sup>[5]</sup>. Refugees, who enjoy certain rights in Romania, have the right to stay in Romania, obtain the corresponding documents, and receive various forms of work and educational opportunities, but the time limit of asylum and the language barriers are the main difficulties for the long-term stay of Romanian refugees.

The number of refugees entering the EU from Ukraine has grown exponentially since the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Romania offers many facilities to Ukrainian refugees. For example, Romania and Ukraine are ready to open new border points. In November 2022, against the backdrop of intensified Russian military operations and the need to evacuate Ukrainian refugees from the capital Kyiv, Romania opened a new road crossing point at the border with Ukraine in Suceava County <sup>[10]</sup>. In addition, Romania introduced a temporary protection mechanism. It allowed refugees from Ukraine, citizens of Ukraine, and citizens of third countries located on Ukrainian territory to enter Romanian territory, where they could benefit from protection for one year, which could be extended for six months and up to one year <sup>[11]</sup>. Romania has also established a protection agency for refugee protection in the EU, composed of different government departments, to respond to the humanitarian crisis of displaced persons in Ukraine through effective planning, coordination, and interaction.

#### **4 Why is Romania not the First Choice for Ukrainians?**

According to statistics, as of February 2023, Romania ranks 8th among Eurasian countries in terms of the cumulative number of refugees from Ukraine, which is similar to the number of refugees in Moldova and much less than the number of refugees in Poland <sup>[12]</sup>. Romania and Ukraine have a number of favorable objective conditions, such as their geographical proximity as a member of the EU. Romania and neighboring Ukraine share a border of 649.4 km in the north and east <sup>[13]</sup>.

However, these facilitative factors still do not make Romania the first choice for Ukrainian refugees. Apart from the well-known influence of economic conditions, governmental policies, language, and geographical aspects are analyzed below by comparison.

Firstly, in terms of policy, Romania has yet to have an apparent active policy to offer to attract labor from neighbouring Ukraine. Wages entering the Romanian labour market from countries such as Serbia, Albania, and Ukraine are lower than those importing

labour from Asia <sup>[14]</sup>. While complaining about the lack of labour in the market environment, Romania limits its attention to workers from Asia, while people from neighboring countries or the Balkans are ignored. It is easier for people of similar languages and cultures to integrate into the local society and save time and costs. It also helps to promote peaceful coexistence in neighboring countries, overcome stereotypes and increase mutual trust. Regarding labour policy, Poland offers Ukrainians the advantages of a labour market, and Polish companies recruit many laborers from Ukraine. As of 2021, 300,000 Ukrainians have been granted residence visas in Poland. Although Ukraine also has historical and territorial issues with Poland, these consistent policies have created an apparent rapprochement with Poland within Ukrainian society over the years. These policies have provided relief economically for many Ukrainian families. Furthermore, emotionally, the two peoples were able to develop more empathy. In the minds of the Poles, evacuating their army, government, treasury, and many civilians through Romania in 1939 to escape the Nazis and the Soviet Union still existed. They are willing to offer protection and sanctuary to people currently suffering from the same difficulties.

In addition, geographical factors also affect the movement of Ukrainian refugees to Romania. Crossing the Danube in the south of Romania makes transit difficult, while the Carpathian Mountains in the north pose a particular obstacle. The impact of these problems may seem insignificant now that transport is well-developed. However, Romania could be better developed, and Ukrainian refugees in conflict prefer to seek asylum more efficiently and safely. The Republic of Moldova, the closest country to the conflict zone in Ukraine apart from Belarus, hosts 109,410 refugees, second only to Romania in Europe <sup>[15]</sup>. Although there is an objective difference between the two countries regarding their capacity and economic strength, geography is one of the reasons why Romania and the Republic of Moldova are receiving similar numbers of Ukrainian refugees.

Furthermore, in terms of language, Romania needs an advantage. Romania is known as the Latin island of the Slavic language group. Romanian uses the Latin alphabet, while Moldovan still uses the Cyrillic alphabet, although, in February 2023, Moldova declared Romanian to be the official language. Ukrainians still prefer the Republic of Moldova, where many inhabitants speak Russian and Ukrainian, to Romania, where there are some linguistic differences. Due to the legacy of education in the former Soviet Union and its membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Moldova is not the same as Romania in the Ukrainian consciousness. In contrast to the emotionally close relations between Ukrainians and Moldovans, some political members have recently fostered mistrust and fear of Romania in Ukrainian society <sup>[14]</sup>. This influences many Ukrainian citizens to choose Poland or even the Republic of Moldova over Romania.

## 5 Potential Vulnerability of Ukrainian Migrants

Romania deserves recognition for its efforts, but they represent an immediate solution rather than a long-term one <sup>[13]</sup>. The EU-initiated Temporary Protection has led to a

more rational and orderly resettlement of Ukrainian refugees. As a neighboring country, Romania has also played an essential role in resettling Ukrainian refugees. While this may seem relatively 'perfect', the future of Ukrainian refugees remains complex as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine continues with no sign of de-escalation. While Eurasian countries are largely sympathetic and welcoming towards Ukrainian refugees now, it is not sustainable for Ukrainians themselves to be outside the country for long periods to apply for asylum.

Realistically, it is also difficult for refugee host countries to maintain a balance in a society with many refugees for longer. Firstly, the length of time that EU financial support can be maintained and whether the Romanian government's finances are significantly affected are factors that need to be considered. As the Romanian economy tightens due to inflation and the increasing price of energy, the incoming population may put more pressure on an already tight employment situation.

Secondly, social integration is a complex and urgent matter, with problems in terms of housing, food, work, language, etc. Romania has a social integration policy for foreigners, which aims to allow foreigners living or residing in Romania to acquire a minimum level of knowledge and skills by teaching Romanian language courses. There are also rights to several social services, such as the right to work, education, housing, health care, and social support. The adherence to and implementation of these policies is necessary if the vulnerability of long-term asylum is to be considered. In addition, Ukrainian refugees, on the one hand, contribute to the labor shortage in Romania, bringing incoming economic benefits. On the other hand, it also increases the pressure on the governmental institutions that come to Romania to manage the refugees and the competitiveness of the local population.

Thirdly, the significant movement of refugees could increase the number of foreigners living in Romania illegally. Limited regulation and policy gaps will likely bring in more illegal residents. Romania is actively applying to become a Schengen area country, and weaknesses in refugee management radiating to border management could affect Romania's ability to achieve its goals.

Finally, from the aspect of human nature, Ukrainians still dream of returning home to Ukraine, to their families and to escape the trauma of war, though the space provided by Romania allows children and young people to communicate and encourage each other during this particular time. According to UNHCR, in Bucharest, the Romanian capital, the community organizes art classes for Ukrainian children in sculpture, music, painting, dance, and other activities for young Ukrainians <sup>[16]</sup>. The space provided by Romania allows children and young people to communicate and encourage each other during this particular time. However, they still dream of returning home to Ukraine and their families and escaping the trauma of war.

## 6 Conclusion

In response to the massive influx of refugees from Ukraine, the EU has reopened with Temporary Protection, which is implemented in a context of solidarity and a relatively rational mechanism. As a country politically and geographically close to Ukraine,

Romania has positively hosted Ukrainian refugees. In addition to introducing the EU's temporary protection policy, Romania has responded to the humanitarian crisis of internally displaced persons in Ukraine by opening new border crossings and establishing a refugee protection agency.

Despite the long geographical border between Ukraine and Romania, Ukrainian refugees have other choices than Romania. Apart from economic factors, Romania needs an active and visible policy regarding finances to attract labor from neighbouring countries. The labor market in Poland is more advantageous. In addition, geographical factors also influence the flow of Ukrainian refugees to Romania, thus making more refugees prefer Moldova. Furthermore, the Romanian language is Latin and differs somewhat from the Slavic languages in neighboring countries. The differences create difficulties for Ukrainian refugees.

Romania's efforts to resettle the Ukrainian refugees are commendable, but there has yet to be a long-term solution for Romania. From a practical point of view, the refugee problem puts much economic pressure on Romania and the EU, and the social integration of refugees is a pressing issue. In addition, the large flow of refugees could lead to an increase in the number of foreigners living in Romania illegally. From the point of humanitarianism, despite Romania's extraordinary efforts to support and encourage Ukrainian refugees, Ukrainians still expect to escape the trauma of the war and return home. Therefore, the issue of refugee resettlement in Romania is not sustainable, objectively speaking. It would be best if the Ukrainian people could return to their country after the military operation is ceased.

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