



IJM



# Ukrainian Refugees Flows in Romania and Human Trafficking Trends

September 2024



## Introduction

Between March 1 and May 31, 2024, International Justice Mission (IJM) implemented an extensive data collection program to understand the risks of trafficking and exploitation faced by Ukrainian refugees in Romania. In total, 40 professionals from 29 IJM Romania partner institutions were interviewed. Additionally, from April to May 2024, a total of 495 Ukrainian refugees responded to an online questionnaire, which aimed to collect information about their experiences in Romania, perceived risks, and willingness to report these risks to the authorities.

The data collection is part of the scope of the project “Regional Response to Trafficking in Persons within the Ukraine Crisis”, funded by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State, and implemented by IJM.

## Sampling:

A comprehensive questionnaire was distributed to refugees from over 18 counties in Romania, including Bucharest, Constanța, Cluj, Brașov, Iași, Galați, and Vâlcea – regions recognized for hosting large refugee populations. The questionnaire was disseminated through IJM's trusted online groups and partners (Telegram, Viber, WhatsApp), as well as through information sessions for refugees organized in Bucharest, Constanța, and Galați. The following partners assisted in distributing the survey for the Ukrainian refugees: CNRR, JRS, SALVATI COPII, CARITAS, HIAS, COMUNITARIA. The sample was convenient, non-probabilistic, and is not representative of the overall refugee population.

Additionally, 29 partner institutions from 12 counties in Romania were interviewed through a semi-structured interview. These included: 2 County Police Inspectorates, 4 Social Services Directorates, 6 Border Police Stations, and 17 non-governmental organizations involved in humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian refugees. The partner institutions, represented by their officials, were selected based on the services they provide to refugees and their interaction with them since the beginning of the conflict.

## Objectives:

The purpose of this analysis of the collected data was to answer the following questions:

- What are the main risk factors for Ukrainian refugees in Romania which could increase their vulnerability to human trafficking?
- What information or services can be offered to manage these risks?
- What information or training can be offered to organizations working with refugees in Romania to improve their efficiency and effectiveness when working with Ukrainian refugees?
- Is it possible to create a risk profile for Ukrainian refugees in Romania?

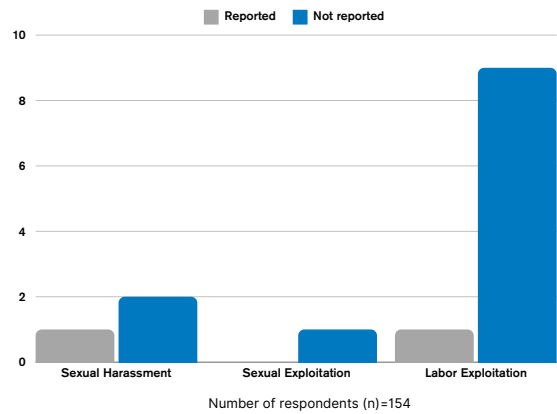
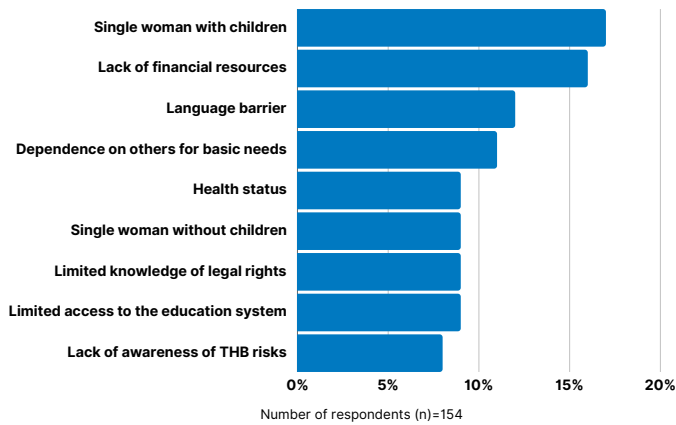
## Limitations

1. Among the refugees, there was a noticeable reluctance to answer questions, which could be explained both from fatigue accumulated after completing multiple surveys and the complexity of this particular questionnaire, which could take up to 20 minutes to complete.
2. The majority of refugees who responded to the questionnaire were direct beneficiaries of services provided by NGOs, indicating that they were already connected to support networks. Consequently, the questionnaire was not completed by individuals who were unaware of these services or who did not receive support from NGOs in Romania, which limits the ability to include the most isolated refugees in this analysis.
3. The sample was convenient, non-probabilistic and it is not representative of the overall refugee population. Therefore, the results pertain only to the participants who were interviewed and cannot be generalized to the entire population.
4. A lack of in-depth knowledge of the risks and indicators of human trafficking among professional was noted, largely due to their specialization in other fields such as humanitarian assistance, protection, etc. This knowledge gap could impact the identification or prevention of potential human trafficking cases.



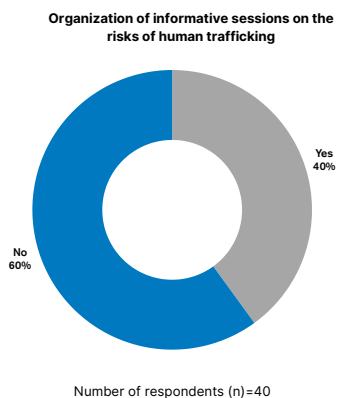
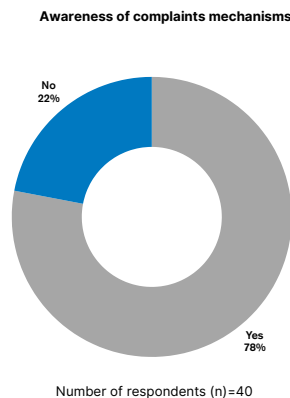
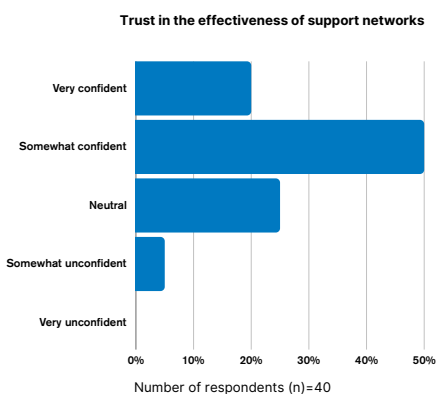
### Interviews with partners

During the interviews, partners were asked to identify the five main indicators of vulnerability among Ukrainian refugees, based on their experience in interacting with or assisting them. The five most frequently identified indicators were: single women with children, lack of financial resources, language barriers, dependence on others for basic needs, and health conditions. Out of the 40 professionals interviewed, 14 reported receiving complaints or noticing signs of possible labor or sexual exploitation, or sexual harassment. Out of the 14 complaints that were addressed, only two were reported to the authorities. The remaining 12 are still in the process of being resolved and had not been reported to local authorities at the time the study was conducted.



Additionally, the interviewed partners were asked to assess their confidence in the effectiveness of support networks for Ukrainian refugees in the region where they operate, using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 the highest. 50% of partner organization representatives gave a score of 4, indicating a good level of confidence in the support networks and the assistance provided to refugees and 20% gave a score of 5 – the highest score. However, it is important to note that 25% provided a score of 3, and 5% gave a score of 2.

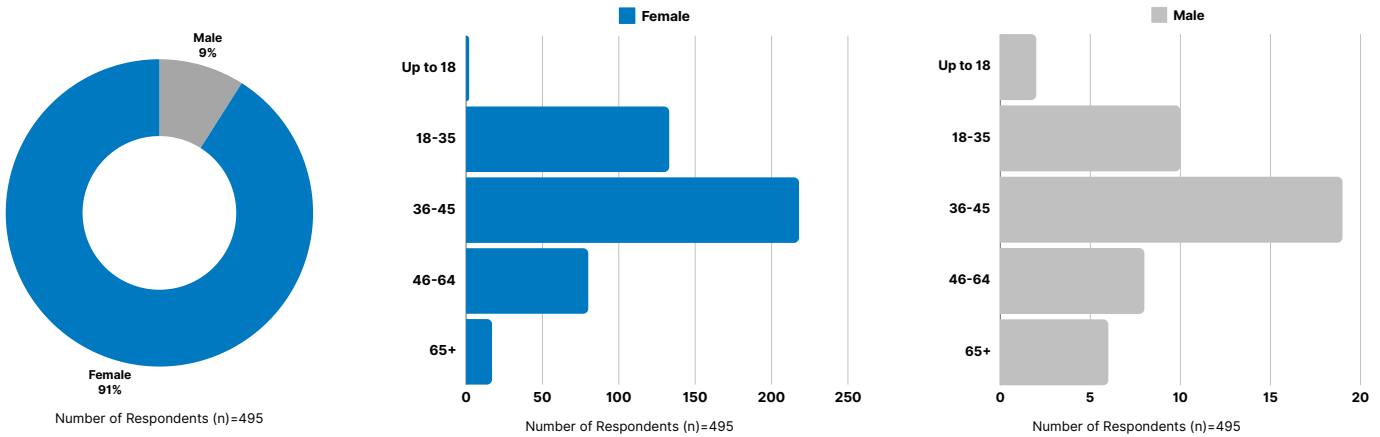
In addition, when asked whether refugees were interested in migrating to other regions within Romania or abroad, the partners mentioned that most refugees are interested in relocating to other countries, such as Germany, Spain, Italy, Canada, and Bulgaria. Within Romania, they would choose Bucharest, Constanța, Brașov, or Cluj, with reasons being family reunification, better employment opportunities, and a more developed integration program. Another important aspect is that 24 out of 40 partners (60% of the total) have no experience in organizing informational sessions on the risks of human trafficking and have not collaborated with other partners (state institutions or NGOs) in this regard. Nevertheless, 78% confirmed that they are familiar with the mechanisms for filing complaints, and 31 out of 40 interviewees mentioned that the institutions they work for have a dedicated phone line or email address for addressing the needs or complaints of refugees.



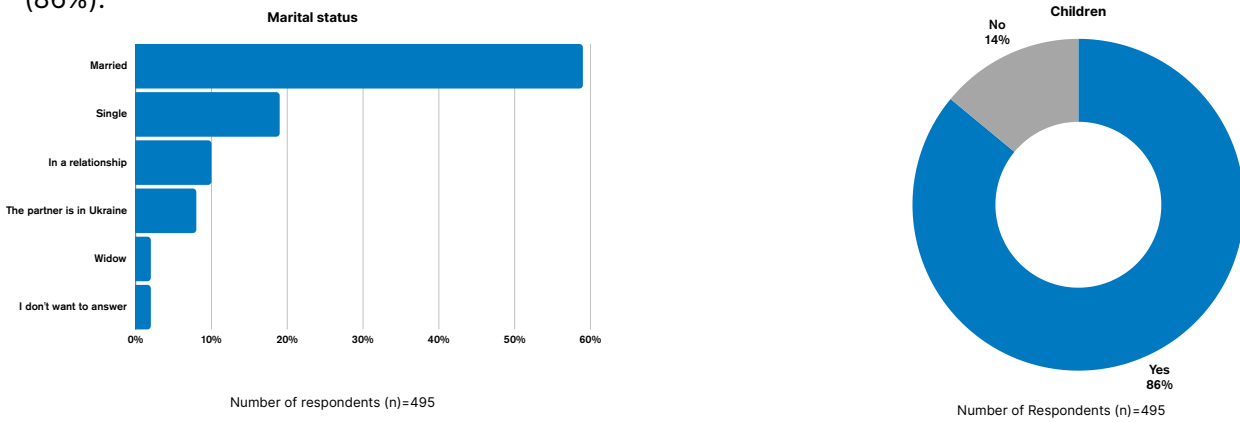


## Demographics

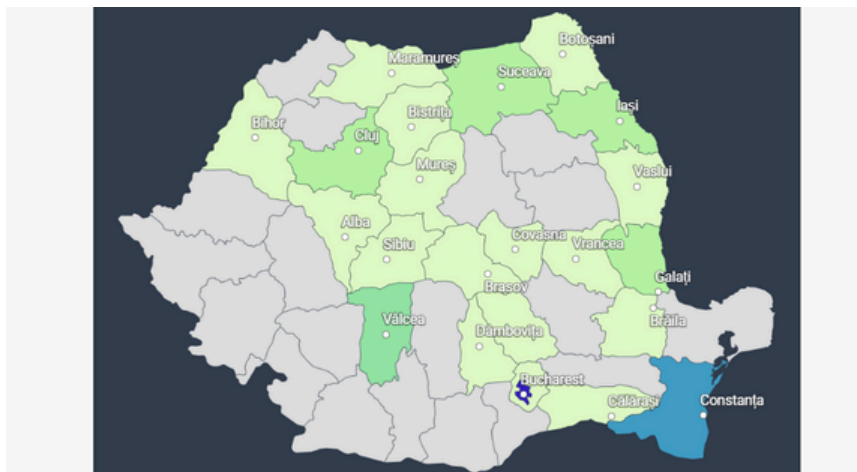
Between April 1st and May 31, 2024, a total of 495 refugees responded to the survey, providing valuable information about their status, experiences in Romania, and their integration into the country in terms of employment and housing. Among the respondents, 450 were women and 45 were men, distributed across the following age groups. For both genders, the majority were between 36 and 45 years old.



The most prevalent group in this analysis consisted of married individuals (59%) and those with children (86%).



Most respondents reside in Bucharest, followed by the counties of Constanța, Vâlcea, Suceava, Galați, Cluj, and Iași.



Number of Respondents (n)=495



## Understanding the risks associated with human trafficking

Approximately 64% of respondents stated that they understand the risks of human trafficking, with percentages being slightly higher among men under 45 compared to women in the same age groups. Overall, the study shows that women appear to be more aware of these risks compared to men – 64% versus 62.22%.

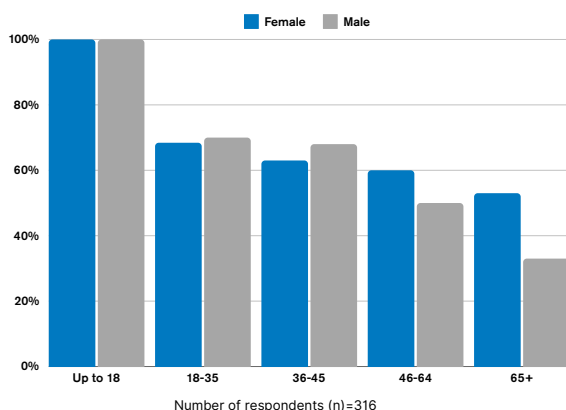
Interestingly, for both genders, understanding of the phenomenon seems to decrease consistently with age. Among women aged 18-35, 68.42% reported understanding the risks, while for those over 64 years old, this percentage dropped to 52.94%. In the case of men, the decline was more pronounced, from 70% to 33.33%.

These differences can be explained by several factors. Younger individuals are more active, have easier access to a variety of online information, and participate actively in awareness campaigns about human trafficking risks. Older individuals may feel that they have enough life experience, and the likelihood of something happening to them seems lower. Alternatively, older people may understand that trafficking is a complex phenomenon with various risks, and they may be more cautious about claiming full understanding, aware that someone with an unstable professional or social situation is always exposed to risks.

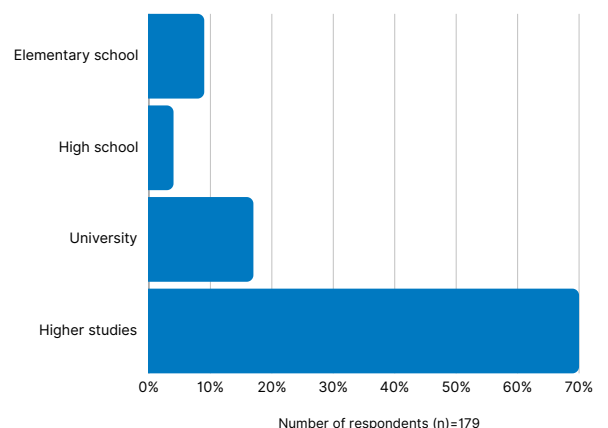
## Vulnerabilities of Individuals who do not know the risk of trafficking

The analysis of vulnerabilities can provide useful details regarding the types of information or services that can be offered to refugees. This analysis focuses on the segment of refugees who reported that they are unfamiliar with the risks of trafficking/exploitation. It does not exclude the possibility that within the group of those who claim to understand the trafficking risk, there may be individuals who face similar vulnerabilities. It is also likely that in that group, some individuals may have overestimated their knowledge regarding trafficking risks or provided socially desirable responses. To deepen the understanding of the profile of individuals who stated that they do not know the risk of human trafficking, several criteria were selected for a cross-sectional analysis. The reference data used include education level, foreign language proficiency, possession of identification documents, and gender distribution. Out of a total of 495 interviewed individuals, 179 reported that they do not know the risk of human trafficking. Among these, 125 (69.83%) have higher education, representing the majority. This finding highlights an important paradox: although most of those unaware of the risk of trafficking have higher education, it suggests that formal education does not necessarily guarantee awareness of the risks associated with trafficking. Therefore, it is essential to reevaluate and adapt awareness and information strategies to more effectively address this issue, even among individuals with high levels of education.

Understanding the risks associated with human trafficking



The level of education of those who do not understand the risk of human trafficking





## Travel plans outside of Romania

Another essential criterion for understanding the risk associated with human trafficking is the awareness of the importance of identity documents. Based on the responses provided by refugees, it is notable that there are nine (9) individuals who have expired or lost identity documents, who do not understand the risks of trafficking, yet plan to travel outside Romania in the near future.

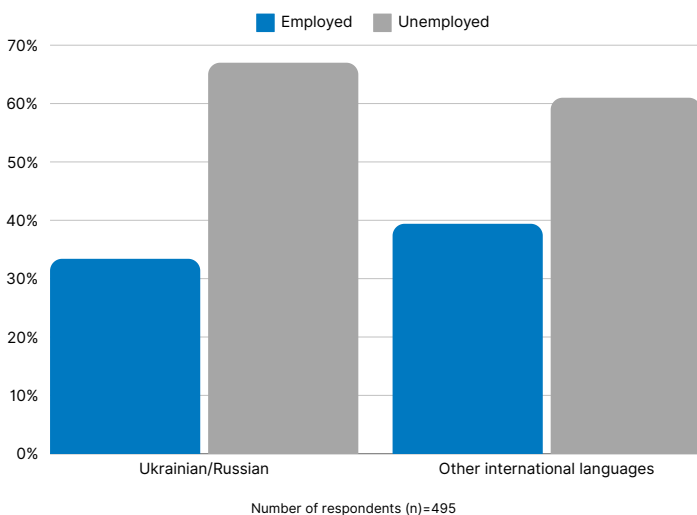
Including these nine individuals, an attempt was made to outline a more complex profile of the 35 people who stated in the questionnaire that they plan to travel outside Romania. Of these 35 individuals who are not aware of the trafficking risks and are planning trips, 28 can cover their travel costs from their own resources, while the remaining seven rely on others to cover these costs. Among these seven, three are employed, while four are unemployed. Additionally, one person among the seven stated that their income does not cover their daily living expenses.

## Knowledge of an international language

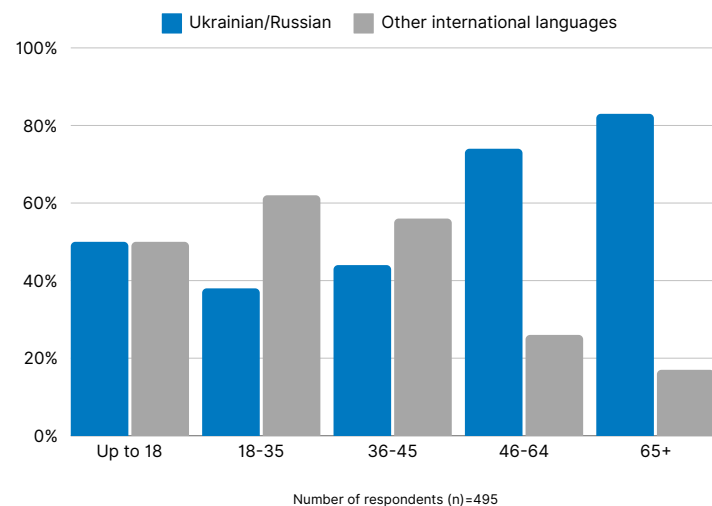
Knowledge of a widely spoken language in Romania (Romanian or English) can significantly contribute to the integration of Ukrainian refugees in Romania and thus, knowledge of only one language, Ukrainian/Russian, can be considered a vulnerability. Based on the responses, there is a link between knowing a foreign language and the probability of having a job, with 39.4% of those who know a foreign language being employed, compared to 33, 4% of those who speak only Russian and Ukrainian.

Furthermore, 85 individuals who only speak these languages are not aware of the risks of trafficking, and among them, 52 are unemployed, suggesting increased vulnerability within this group. Women are the majority in both language groups, and individuals aged 18-45 are more likely to know a foreign language. Based on this data, improving language skills could contribute to increasing the chances of success on the labor market.

Distribution of language according to professional status



Distribution of languages according to age





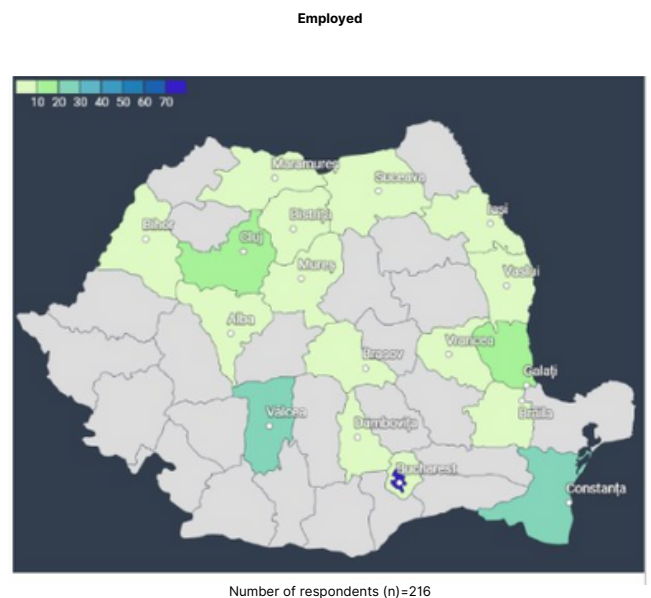
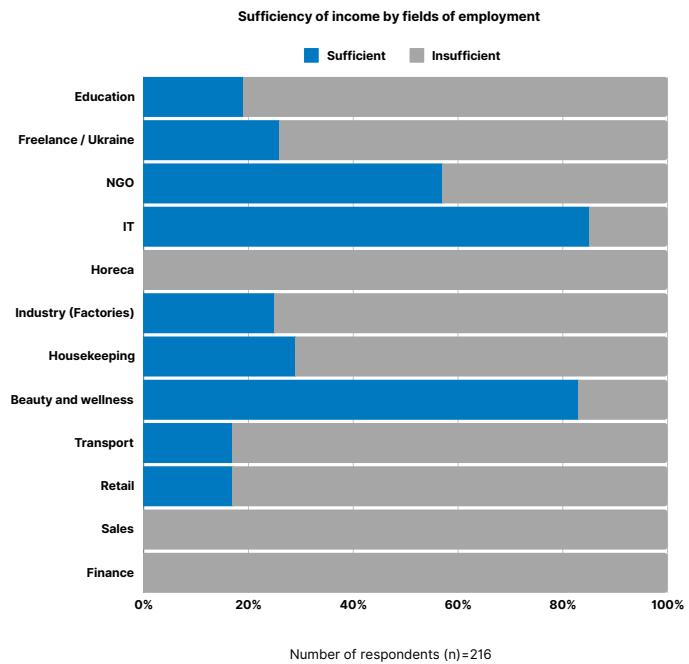
### Integration into the labor market

Integration into the labor market plays a crucial role in reducing the risk of trafficking and exploitation. However, the analyzed data shows that 216 respondents (43.63% of the total) are employed and work in 20 different fields, including education, NGOs, HORECA, IT, and others. However, only 25.46% (of 216) reported that their income is sufficient to cover living costs in Romania. This indicates a potential high vulnerability, especially for the 124 employees (25.05% of the total) who do not have sufficient income and may be exposed to the risk of exploitation.

Among the 124 employees with insufficient income, there is a group of 33 refugees at an increased risk of exploitation due to their significant vulnerability, specifically single women with one or more children who do not speak any language other than Ukrainian and Russian. Additionally, 36 refugees (16.67% of the 216 employed refugees) responded to the question "Are you currently working?" with "It's complicated," indicating uncertainty regarding job stability. Furthermore, most of them provided details indicating that they work as freelancers, online, or for Ukrainian companies online.

67.78% of employees have a work contract, which highlights professional insecurity for a third of those who work, and among those who have a contract, 19.67% are not paid according to the amount set in the contract, which underlines the risk of abuse and exploitation. Regarding the distribution of working hours, the majority work 8 hours or less, and only 18.8% exceed this threshold. The distribution by age and gender shows that individuals aged 18 to 45 are most likely to be employed, while those over 65 are not represented among the employed, which may reflect a natural withdrawal from the labor market or difficulties in finding work at that age.

The distribution of employed refugees, based on county, gender, and presence of children, provides relevant information about their integration into the labor market and the potential risks they face. Most employed refugees reside in Bucharest, followed by Constanța and Vâlcea, which demonstrates considerable variability between counties regarding the number of employed refugees and working conditions. Among the 180 employed refugees, 142 (78.8%) have one or more children, which indicates the additional pressure they face in the context of work and living. Bucharest and Constanța have the highest numbers of employed refugees, but also the greatest risks related to work and living conditions.







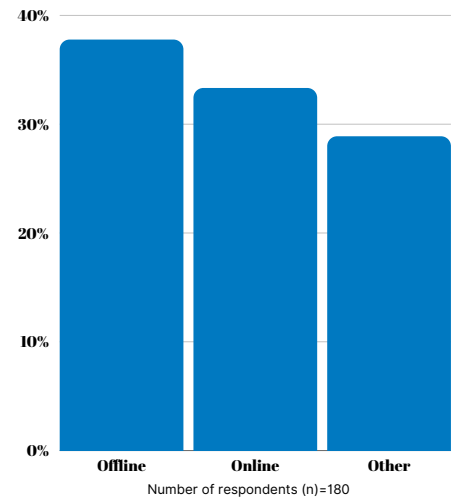
### Integration into the labor market

From the perspective of the risks faced by refugees, an analysis of the data shows that 31 refugees work 10 hours or more per day. Among these, 11 (35.48%) report that their income is sufficient to cover their living costs, while the rest are exposed to significant risks, including the absence of a work contract, non-payment according to agreements, and unsafe living conditions. Specifically, among those who work over 10 hours, 41.94% do not have a work contract, 22.58% are not paid as agreed, and 9.68% live in unsafe conditions. Data obtained from the survey indicate that refugees diversify their sources of information to maximize their chances of employment. Approximately 68 individuals (37.78%) use offline channels, such as social networks or personal contacts, while 60 individuals (33.33%) rely on online sources, such as recruitment platforms and messaging apps. The remaining 52 individuals (28.89%) utilize other methods, which may include less conventional sources. This diversity suggests an active and flexible approach to job searching.

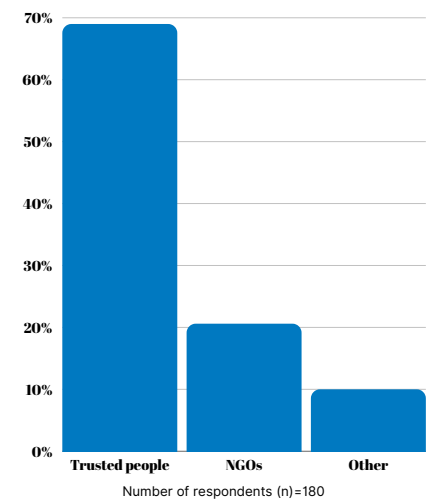
Among those using offline sources, the majority (69.1%) depend on trusted individuals to find job opportunities. This indicates a preference for direct contacts and personal recommendations, suggesting increased caution and a need for safety in the employment process. NGOs are also an important source for 20.6% of refugees, reflecting their role in supporting the community. In contrast, other sources, such as unknown individuals or recruitment firms, are used to a much lesser extent, indicating a low level of trust in these options.

For online job searching, Telegram is the most popular platform, used by 28.33% of refugees. This suggests that messaging apps are extremely valuable for quick and accessible communication. Recruitment platforms such as Bestjobs and Ejobs are used by 23.33% of refugees, indicating a preference for specialized job sources. For informal channels, the majority of respondents (71%) receive information from friends. Based on this data, younger and middle-aged adults are the most active in searching for jobs online. The age groups 18-35 and 36-45 are the largest users of online resources, suggesting greater familiarity and adaptability to modern technologies. Older individuals (ages 46-64) are less active online, which may reflect lower familiarity with these platforms or a different approach to job searching.

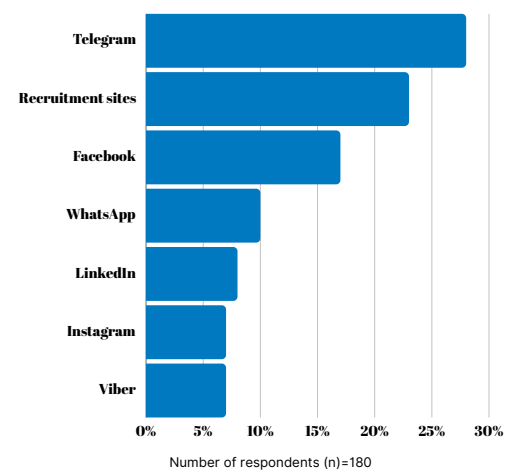
Sources of information for employment



Offline sources of information for employment



Online sources of information for employment

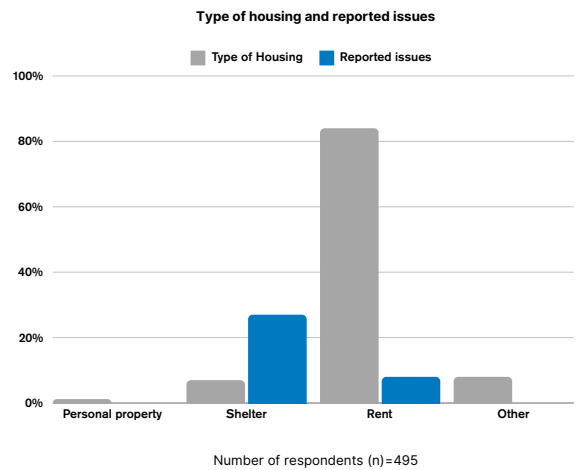






## Accommodation of refugees in Romania

Out of 495 refugees, 412 live in rented accommodations, of which 32 (7.8%) face physical or financial safety issues. Among the 37 refugees who reported living in government shelters, 10 indicated that they are in risky situations specifically related to physical safety and potential abuse, although they did not provide many details. In comparison, only 4.61% of those living in rental housing experience these issues, suggesting that rented accommodations may be relatively safer than government shelters. The data indicates that refugees in Bucharest are the most affected by housing problems, with 18 individuals reporting unsafe conditions or financial issues. Constanța and Vâlcea also have significant numbers of refugees in similar situations, indicating a concentration of risks in certain regions, given the higher number of refugees residing in those areas. In Cluj, Galați, Iași, Mureș, and Suceava, such problems are less frequent. However, it is important to note that few refugees responded to the survey from those regions, with most respondents residing in Bucharest and Constanța. The majority of refugees pay for their own housing, followed by 146 who receive financial support from their spouse, and only 40 individuals state that their housing is paid for by others, including relatives or state organizations/churches. It is also important to consider the reluctance of Ukrainian refugees to answer certain sensitive questions, such as "Who pays for the accommodation?" This reluctance, manifested by a significant proportion of 15.15%, indicates a high degree of distrust or fear among refugees, which raises the need for careful and multidimensional assessment.



## Impact of legislative changes

Another essential aspect is related to the changes in the legislation on the compensation granted to refugees. Those who live in government premises are probably the most vulnerable to such changes. Their demographic and socio-economic analysis shows:

- A predominance of women (31 out of 37) and families with children (31 out of 37).
- A diversity of ages, with a predominance in the 36-45 years category.
- A majority who speak only Russian or Ukrainian, which may limit their integration into the labor market.

## Favors in Exchange for Free Accommodation

A total of 11 individuals reported being asked for favors in exchange for free accommodation, which implies a serious risk of exploitation and abuse. Harassment and labor exploitation were specifically mentioned as issues in this context. It is important to note that there is no clear information regarding refugees who accepted these conditions, suggesting that those who faced such demands refused the accommodation offered under these terms.

### Sketchy job offers

69 people received job offers for video chat, most of these offers being sent through social media and WhatsApp or Telegram groups. It is important to note that, although the video chat activity is legal according to Romanian legislation, this type of work could represent an increased degree of risk for exploitation among refugees. Also, 84 people received job offers with vague descriptions but very high salaries, which raises questions about the nature of these offers.

### Perception of risk

The refugees were asked whether they or anyone in their circle considers themselves exposed to risks in Romania. Out of 14 respondents, 12 identified specific risks, while 2 did not provide any answers, which could indicate either a lack of awareness of the risks or a reluctance to express them. Fraud was the most frequently mentioned risk, with 6 cases reported, suggesting possible exposure to negative experiences, either directly or through common experiences among the refugees.

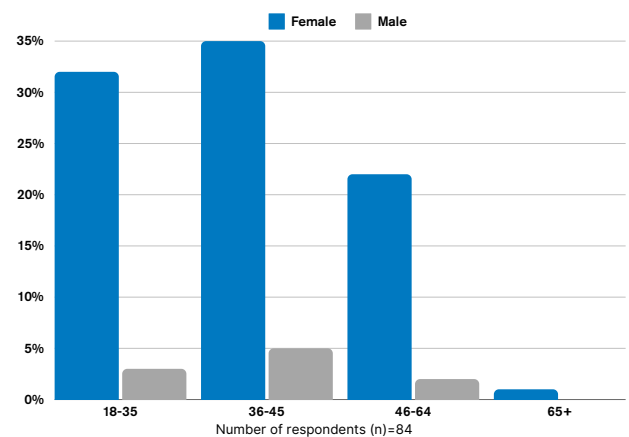
### Physical violence and the use of force

Five people reported that physical force was used against them, but only one of them said they would agree to inform the authorities. Instead, six people chose not to answer this question, a higher number than those who confirmed physical violence.

## Vulnerability of the elderly

Another particularly vulnerable group among the refugees interviewed is that of elderly refugees (over 65 years old). The 23 respondents in this category do not have access to healthcare services in Romania, and 22 of them are unemployed, which exacerbates their vulnerability. Additionally, none of them provided an answer to the question regarding the sufficiency of their income, suggesting possible reluctance or difficulty in assessing their own economic situation.

### Sketchy job offers



### Restriction of freedom of movement

Three individuals reported that they have been prevented from moving freely in Romania, but two of them cited "low salary" as the reason, indicating an economic issue rather than a direct constraint. The responses suggest that economic problems and financial insecurity may contribute to the perception of restricted freedom of movement.

### Labor exploitation

Labor exploitation was confirmed by 20 people (4% of all respondents), while another 15 people refused to provide details, suggesting either an insecurity or a fear of disclosing negative experiences. The main reasons given include unclear contract terms and unpaid work, each reported by six people. Only three of those who said they were exploited agreed to inform the authorities.

## Sexual harassment

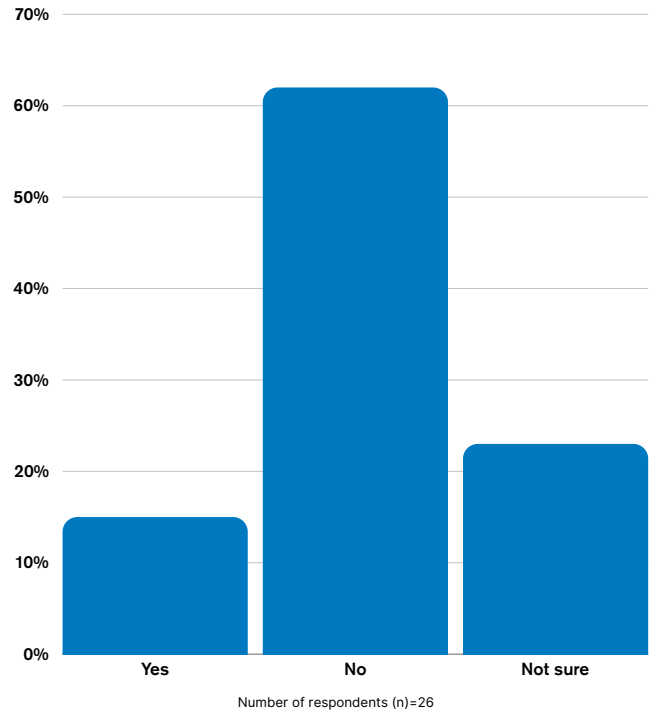
Sexual harassment is a major issue among the interviewed refugees, with 26 individuals reporting that they were sexually harassed in Ukraine. Of these, only three reported it to the authorities, while 16 did not, and seven are unsure whether reporting would be helpful. In Romania, only one person mentioned sexual harassment, but this individual did not report it to the authorities. This data suggest a persistent fear or lack of trust in authorities, even after relocating to Romania. Among the 26 individuals who experienced sexual harassment in Ukraine, the majority have a high school education (20), and most are aged between 18 and 45. Only four individuals stated they would be willing to inform the authorities in the case of sexual harassment, while a significant number of 16 would not report the incidents, and six are not sure. Furthermore, 12 individuals confirmed that they experienced sexual harassment in Romania at their workplace, but five avoided providing additional information, indicating a clear reluctance to discuss the issue.

### Experiences of abuse

A significant number of refugees (45 out of 495) confirmed that they have experienced physical or psychological abuse. The number of those who chose not to answer this question (146) raises additional concerns, suggesting that many may be reluctant to disclose such experiences, either due to trauma or a lack of trust in the data collection process.

The distribution by gender and age of those who reported abuse shows a higher prevalence among women, particularly in the 18-35 age group. Notably, only two men in the 36-45 age group reported abuse, which may indicate either underreporting or a genuine difference in abuse experiences based on gender. Regarding the types of abuse reported, domestic violence is the most common, followed by war crimes.

Reporting to authorities



### Interaction with the authorities

Only 78 individuals stated that they would be willing to inform the authorities if they experience abuse. Meanwhile, 30 refugees would not contact the authorities, and 7 are unsure whether doing so would be helpful. This level of distrust may stem from negative past experiences with authorities in their country of origin or a general perception of distrust in state institutions, whether in Romania or Ukraine.

### Engaging in illegal activities

Eight individuals confirmed that someone attempted to involve them in illegal activities, such as drug and cigarette distribution or fraud. It is concerning that six of them refused to inform the authorities or are unsure whether reporting would be helpful.



## Conclusions

- **Increased vulnerability of unemployed refugees:** The majority of refugees who answered the questionnaire (63.63%) do not have stable employment, making them extremely vulnerable to exploitation. This vulnerability is exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the risks of human trafficking (36.16%), which directly affects their ability to identify and avoid dangerous situations.
- **Impact of language barriers and social isolation:** Approximately 49.44% of refugees who answered the questionnaire speak only Ukrainian or Russian and do not understand the risks associated with trafficking. These refugees are more exposed to the risk of being manipulated or exploited, as they cannot communicate effectively with authorities or fully understand their rights and the resources available in Romania.
- **Uncertainty regarding housing funding sources:** A significant proportion of the refugees who answered the questionnaire (15.15%) are unwilling to answer or do not respond to the question about who pays for their accommodation in Romania. This may indicate a risky dependence on third parties or possible involvement in illegal activities to cover living costs, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation.
- **Increased risks for women and children:** Among the surveyed refugees, single women with children (26) and large families (10) represent high-risk categories, especially when financial resources are lacking (25) and there is limited knowledge of legal rights (14). These groups are susceptible to becoming targets for traffickers, considering their dependence on others for basic needs (17) and limited access to essential resources such as education and healthcare.
- **Evasive responses indicate hidden risk factors:** Responses such as "I don't want to answer" or "No answer" may conceal involvement in illegal activities or exposure to risky situations. This may suggest that some refugees avoid disclosing the true nature of their circumstances, likely due to fear of repercussions or a lack of trust in authorities.
- The responses provided in the survey are not conclusive enough to develop a risk profile for Ukrainian refugees in Romania, especially in the light of recent changes regarding financial and housing support of refugees from Ukraine in Romania. This situation highlights the urgent need to resume data collection through a study focused on identifying specific risk profiles.



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## Recommendations

- In the context of risks related to online exploitation and fraudulent job advertisements that can lead to various forms of human trafficking, it is important to note that, while the adaptability of Ukrainian refugees in Romania to digital platforms is evident, it is essential for these platforms to be secure and provide accurate and accessible information. Additionally, moderators of groups, largely representatives of NGOs or other state institutions, should verify the accuracy of the information and inform refugees about red flags.
- **Enhancing efforts to inform and educate about the risks of human trafficking:** It is essential to inform refugees about their rights in Romania, to identify the risks associated with human trafficking, and to understand how to access help in risky situations. There is also a clear need to organize informational sessions. These sessions should target both IJM partners who completed the questionnaire and the refugees themselves, thereby contributing to the prevention of trafficking cases and increasing trust in the relevant authorities.
- **Monitoring and supporting unemployed refugees:** State institutions and NGOs supporting Ukrainian refugee communities in Romania should pay special attention to those who do not have stable employment or cannot identify a source of income necessary for living. Partnerships with employment agencies and vocational training programs can help reduce their vulnerability.
- **Improving access to translation services and language support:** To combat language barriers, it is important for Ukrainian refugees to continue taking Romanian language courses offered by NGOs and to ensure they have access to translation services, including in interactions with authorities and within integration programs. This will facilitate communication and improve refugees' access to information and resources.
- **Creating a safe and anonymous reporting mechanism:** Developing an anonymous reporting mechanisms that allows refugees to report cases of exploitation or harassment without fear of repercussions could encourage more refugees to share their experiences and seek help.
- **Close collaboration with partners to identify and protect victims:** Organizing training sessions for partners involved in identifying potential victims of trafficking, using identified risk factors, will strengthen prevention and protection efforts. This collaboration should include partnerships with local NGOs, government agencies, and communities to expand the support network.

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