



February 1st, 2023

SUMMARY

THE RESEARCH REPORTS ON POTENTIAL CASES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

ECLER collects information about potential cases of sexual exploitation or human trafficking in Romania. Please report such situations, for centralization, to office@ecler.org

ECLER's research on the GBV and THB vulnerabilities among Ukrainian refugees, was conducted by 3 experts - Silvia Tăbușcă (ECLER), Alexandra Stroică (ECLER), and Stefan Leonescu (JRS Romania). There has been identified 2 main directions that generate vulnerabilities for people on the move:

- the inadequate management of mass flow of people crossing the Romanian borders from the conflict area and of their immediate needs, as a general vulnerability
- the gender, age, minority groups and unaccompanied children, as a personal vulnerability of people fleeing the conflict.

The main weakness in the crisis response, identified during the research, was the **lack of immediate and adequate training of main stakeholders** on criminal modus operandi in conflict areas and early identification of GBV/THB cases among refugees.

Every person coming from Ukraine directly or via Republic of Moldova was granted access to the Romanian territory and, in specific cases, access to the asylum procedure. From this point of view, the Romanian Border Police was considered a European model of good practice. Authorities, civil society (more than 150 NGOs present at the border areas) and international organizations, along with the Romanian population, have come together to ensure access to territory and immediate assistance. With women and children comprising the vast majority of refugees, protection from and response to GBV and THB should have been a key priority of Romania. The data has already proved that women and children are at a heightened risk in situations of mass displacement. These offences are usually linked to informal shelter, reception and transit facilities, private arrangements for transportation from the border to transit facilities and onward to other countries.

The governmental program for refugees' accommodation in private locations, called "50-20"/person (50 lei/10EUR for accommodation and 20 lei/4EUR for food per day), was considered a good policy, but it was very poorly implemented. It has been largely reported that accommodation owners evicted Ukrainians who paid their regular rent (sometimes covered by NGOs) in order to use the "50-20" program, which was more financially convenient for them and without clear responsibilities. The lack of "50-20" program monitoring led to many abusive situations. In a large number of cases, the owners did not provide free daily meals, nor gave the money for food to the Ukrainians as it was requested under the governmental "50-20" program or they accommodated a large number of refugees in a very small apartment in order to maximize their profits. According to officials, the Government is willing to give up this program, measure that is considered to create a high risk of exploitation and sexual abuse as a research study conducted by ECLER shows below (sex in exchange of accommodation and/or food). These risks are not clearly mitigated in the new governmental policies.

In Romania, the main campaign on prevention of GBV and THB among refugees was done through different **printed and online materials** (flyers, brochures) which often, were reported, as ineffective. In practice, these materials are thrown away immediately or not read because they have not been developed based on the Ukrainians current needs and interests. The lack of proper THB knowledge was a challenge in reaching the target group through awareness materials as, very often, THB and prostitution are overlapping concepts in the Ukrainians perception. *"I am not going to prostitute, so I am not interested in this information on THB"* – used to be the most common feedback from the Ukrainians, received by ECLER during its GBV & THB info-sessions organised among more than 300 refugees located all over Romania. The cultural and language barriers remain among the main impediments in reporting potential sexual abuses or THB among Ukrainians. There was reported a case of sexual abuse against a 15 years old girl that got pregnant. She did not receive any support from Child Phone 119 (unique national number for reporting cases of abuse, neglect, exploitation and any other form of violence against children) when the case was reported as it was "not an emergency" and was advised not to report the case to the police. There were also reported cases of Ukrainian women willing to come from Poland to Romania for abortion purposes, due to the restrictive policies there.

In order to better respond to these needs, the Government improved the national policies, but the identification process and monitoring of THB phenomenon remain **the most important national long-term challenges for Romanian authorities**. The Government adopted the National Mechanism for the Identification and Referral of Victims of Trafficking in Persons, a document criticized by civil society due to the overlapping of competences and the inconsistency of the referral procedures for minor victims. The Economic and Social Council delivered, in its vast majority, a negative opinion for this draft law. The representative of the police unions in Romania also requested, together with representatives of civil society, a negative opinion. Nevertheless, the Government decided to adopt the Mechanism in its original form, without amendments, which makes the identification and protection of victims a very centralized process under the National Agency against Human Trafficking (NAAHT), which is not an independent institution in Romania but subordinated to Ministry of Interior. The Agency's competences have been extended based on competences of similar institutions in countries where this authority is an independent one. NAAHT, in the last 10 years, recognized a very

low number of victims, between 30% and 50% of the number of Romanian victims reported annually by the European Commission¹.

It is largely accepted that, in a conflict area, the transnational criminality highly increases, including human trafficking under all forms of exploitation. Currently, Romania has **7 prosecutors and 48 full-time police officers² working on more than 800 THB national and international investigations**. They hardly cope with these ongoing activities and there is a clear national incapacity to monitor the permanently raising THB phenomenon among the 20 million Romanians, with 5 million living abroad, and the 1.8 million very vulnerable Ukrainians on the Romanian territory and the criminal challenges generated by the conflict. Furthermore, Romania does not have public adequate shelters for THB victims and the services offered by the civil society have been under-funded or not funded at all. In the context of THB evaluations done by international entities, the Government has reported **9 public shelters** for THB victims (Satu Mare, Botoșani, Iași, Galați, Ilfov, Giurgiu, Mehedinți, Timiș, Arad), **but none of them is functional³**.

The online data collected by Thomson Reuters, confirms a large demand for sexual access to Ukrainian women and *"this demand serves as a strong incentive for traffickers to recruit and exploit Ukrainian women at scale, as well as of smuggling networks operating at the border areas in order to facilitate the transit"*⁴. Since the start of the humanitarian crisis the online traffic has shown huge spikes searches for explicit content and sexual services from Ukrainian women and girls. For example, **global search traffic for "Ukrainian porn" increased more than 600% since the start of the humanitarian crisis, while searches for "Ukrainian escorts" increased 200%**⁵.

At the Romanian border and in the accommodation shelters, many concerns have been raised about the quality of the volunteers offering humanitarian aid to refugees upon arrival, transport, and housing in private accommodations⁶. Based on the large need of immediate support, there was no effective vetting system implemented for people volunteering in the crisis response. At Siret border a volunteer reported that he was simply asked if he speaks Russian or Ukrainian and then it was given a badge to start working and helping the refugees⁷.

¹ See the European Commission's reports and ANITP annual reports. ECLER has published a 10-year study that can be accessed here <http://www.ecler.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019%20ANITP%20fake%20data%20reported.pdf>

² 187 police officers work, according to the reported data, only 26% of their activity on cases of human trafficking. See the Letter addressed to the Prime Minister of Romania by 21 NGOs acting in the field of justice and prevention of human trafficking <https://www.ecler.org/en/advocacy-2/>

³How young women who are taken to Europe for prostitution are tricked: "I looked for love in the arms of an unscrupulous man", min.7:20, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/cum-sunt-pacalite-tinerele-care-sunt-duse-in-europa-pentru-prostitutie-am-cautat-iubirea-in-bratele-unui-om-lipsit-de-scrupule-1818115>

⁴ OSCE Recommendations on enhancing efforts to identify and mitigate risks of trafficking in human beings online as a result of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/c/516423_0.pdf

⁵ Meeting of the Scottish Parliament https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/chamber-and-committees/official-report/what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-09-06-2022?meeting=13809&iob=125243&fbclid=IwAR25T5g3a_umlyHGKdHFFrn5LI3BAF4xYJsDr0WuXLC-3Uje_ciq13qGK8o

⁶ ECLER Documentary - Războiul din Ucraina, o oportunitate pentru traficantii de persoane? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRHZDF0ys4I>

⁷ Waiting for the skies to close: The unprecedented crisis facing women and girls fleeing Ukraine, pg.23, https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL-RO_ROMANIA_ASSESSMENT_REPORT.pdf

In December, 13.112 Ukrainian children have been declared as "deported" to Russia and 330 children missing⁸. For some of them, the last information was from the Romanian territory. Despite of the fact that authorities have agreed to set up a working group on missing children, this is not effective.

The unaccompanied and separated minors are at the highest risk of GBV and THB. A relevant aspect that may increase the risks of GBV/THB is the fact that the legal definition of separated children was applied randomly at the Romanian border, as any adult accompanying a child was considered a representative. So, in many cases of separated children was raised the concern about lack of parents' empowerment provided to the adult that accompanied them. There are more than 30.000 children from Ukraine that receive temporary protection in Romania. About 5.000 unaccompanied children crossed the Romanian borders in 2022 and only 1.459 remained under supervision of the Romanian child protection systems while 2.838 were in transit to other countries. There have been concerns regarding more than 1.880 unaccompanied children that transited Romania to Turkey.

As part of an action coordinated by the Ukrainian governmental agencies, a large number of unaccompanied children have been relocated to Turkey. In 2022, from February to late April, at least **1.880 children from foster care centers in Ukraine were flown, through Romania, to hotels in Antalya**. The children arrived in Maramureş by buses, and they were picked up from the International Airport for further transportation⁹. A Romanian NGO established in 2019, Blondie Association¹⁰, reported evacuation of over 1.000 Ukrainian children and their transfer to Turkey or other EU countries, mainly Germany¹¹.

Are the transnational criminal groups present at the Ukrainian borders?

⁸ Ukraine says Russia has abducted more than 13,000 children since the invasion began <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-says-russia-has-abducted-more-than-13000-children-2022-12>

⁹ 180 abandoned children from Ukraine, flown to Antalya by the Blondie Association, <https://www.g4media.ro/180-de-copii-abandonati-din-ucraina-dusi-cu-avionul-in-antalya-de-asociatia-blondie-intr-un-proiect-coordonat-de-sotia-presedintelui-zelenski-consulatul-ucrainei-in-antalya-platim-un-pret.html> Flight of the Teddy Bears. 160 children from Ukraine flew to Turkey with the help of the Blondie Association <https://www.monitorulcj.ro/social/97994-zborul-ursuletilor-160-de-copii-din-ucraina-au-zburat-in-turcia-cu-ajutorul-asociatiei-blondie>

¹⁰ Blondie Association <https://www.asociatia-blondie.ro>

¹¹ Orphans of Ukraine, extracted from the war with the help of a Romanian NGO <https://www.dw.com/ro/orfanii-ucrainei-extra%C8%99i-din-r%C4%83zboi-cu-ajutorul-unui-ong-din-rom%C3%A2nia/a-61464426>

I. SMUGGLING CASE REPORTED AT THE UKRAINIAN BORDER

In May 2022, a very large smuggling criminal network, involving Romanians, was identified acting close to the border of Ukraine. The coordinator of the group was a young Romanian of only 28-year-old who has been internationally wanted, with a preventive arrest warrant in 3 countries (Romania, Hungary and Austria). On the 4th of May 2022 he was arrested in Florești, Cluj County. The Austrian authorities mentioned that he coordinated a transnational criminal group made of more than **250 smugglers**, mainly from Republic of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, Serbia, Estonia, Lithuania, Turkey, most of them being guides who drove vehicles through predetermined and controlled areas¹². Based on the information from the Austrian authorities, in less than one and a half year, the criminal group smuggled **over 36.000 illegal migrants to Austria**. The proceeds of crime from migrant smuggling exceed 150.000,000 euros¹³ as the cost of a transfer was, on average, over 4.000 euros per migrant. During the search carried out by the border police in Sighet, 27 cars used for the transportation of migrants on the territory of Hungary and Austria were identified at one of the Romanian members of the criminal group. The authorities underlined that several Romanian citizens carried out activities of guiding, transporting, and sheltering migrants of Afro-Asian origin on the territory of Hungary and Austria. In early May 2022, the network was dismantled by the Austrian authorities, in cooperation with the Romanian Police.

II. POTENTIAL CASES OF GBV/THB REPORTED¹⁴

1. Housing in exchange of sex or cookies in exchange of kisses

A case of sexually aggressions have been reported during accommodation in one monastery in Maramures county (Petrova village) that has an accommodation capacity of 40 seats, all occupied by Ukrainian refugees. One woman (22 years old, mother of a 2 years old girl) claimed to have been sexually aggressed by the abbot during the first days of accommodation at the monastery¹⁵. The young woman entered the country through Sighet crossing border point and received a ticket to travel to Bucharest from volunteers. Even so, as she had no concrete plans, she was taken to the monastery by a priest who used to receive refugees from the volunteers at the border. An NGO representative asked one of the volunteers to look for the mother and girl after few days and the sexual aggression was identified. The public sources mentioned that the victim hired a lawyer to represent her before the Romanian authorities, but in the end, she did not go further with the complaint. In this situation, the police completed the file and sent it to the Prosecutor's Office

¹²The Romanian Border Police contributed, together with the Austrian authorities, to the destruction of an organized criminal group coordinated by a Romanian <https://www.politiadefrontiera.ro/ro/main/i-politistii-de-frontiera-romani-au-contribuit-alaturi-de-autoritatile-austriece-la-destructurarea-unei-retele-de-criminalitate-organizata-coordonata-de-un-roman-29052.html>

¹³A Romanian is the head of the network that made 152 million euros from migrant trafficking in Europe <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/un-roman-e-seful-retelei-care-a-strans-152-de-milioane-de-euro-din-traffic-de-migranti-in-europa-4126187>

¹⁴ ECLER highly respects the rights of the survivors of the sexual violence and human trafficking offences. The cases are presented in order to underline the fact that these crimes are present among Ukrainian refugees

¹⁵ Romanian Television, 18 April 2022, http://stiri.tvr.ro/o-refugiata-ucraineana-ar-fi-fost-agresata-sexual-pe-durata-cazarii-la-o-manastire-din-maramure_903224.html#view

attached to the Vișeu de Sus Court, with a proposal to close the case and the priest was acquitted of any charges¹⁶.

A volunteer working at the border with Ukraine was observed asking a small child for a kiss “on the lips” in exchange of a cookie¹⁷. Few Ukrainian mothers reported to ECLER that they have been received offers of housing in exchange of sex, but they do not want to report them to authorities as it may be troubling, with lost time and financially expensive¹⁸.

2. Lack of monitoring at the border crossings or accommodation centers

During the very first days of the conflict, ECLER was informed about a potential case of human trafficking identified by volunteers at a border crossing. A young Ukrainian woman, pregnant, was in need of health support when she reached the Romanian border. The volunteers recommended her to go to the hospital, but she was scared and declared that she wants to travel further to Poland together with the group from her city of residence. The volunteers insisted and promised her support to reach Poland after hospitalization, but she did not want to be separated from the group. She mentioned that she was very scared of a man that she met during the trip to the Romanian border. He was very kind with her at the beginning, but before reaching the Romanian border he started to put pressure on her to accept to prostitute herself in Poland. She told him during their very first discussions that she would like to help her husband and her brother to escape from the war. The man mentioned that he has all the needed connections and for 3.000 euros/person he can bring her relatives to Romania or Poland. As the woman did not have 6.000 euros to pay him, he mentioned that she can manage to prostitute herself and, in few weeks, she will earn the needed amount of money. She categorically refused the offer, and he started a psychological pressure on her: “You are lying! You do not really love your husband and brother! They can die in any moment, and you do not care about them! What means for you to do that for few weeks and save their life? If you really love them, you should do it!” As she further refused his offer, the man started to be violent verbally and even physically, punching her.

A volunteer working at the border reported that an unknown strange man had approached her asking to “bring him 3 female refugees” for transportation¹⁹. A Romanian that has been convicted by the Romanian court for human trafficking and pimping, was identified at the border trying to transport Ukrainian women²⁰. A man came to a shelter offering to accommodate 14 children in a remote

¹⁶ Last-minute decision in the sexual assault case opened in the name of the priest Agaton Opreșan, <https://www.gandul.ro/actualitate/decizie-de-ultima-ora-in-dosarul-de-agresiune-sexuala-deschis-pe-numele-duhovnicului-agaton-oprisan-staretul-a-fost-acuzat-de-o-refugiata-din-ucraina-19844859>

¹⁷ Waiting for the skies to close: The unprecedented crisis facing women and girls fleeing Ukraine, pg.23, https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL-RO_ROMANIA_ASSESSMENT_REPORT.pdf

¹⁸ “Look, he locked us in a room and is using violence”, min 0:10, http://stiri.tvr.ro/uite--ne-a-inchis-intr-o-odaie---i-aplica-violen--a--multe-femei-refugiate-din-ucraina-dar---i-copii-cad-prada-traficantilor-de-carne-vie_910128_youtube.html#view

¹⁹ Waiting for the skies to close: The unprecedented crisis facing women and girls fleeing Ukraine, pg.23, https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL-RO_ROMANIA_ASSESSMENT_REPORT.pdf

²⁰ ECLER Documentary - Războiul din Ucraina, o oportunitate pentru traficantii de persoane? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRHZDF0ys4I>

mountain lodge, without offering enough information about the kind of support offered to the requested children²¹.

The Assoc Association reported a case related to a Ukrainian woman running from Kharkiv, going to Greece. All indications showed that upon arrival, she would be exploited sexually. After receiving information about her potential exploitation, she decided not to move to Greece²². Other case was reported by a representative of Assoc *“I have personally identified two older people who were victims of human trafficking during one of my visits; they managed to escape. Of course, due to the sensitive nature of the case, I cannot disclose any more details”*.

One of the participants in the ECLER’s trainings on early detection of GBV/THB cases reported that three Ukrainian children are selling flowers in the pedestrian area of downtown Bucharest and some of human trafficking indicators are present. ECLER asked for specific actions and behavioral monitoring. Thus, other clear indicators of exploitation have been observed – the children were sad and scared, they did not want to talk when they were asked about their activity, they have been in the street for a very long time without water and food, one of them received a large amount of money for a flower bouquet and he did not show any happiness. The case was reported by ECLER to the competent Romanian authorities.

3. Fake persons or fake entities

A man promoted himself on social media as a representative of an American Association of Obstetrics and Gynecology, offering shelter and support to at least 10 Ukrainian pregnant women. Based on this information, a pregnant woman invited him to a refugee shelter in Iași. The manager of the shelter, realizing that it may be a potential trafficking situation, tried to dissuade the three women who insisted that they wanted to go with “the American”. The manager sent a social worker with them to the accommodation place, which had no Internet, no supplies, no TV, and bare rooms. Realizing what was happening, the women went back to the shelter²³.

A Ukrainian mother and her children crossed the border into Romania. They were looking for a means of transport that would take them away from the border area. Two fake volunteers, pretending to represent a refugee shelter, asked her where she was staying. They returned later in the day and told her that Switzerland was the best place for her to go and that they would transport her there with a van full of other women. They asked her to show them his son who was in another room. They looked him up and down. They insisted that the mother and children must travel with them and got angry when she asked to see their ID cards. To get the men away from her family, the mother promised to meet them when the other women were already in the van. But as soon as the men left, she took her children and ran away²⁴.

²¹ Waiting for the skies to close: The unprecedented crisis facing women and girls fleeing Ukraine, pg.23, https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL-RO_ROMANIA_ASSESSMENT_REPORT.pdf

²² The unsung heroes at the Ukraine-Romania border, <https://eeagrants.org/news/unsung-heroes-ukraine-romania-border>

²³ Waiting for the skies to close: The unprecedented crisis facing women and girls fleeing Ukraine, pg.23, https://voiceamplified.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL-RO_ROMANIA_ASSESSMENT_REPORT.pdf

²⁴ Case reported during discussion on Regional cooperation and capacity building for Ukrainian CSOs for a coordinated humanitarian response in the Black Sea

Many NGOs reported that Ukrainian citizens, especially women, are contacted online and offered jobs in countries like England, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, Turkey and UAE. The offers exceeded the average pay for that job 2-3 times and the professional experience was not needed, which is always alarming.

One of the participants in the ECLER's trainings on early detection of GBV/THB cases reported that a Facebook account of a woman from Ukraine, who is part of a very large Facebook community in Romania - United for Ukraine, posted very strange job ads for several months. For example, one of the ads mentions 12 hours of work/day for 5 or 6 days/week. Through open date research, ECLER identified that the company in Romania for which the job adverts were promoted has been closed since 2016. It was also identified that the recruitment company is based in Dubai. Doing research about the services offered by this recruitment company, ECLER found that the total working conditions are very similar to exploitation, wages were not paid, and in one of the cases 2 sisters were separated against their will. ECLER further reported this case to INTERPOL.

One of the participants in the ECLER's activities reported that a person posts messages of recruiting models (females, males and boys aged 3-4 to 7-8) for an 8-hour photo shoot for Dubai. ECLER was able to identify other indicators of potential exploitation and the case was further reported to INTERPOL.

A case of potential trafficking of minors was reported to ECLER by a Romanian NGO working directly with refugees. An Italian-speaking citizen, allegedly a diplomat working for a fake international organization, has asked the NGO for support to resettle 100 unaccompanied minors in Italy, saying he has a mandate from the Italian government. Even though it was explained to him that there are rigorous inter-governmental procedures that should be followed for the transfer to some unaccompanied minors, he seems to want to bypass them. ECLER made further research finding out that the representatives are not part of a UN agency, but they come from an NGO that is connected to Italian mafia, money laundering investigation platforms and different businesses in hospitality. ECLER further reported the case to the competent authorities. ECLER identified that this NGO covered some travel expenses of a high-level Romanian politician.

A Romanian citizen reported to ECLER that a group of Ukrainian young girls were waited to Bucharest, but they disappeared after an NGO offered them accommodation in transit from the border to the capital. A volunteer, called Daniel and helped by a Transnistrian that speaks Russian, was the person looking for Ukrainians in need of accommodation at the crossing point and transferred them to an NGO that hosted them in a festivity hall. The person that reported the case to ECLER mentioned that the young women were informed by the NGO's representatives that they will be transferred to Italy for jobs even if they have not requested that, but they planned to travel to Bucharest. They found out that this NGO has partners in Italy and Germany that can support Ukrainian single women. After about one week, the Ukrainians could not be contacted by their mobile phones or social media. ECLER reported the case to the Romanian authorities.

4. Loverboy modus operandi

A 16-year-old girl of Ukrainian citizenship crossed the border accompanied by the declared “her brother-in-law”. After a few days, while they were in a cafe, the girl managed to escape, approached a policeman and stated that she was constantly raped by the man, both in Ukraine and after they crossed the border into Romania. It is assumed that the perpetrator's intention was to take the girl from her family and force her into prostitution. The man decided to leave Ukraine taking advantage of the situation created by the war and the possibility of crossing the border into Romania without passports²⁵.

One of the participants in the ECLER’s trainings on early detection of GBV/THB cases reported that she identified certain indicators of human trafficking in a case that is very similar to a recruitment situation using the loverboy modus operandi. She informed us that this is the case of a mother and daughter who were transported from Moldova through Romania to other EU country. Once they arrived in that country, they got free accommodation, and the owner of the apartment asked the mother to offer sexual services in exchange for the accommodation. Later, the owner of the apartment said that his girlfriend knew about their sexual relationship and asked them to leave the apartment. He promised to transfer them to a refugee shelter, but now he has changed his mind many times confusing them, trying to separate the mother from the daughter, claiming that a friend can only provide accommodation for the mother. When the violence against the two women started, ECLER reported the case to INTERPOL and with their immediate intervention, the mother and daughter were saved at the very last moment, just as the violence against them started, and before being transferred to other members of the network in order to be sexually exploited who came to take them.

A Ukrainian woman was convinced by a Romanian-Moldovan citizen to leave Kishinev and move to Romania, together with her 1.6-year-old son, where he can find a job and offer her accommodation and protection. After moving to Romania, her husband reported from Ukraine that she was isolated by her family and friends, she did not answer to her mobile phone or emails. The case was reported by ECLER to the Romanian authorities. The women and the son are back home in Ukraine.

III. RESULTS OF A SURVEY APPLIED AMONG PROFESSIONALS

ECLER applied a survey on the identification of potential vulnerabilities and risks of human trafficking and sexual violence among Ukrainians living in Romania or being in transit to other countries. The survey was applied to professionals that are working directly with Ukrainian refugees and children, mainly frontliners like social workers, child protection workers, police officers including the border police, NGO representatives, representatives of local authorities, teachers, psychologist, doctors and journalists working at the border. The multiple choices options of the survey were developed based on the findings of a desk research and group discussions conducted by ECLER.

²⁵ Case reported during discussion on Regional cooperation and capacity building for Ukrainian CSOs for a coordinated humanitarian response in the Black Sea

The survey was applied twice: in October 2022 to over 117 professionals and in January 2023 to over 223 professionals. The results of the 2 surveys show minor differences between the findings.

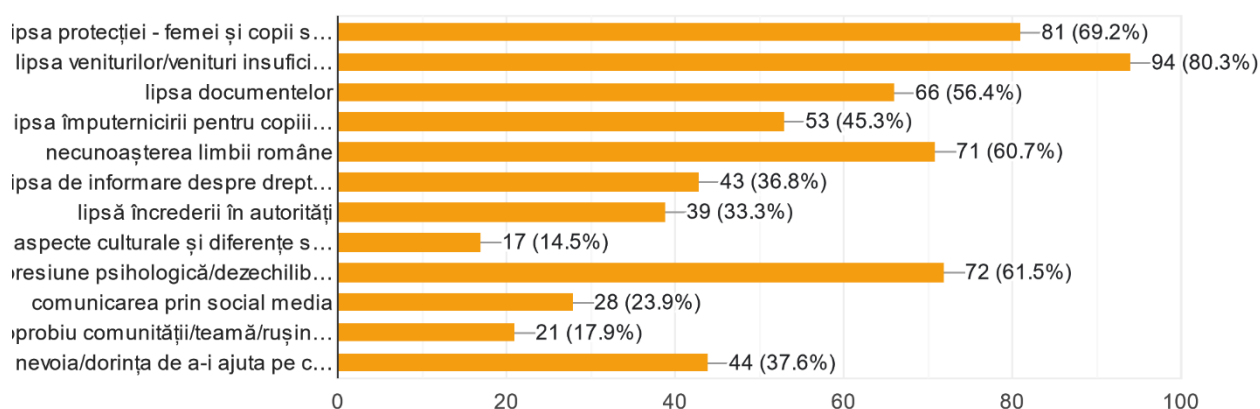
Findings of the Survey applied in October 2022

This survey focused on the main vulnerabilities of Ukrainians in front of human trafficking phenomenon. The survey was applied in Romanian language to 117 frontline professionals. Among the 12 potential vulnerabilities that resulted from the desk research and group discussions conducted by ECLER, the survey shows that the top 5 vulnerabilities identified on the field are:

- lack of funds/cash (94 respondents)
- lack of protection of women and children (81 respondents)
- psychological pressure and need for emotional balance (72 respondents)
- language barrier (71 respondents)
- lack of documents (66 respondents)

Care considerați că ar putea fi principalele VULNERABILITĂȚI ale ucrainenilor în fața potențialelor situații de trafic de persoane?

117 responses



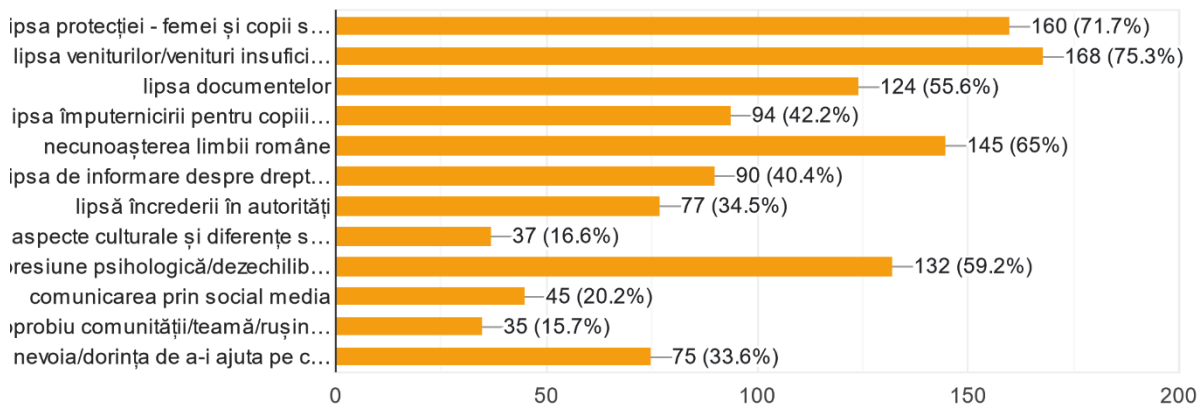
Findings of the Survey applied in January 2023

The survey was applied to 209 frontline workers and was extended to the risks of human trafficking as ECLER considers that cases of Ukrainians exploitation should be seen and identified. Among the 12 potential vulnerabilities, the survey shows that the top 5 vulnerabilities are the same as those reported in October 2022:

- lack of funds/cash (168 respondents)
- lack of protection of women and children (160 respondents)
- language barrier (145 respondents)
- psychological pressure and need for emotional balance (132 respondents)
- lack of documents (124 respondents)

Care considerați că ar putea fi principalele VULNERABILITĂȚI ale ucrainenilor în fața potențialelor situații de trafic de persoane?

223 responses



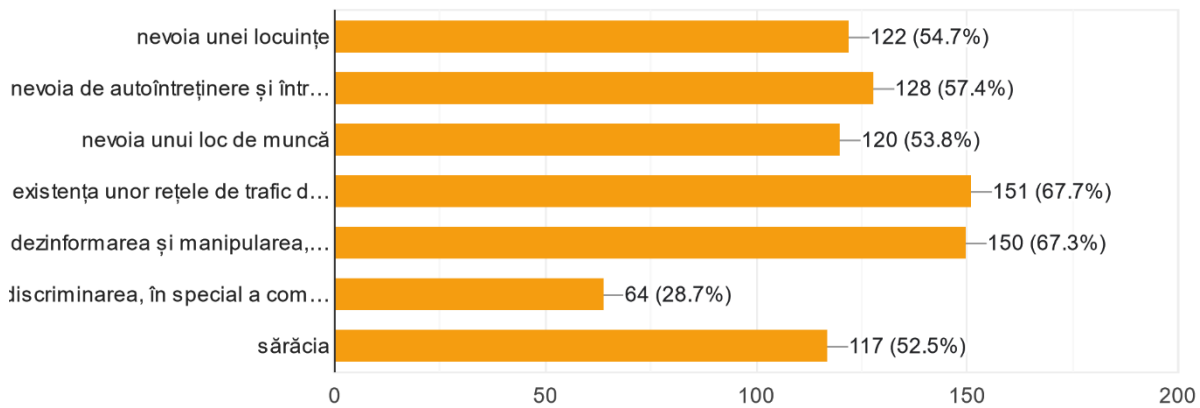
Other potential vulnerabilities reported by the professionals involved in the research, that have not been identified by ECLER's desk research, are the lack of a well-organized reception system, the distrust in the Romanian authorities, lack of job opportunities in Romania, the psychological immaturity of youth and young women, the fear of being judged/isolation from the community if they report the abuse.

Among the 7 potential risks of human trafficking that resulted from the desk research and group discussions conducted by ECLER, the survey shows that the top 5 risks are:

- the presence of powerful transnational criminal networks, existing before the conflict in Romania and Ukraine (151 respondents)
- the disinformation and manipulation through the communication platforms/social media (150 respondents)
- the need to support herself and her family members (128 respondents)
- the need for housing (122 respondents)
- poverty (117 respondents)

Care considerați că ar putea fi principalele RISCURI ale ucrainenilor în fața potențialelor situații de trafic de persoane?

223 responses



Other potential risks reported by the professionals involved in the research are the lack of proper information about GBV/THB risks and reporting mechanisms, the need to move from an accommodation place to another, the easy access of traffickers to vulnerable women and children, the trust in tempting offers “too good to be true”, the illusion of an easy life in EU, and the lack of proper training on THB for many professionals working with refugees.

The content of this material does not necessarily represent the official position of the funding entities.

ProUCare is a project funded by Care - a global confederation that has been fighting poverty and social injustice for over 75 years and it is coordinated and implemented at national level by the SERA Romania Foundation (a non-governmental, non-profit, private organization operating for 26 years in the field of child protection and the promotion of children's rights in Romania) with the support of Care France and FONPC (Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations for Children).