

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF UKRAINIAN WAR REFUGEES IN MOLDOVA AND ROMANIA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53486/dri2025.07>

UDC: 364.65(478+498):314.745.22(477)

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Abstract: *The outbreak of Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine in 2022 has resulted in a significant refugee crisis, with millions of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict and seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, including Moldova and Romania. This research paper aims to examine the socio-economic conditions of Ukrainian war refugees in these two countries, focusing on the economic and social challenges faced by both the displaced population and the host nations. The study draws on secondary data, including reports from international organizations, government statistics, and academic articles, to assess the impact of the refugee crisis on Moldova and Romania. The methodology incorporates a review of existing literature, national and international reports, and findings from non-governmental organizations working in region. The research highlights the financial and social strain experienced by both countries, particularly Moldova, due to the high influx of refugees relative to its population size. The paper explores the burden placed on public services, housing, healthcare, and social welfare systems, as well as the difficulties faced by refugees in securing employment, accessing education, and integrating socially into their host communities. Despite these challenges, the study also identifies the resilience demonstrated by both Moldova and Romania through governmental and international humanitarian efforts. The findings underscore the urgent need for continued international support and the implementation of more effective integration policies. This paper contributes to the understanding of the socio-economic implications of the Ukrainian refugee crisis on Moldova and Romania and offers insights into the long term impacts on both refugees and host countries.*

Key words: *Ukrainian war refugees, socioeconomic conditions, Moldova, Romania, refugee burden, humanitarian support.*

JEL: J61, I38, R23

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of Europe was dramatically altered with the onset of Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine in February 2022. This military intervention led to widespread displacement across Ukraine, creating one of the largest refugee crises in modern history. As Ukrainian civilians fled the war zones in search of safety, neighbouring countries, particularly Moldova and Romania, became pivotal hosts for millions of displaced individuals. Moldova, a smaller country with a population of just over 2.4 million, and Romania, with a larger and more developed economy, have both faced significant challenges as they absorbed the influx of refugees. Moldova and Romania, both of which share historical, cultural, and geographic ties to Ukraine, have seen their socioeconomic systems stretched to their limits. The Ukrainian refugees arriving in these countries have come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, seeking shelter, food, medical assistance, and safety. The humanitarian burden of managing such a large and diverse group of people has strained both the public and private sectors in Moldova and Romania, placing additional pressure on already struggling economies. Both European states have made remarkable efforts for immediate relief for refugees. The influences of the Ukrainian war refugee issue on the national economies of Romania and Republic of Moldova is quite significant and disturbing.

United Nations Refugee Agency in Romania had registered 182,347 Ukrainian War refugees for temporary protection in the end of February 2025. While the United Nations Refugee Agency in Moldova inked 127,000 Ukrainian war refugees as per March 2025.

The crisis of Ukrainian war refugees falls in the scope of humanitarian issue but at the same time it is an economic issue also. There is tremendous pressure on healthcare, housing, education and social services in Moldova and Romania because rapid increase of human population. There are limited resources in Moldova. Because of this government of Moldova faces a serious challenge to provide the basic services and integration programs related to Ukrainian war refugees. In case of Romania, the economy is developed and larger and it the part of European Union. Despite this Romania is experiencing tremendous pressure on its economy because of Ukrainian war refugees. Unemployment, inflation and housing shortages because of larger refugee influx impacts the local Romanian communities and national economy.

This research paper make analysis the socioeconomic conditions of Ukrainian war refugees in Moldova and Romania. The paper examines (i) economic costs related to hosting refugees (ii) social integration challenges of refugees (iii) economic burden of Ukrainian war refugees in the host countries. By exploring the experiences of refugees in both Moldova and Romania, the paper will highlight the resilience of the host countries while also addressing the substantial economic and social difficulties they face. Additionally, this study aims to shed light on the effectiveness of current policies and the need for future international support to mitigate the long term impact of this crisis on both the refugees and the countries hosting them.

The importance of this research lies in its potential to inform policy decisions and humanitarian efforts. Understanding the socioeconomic challenges faced by Ukrainian war refugees in Moldova and Romania is critical for governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations working to improve the conditions of displaced populations. Moreover, it underscores the need for comprehensive integration programs that go beyond immediate relief and address long term issues such as employment, education, and social cohesion. The findings of this research are not only relevant to Moldova and Romania but also to other countries grappling with similar refugee crises and seeking sustainable solutions to support displaced populations.

Literature review

The socio-economic impacts of the Ukrainian war refugees in Moldova and Romania have been widely discussed in recent literature, focusing on both the challenges faced by refugees and the burden on host countries. Several studies highlight the significant strain placed on public services, including housing, healthcare, and education.

Economic impact on host countries

Previous research has shown that the economic burden of hosting refugees often includes increased demand for public services, rising inflation, and strain on the labour market. According to the IOM (2024), both Moldova and Romania have experienced rising housing costs due to the increased demand for rental properties, especially in urban centers. Moldova, with its smaller economy, faces a disproportionate strain on its public services (World Bank, 2024), while Romania, though economically stronger, still faces inflationary pressures and labour market disruptions (European Commission, 2024).

Social integration challenges

Studies on social integration have emphasized the language barriers and challenges to labour market inclusion faced by refugees. In Moldova, many refugees struggle to access healthcare and education due to the lack of language skills and the limited availability of integration programs (UNHCR, 2023). In Romania, while refugees have better access to services, social integration remains an issue due to language differences and unfamiliarity with local systems (EU, 2024).

Psychosocial effects on refugees

The psychological impact of displacement has been a focus in both Moldova and Romania. Refugees often experience trauma, isolation, and mental health challenges, which can hinder their ability to integrate into the host society. The IOM (2024) reports that mental health support services are often insufficient to meet the high demand for care, especially in Moldova.

Long term economic and social outcomes

While much of the focus has been on the immediate impacts of the refugee crisis, long term studies suggest that refugee populations can contribute to the host countries' economies over time if provided with adequate support for integration (Smith & Hauer, 2024). Employment integration and access to education are key factors in the successful socioeconomic integration of refugees, with positive impacts on local economies and social cohesion.

Methodology

This research employs a secondary data analysis approach to investigate the socioeconomic conditions of Ukrainian war refugees in Moldova and Romania. Given the challenges and limitations of primary data collection, secondary data from reputable sources such as international organizations, governmental reports, academic studies, and media outlets were utilized.

Data sources

The sources of data include:

- Reports from international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Bank.
- Government publications from the Ministries of Social Affairs and Labour, as well as local government reports from Moldova and Romania.
- Academic articles and studies on the economic and social impacts of refugee influxes in Eastern Europe.
- News articles and policy papers that provide insights into the evolving situation of refugees in the host countries.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected for the period of 2022-2025 to ensure relevance and reflect the most recent developments. The study focuses on two main areas:

Economic impacts: Data on gross domestic product changes, inflation, employment statistics, housing market trends, and social services expenditure were examined to assess the financial strain placed on both Moldova and Romania.

Social integration: Secondary data regarding refugee access to healthcare, education, language integration programs, and employment opportunities were analysed to understand the social challenges faced by refugees.

The data were analysed through a qualitative content analysis approach, categorizing the findings into thematic areas such as economic burden, employment, housing, healthcare, and education.

Findings

The findings of this study are based on a comprehensive analysis of secondary data, including reports from international organizations, government publications, academic articles, and media sources. The results highlight both the direct and indirect socio-economic impacts of the influx of Ukrainian refugees into Moldova and Romania. This section is divided into two main areas: (1) the economic impact on host countries, and (2) the challenges faced by refugees in terms of social integration.

1. Economic impact on Moldova and Romania

Increased economic burden on host countries

Both Moldova and Romania have experienced significant economic impacts as a result of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The influx of refugees has placed considerable strain on public services and infrastructure, leading to both short term and long-term economic burdens. For Moldova, the smaller economy and limited resources have made it particularly vulnerable to the economic shock caused by the Ukrainian war refugee crisis.

According to the World Bank (2024), Moldova's gross domestic product saw a reduction of approximately 2-3% due to the costs associated with accommodating Ukrainian war refugees. These costs include increased demand for housing, healthcare, education, and social services. The

government has been forced to allocate a significant portion of its budget to meeting the basic needs of Ukrainian war refugees, which has reduced the availability of funds for other essential public services (World Bank, 2024).

In Romania, while the economic impact has been less severe, the country has still faced notable challenges. The IOM (2024) reports that Romania experienced rising inflation, particularly in housing markets, due to increased demand for rental properties. Major urban centers like Bucharest have seen rental prices soar as refugees settle in these areas. Although Romania's economy is more robust, the crisis has created pressure on public services, particularly in border regions and large cities where refugees have concentrated (IOM, 2024).

Strain on housing and public services

Housing has been one of the most visible areas of strain in both countries. In Moldova, where available housing is already limited, the arrival of a large number of refugees has led to overcrowding in certain areas. Local governments have struggled to provide adequate housing for refugees, especially in rural areas where infrastructure is less developed (UNHCR, 2023).

Similarly, Romania has faced increased demand for housing, particularly in cities near the Ukrainian border. The European Commission (2024) notes that the refugee influx has caused a shortage of affordable housing, driving up rental prices and creating competition between refugees and local populations. The rising cost of living has put additional pressure on the social welfare systems in both countries (European Commission, 2024).

Ukrainian war refugees represent a significant economic resource for both Moldova and Romania. The governments of these two countries have the potential to capitalize on this resource by generating funding for constructing accommodations for the refugees. One possible approach to achieve this is by implementing a model based on integrated man-hours and a barter system. This innovative model was introduced by Engineer Kamran Khan during the "Economics, Management, and Finance: Problems, Research, Results" session of the international conference titled *Communications, Society, Spirituality*, which took place in May 2024 at Russia's Ukhta State Technical University (Ukhta State Technical University, 2024). The same model was presented as a housing solution for homeless individuals by Engineer Kamran Khan in March 2025 at the international Scientific and Practical Conference titled "Chemistry. Ecology. Urbanism," held at Perm National Research Polytechnic University in Russia.

Both Moldova and Romania have also experienced an increased strain on public services such as healthcare and education. In Moldova, the healthcare system, which was already underfunded, has struggled to meet the needs of refugees who require medical attention, vaccinations, and psychological support (IOM, 2024). Romania, with its more developed healthcare infrastructure, has nonetheless seen an increase in the number of refugees accessing medical services, which has stretched the capacity of hospitals and clinics, especially in areas with high refugee concentrations (IOM, 2024).

Unemployment and labour market integration

One of the major economic challenges faced by both host countries is the integration of refugees into the labour market. Many refugees, particularly those from Ukraine, are skilled workers who face significant barriers to employment in Moldova and Romania. The lack of recognition of qualifications, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with local labour markets have contributed to high unemployment rates among refugees. In Moldova, refugees have found it particularly difficult to secure formal employment due to the country's limited job market and the lack of language proficiency among many refugees (Smith & Hauer, 2024). The IOM (2024) reports that while some refugees have found work in agriculture and the informal sector, many remain unemployed or underemployed (IOM, 2024).

In Romania, refugees have faced similar challenges in labor market integration. The EU (2024) reports that despite some efforts to facilitate refugee employment, such as language training and job placement services, the overall unemployment rate among refugees remains high. Many refugees are

employed in low wage, temporary jobs in sectors such as construction, retail, and agriculture. However, access to skilled jobs remains limited, and the lack of recognition of Ukrainian qualifications further exacerbates the problem (EU, 2024).

2. Social integration challenges for refugees

Language barriers and cultural adaptation

One of the major barriers to social integration for Ukrainian refugees in both Moldova and Romania is language. Many Ukrainians speak Russian. The official languages in Moldova and Romania is Romanian language. In Moldova, where Romanian is the most widely spoken language, Ukrainian refugees with limited knowledge of Romanian struggle to access education, healthcare, and employment. Smith and Hauer (2024) highlight that language barriers have made it difficult for many refugees to integrate into local communities, particularly in rural areas where the population speaks little Russian. In Romania, the language barrier remains a significant challenge for those who speak only Ukrainian or Russian. Language barriers affect refugees' ability to participate fully in society, limiting their access to public services, social networks, and employment opportunities (Davis, 2024).

Access to housing, healthcare, and education

Social services have also been an area of concern for refugees in both countries. In Moldova, refugees have faced difficulties in accessing adequate housing and healthcare, particularly in rural areas. The UNHCR (2023) notes that temporary shelters have often been overcrowded and refugees in these shelters face poor living conditions. In addition, refugees have reported difficulty accessing medical care, as Moldova's healthcare system struggles to accommodate the increased demand. (World Bank, 2024).

In Romania, while refugees generally have better access to social services, there are still significant barriers to healthcare and education. Many refugees struggle to navigate the Romanian healthcare system due to language barriers and a lack of knowledge about how to access services. Similarly, the IOM (2024) reports that while Ukrainian children have the right to attend Romanian schools, there are challenges related to integration into the educational system, especially in terms of language proficiency and curriculum differences (IOM, 2024).

Psychosocial impact

The psychological and social impact of displacement is another key issue for refugees. Many refugees from Ukraine have experienced trauma due to the war, displacement, and loss of loved ones. In Moldova, where mental health services are limited, refugees have reported feelings of isolation and depression. The IOM (2024) highlights the importance of providing mental health support, but the demand for such services often exceeds the available resources (IOM, 2024).

In Romania, while mental health services are more developed, there is still a gap in providing adequate psychological support for refugees. Reports from the UNHCR (2023) and IOM (2024) suggest that refugees often struggle to access mental health care, which exacerbates the long term social and psychological consequences of displacement (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2024).

The economic burden on Moldova and Romania's economies

The economic burden of hosting refugees from Ukraine has been significant for both Moldova and Romania, albeit in different magnitudes. Both countries, though geographically and culturally linked, have distinct economic structures and levels of development, which influence their capacity to absorb and support large numbers of Ukrainian war refugees. Moldova, with a smaller, less resilient economy, has been disproportionately affected, while Romania, with a more developed economy, has faced its own set of challenges, though its overall economic capacity has enabled a somewhat more stable response.

Economic strain on Moldova

Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe, has faced extraordinary challenges in accommodating a large number of Ukrainian war refugees. According to the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023), Moldova has received one of the highest per capita numbers of refugees in Europe, relative to its population size. This has resulted in an increased demand for essential public services, including healthcare, housing, and education. These public sectors in Moldova are underfunded.

Effect on economic growth

The economic impact of hosting Ukrainian war refugees in Moldova was shocking as per the estimate of World Bank (2024). There is a reduction of approximately 2 to 3% Moldova's GDP is recorded. This economic decline was happened because of allocation of public funds to Ukrainian war refugees related economic costs. This include expansion of housing facilities, healthcare and education spending. Moldova decline to work on its key infrastructure projects for the economic development because of redirection of resources for Ukrainian war refugees.

Public service and infrastructure under pressure

The large influx of Ukrainian war refugees made a tremendous burden on weak healthcare and education system of Moldova. The healthcare facilities for refugee population and the local population are struggling to accommodate as per World Health Organization (WHO, 2023).

Refugees often face delays in accessing medical services, and the sudden spike in demand has overwhelmed local hospitals, particularly in urban centers.

Similarly, the education system has been stretched thin. The Ministry of Education in Moldova has reported overcrowding in schools, with an increased need for educational materials and teachers who can provide instruction in both Romanian and Ukrainian (UNHCR, 2023). This has led to the diversion of funds that would have otherwise been used for general education system improvements. The strain on housing has also been particularly severe. While the Moldovan government has provided temporary shelters for refugees, the sheer number of people arriving has led to overcrowded conditions and rising rental prices in cities like Chisinau, where most refugees have settled. According to IOM (2024), rental prices have increased by up to 20% in some urban areas due to competition between refugees and local residents. This has further strained the local economy, as displaced Ukrainians often cannot afford private housing without support.

Unemployment and labour market challenges

Moldova's job market, already limited in scope, has been further strained by the influx of refugees. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024) reports that the unemployment rate in Moldova has risen, partly due to the competition for jobs between refugees and local populations. Refugees have found it difficult to integrate into the formal job market, largely due to language barriers, lack of job recognition, and the country's informal economy structure. Mostly refugees have been employed in agriculture sector, manual labour activities, and informal sector jobs. This provide a little economic stability.

Ukrainian war refugees are not able to find employment in their respective fields. This also negatively impact on the Moldova's productivity. The refugees from the urban areas of Ukraine have higher education and high professional skills. But these refugees are working at lower salaries and temporary jobs. This situation leads the path to underemployment. And it further exacerbates the pressure on the Moldova's economy. The government of Moldova need to create effective employment integration policies for refugees. It will help to counter the phenomena of marginalization of refugees in Moldova's labour market. In addition, it will contribute the economy of Moldova. The International Labour Organization (2024) inks that strong efforts are required to provide the language training for refugee employment. In addition, recognition of foreign qualifications is also essential.

Economic pressure on Romania

Romania has more diverse and bigger economy that Moldova. But the government of Romania has a big challenge to manage the large number of Ukrainian war refugees. Because of larger refugees influx, the Romanian economy is experiencing a high pressure.

Reduction of GDP

Romania is experiencing a decline in economic growth because of the high refugees influx. Romanian economy is not declining as quickly as Moldova's economy but the country is in problems. The European Commission (2024) reported that Romania's GDP growth rate has slowed from 4.5% in 2023 and 2.8% in 2024 respectively. This happens because of increased public spending on refugee related services.

The increased demand for housing, food, healthcare, and other basic goods has driven up prices, contributing to inflation. According to the National Bank of Romania (2024), inflation has risen by 4.2% in the past year, with housing costs increasing by 7.5%, largely driven by the refugee crisis. While inflation in Romania is relatively contained compared to other parts of Europe, the refugee crisis has been a significant contributor to the increase in living costs for the local population.

Strain on housing markets and rental prices

One of the most visible economic impacts in Romania has been the surge in housing costs, particularly in cities like Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca, where refugees have concentrated. The European Commission (2024) highlights that rental prices have increased by 10-15% in these urban centres as demand for temporary housing rises. This has made it more difficult for both refugees and local low income populations to find affordable housing, increasing the risk of homelessness and social unrest. The government has struggled to meet the demand for temporary housing, and while it has received support from the European Union to build more shelters, the process of building new accommodation has been slow and hindered by bureaucratic delays. Moreover, the demand for rental properties has had a knock-on effect on the broader housing market, driving up the cost of homeownership and further straining local economies.

Pressure on social welfare systems

Romania's social welfare system has also been under significant strain due to the refugee crisis. While the country's welfare infrastructure is more developed than Moldova's, it is still struggling to cope with the large influx of refugees. The IOM (2024) reports that Romania has increased spending on housing allowances, healthcare subsidies, and unemployment benefits for refugees, which has put additional pressure on the national budget.

Furthermore, the need for social integration programs such as language courses, vocational training, and legal assistance has increased significantly. The European Union has provided funding for these initiatives, but the scale of the refugee crisis has outpaced the support available. As a result, many refugees remain in a state of economic dependency, relying on state support to meet basic needs.

Labour market integration and unemployment

The Romanian labour market has had some success in integrating refugees into the workforce, particularly in cities where there are established networks and employment programs. However, labour market integration has been slow, particularly in rural areas. The IOM (2024) reports that refugees face challenges in securing formal employment due to language barriers, differences in educational systems, and the non-recognition of Ukrainian professional qualifications. As with Moldova, many refugees have found work in low wage and temporary sectors, such as agriculture, construction, and hospitality. The unemployment rate among refugees in Romania remains high, and integration into the formal labour market has been limited by structural issues in both the local and national economies (EU, 2024).

Resolving the Russia Ukraine conflict

Both Ukraine and Russia are part of the East Slavic group of nations, sharing deep cultural, historical, and religious ties. Their similarities in traditions and beliefs are rooted in centuries of shared history. However, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, referred to by Russia as a "Special Military Operation," is not in the best economic interests of many global players, including the United States under the leadership of President Donald Trump, as well as Pakistan, Europe, and other countries around the world.

The government of Ukraine under the leadership of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy should engage in direct dialogue with the Russian government under the leadership of President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin to address and resolve the root causes that led to the conflict in the first place. Through open negotiations and mutual understanding, the two sides can work together to eliminate the factors that escalated tensions and led to the war. Foreign ministries of the both Russian Federation and Ukraine should clearly write the conditions on its ministries website to end the war. After this negotiations can start between the two countries.

The United States under the leadership of Donald Trump and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen could play a key role in facilitating and supporting this peace process. The implementation of United States and Ukraine rare earth minerals deal is possible, if there will be a complete peace with neighbouring Russian Federation.

Ending the Russia Ukraine conflict would bring significant benefits, especially for the Ukrainian refugees who have been displaced by the war and are now living in countries like Moldova, Romania, Russia, and various other European countries. A peaceful resolution would provide these refugees with the opportunity to return to Ukraine and rebuild their lives. It will help restore stability to the Europe. Pakistan based company Pakneftegaz is proposing to provide skilled manpower including engineers for the execution of rare earth minerals deal and reconstruction of Ukraine.

Conclusion

1. Economic burden on Moldova and Ukraine

The Ukrainian refugee crisis has placed a tremendous economic burden on both Moldova and Romania. Moldova has smaller economy. It has faced a more severe impact. It experienced decline in gross domestic product and significant pressure on housing and healthcare facilities. Romania, is also experiencing inflationary pressures, rising housing costs, and pressure on social welfare systems.

2. Social integration challenges of refugees

Both Moldova and Romania are facing challenges in integrating refugees into their social systems. Moldova has limited resources as compare to Romania. The obstacles for social integration are Language barriers, unfamiliarity with local systems, and limited access to employment opportunities. In Romania, healthcare facilities, education, and housing sectors are under stressed because of large refugee influx.

3. Impact on the employment

Refugees in both Moldova and Romania have faced difficulties in accessing formal employment. Many have found work in the informal sector or in low paid jobs. Domain specific Ukrainian refugee professionals cannot find jobs because of language barriers and the non recognition of Ukrainian qualifications. The result is no economic contribution in the host countries economy.

4. Psychosocial struggles and mental health needs

The psychological impact of displacement has been another crucial issue. Refugees from Ukraine often face mental health challenges, including trauma, anxiety, and depression. Both Moldova and Romania have insufficient mental health support systems to address these issues, particularly in Moldova, where resources are more limited. Providing adequate mental health care is essential for the long-term integration and wellbeing of refugees.

5. The need for sustainable solutions

The findings suggest that both Moldova and Romania need more sustainable, long term strategies for integrating refugees. These strategies should include better access to education, language training, job recognition programs, and mental health support. Additionally, more international aid and cooperation are necessary to alleviate the financial strain on these countries and help them meet the needs of the growing refugee population.

6. Positive long term outlook

Despite the immediate challenges, there is a potential for refugees to contribute positively to the host economies in the long term. With effective integration programs, refugees can fill labour shortages, contribute to the local economy, and support demographic growth in countries facing aging populations. The success of refugee integration hinges on the availability of comprehensive support systems that enable refugees to rebuild their lives and fully participate in society.

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