Internal evaluation of the Romania operational plan 2022

Ex post evaluation report

Prepared by the EUAA's Quality Management and Evaluation Sector

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EUAA/EVAL/2022/19/FR; Final

February 2023

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Acronyms and definitions

Term	Definition
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DAI	Directorate for Asylum and Integration
DM	Directorate for Migration
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
GII	General Inspectorate for Immigration
IO	International organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OP	Operational plan
TP	Temporary protection
TPD	Temporary Protection Directive
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Executive summary

Romania has been one of the main European Union (EU) entry points for those seeking temporary protection (TP) following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As a consequence, the Member State's asylum and reception systems were challenged significantly in early 2022. In response to this increased pressure, Romania and the Agency collaborated in the framework of an operational plan (OP), which ran from March to December 2022. The main objective and scope of this evaluation was to assess the results of the Agency's support to Romania. It was conducted internally by the Agency and assessed effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and added value. In addition, the evaluation considered specific questions.

This OP included three result outcomes (measures) relating to TP, reception support for international protection applicants and the voluntary transfer of TP applicants from Romania to other EU Member States. The first measure relating to TP was prioritised as it was Romania's most urgent and relevant need. The Agency extended its originally intended reception support towards infrastructure support for reception centres. There was no need for support for voluntary transfers in the period under review.

Most of the intended outputs on TP were implemented in a flexible manner. By the end of 2022, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) had facilitated almost 63 000 registrations and provided information provision sessions to over 65 000 individuals. The Agency did not complete the planned reception support activities but gained better understanding of the needs of the sector. It also contracted 71 containers which will provide the reception centres of Galați, Radăuți and Șomcuta Mare with additional space for social and administrative support activities. Despite various challenges, the Romania OP was efficient in dealing rapidly with the multiple workflows, through rapid mobilisation and response. The cost efficiency of the OP was adequate in view of the actual deployments of experts and interpreters. The OP was internally and externally very coherent. Examples are good practices in terms of multi-agency collaborations, fit-for-purpose training arrangements and versatile deployments. The operational support benefitted from the smooth internal Agency cooperation.

The main added value of the Agency's support to the General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII) was in the field of TP information provision and registration. This also involved communication on the EU Directive to national stakeholders and TP beneficiaries. The important investment in reception infrastructure is likely to boost the capacity of the three selected reception centres as of 2023.

This evaluation makes the following recommendations:

1. Agree on more **detailed Romania TP registration standard operating procedures** for division of tasks and workflow management between the different actors on the ground, building on lessons learnt and good practices from the operational support;
2. Facilitate better **working conditions** for Agency personnel and experts, such as the availability of emergency exits and improved sanitary facilities in supported locations;
3. Increase the **capacity of roving TP registration teams** to meet the demand on the ground;
4. Develop a **deployment scheme by groups of experts** to allow a more efficient approach to training and onboarding.

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1. Introduction: purpose and scope

In response to the Russian invasion and people fleeing Ukraine, Romania requested the support of the Agency on 4 March 2022. Following a rapid needs assessment, Romania and the Agency collaborated in the framework of an operational plan (OP), which ran from 28 March to 31 December 2022.

The main objective and scope of this evaluation is to assess the results of the operational measures of the Agency's support to Romania. This evaluation assessed five evaluation criteria, i.e., effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and added value in a light manner (refer to Annex 1). In addition, the evaluation considered previously agreed priority and specific questions (refer to Annexes 1 and 2).

The internal evaluation took place between November 2022 and February 2023. It was conducted by the Quality Management and Evaluation Sector of the Agency's Corporate Management Centre. It was implemented in a collaborative manner involving multiple Agency actors and partner stakeholders.

The OP was initially coordinated by the First Response Sector within the First Operational Response Unit of the Operational Support Centre. Within two months of implementation, the operational coordination was transferred to the EU Operations Sector in the Operational and Technical Assistance Unit. The General Inspectorate for Immigration (GII), through its Directorate of Asylum and Integration (DAI) and Directorate for Migration (DM), was the main counterpart from the Romanian side, though other stakeholders were also involved.

This evaluation has a number of limitations. It refers to a start-up OP, which, for inception purposes, did not include targets in its results planning. Although stakeholders considered the achievement of planned results as a priority matter to evaluate, the absence of targets made the measurement of its effectiveness (i.e., deliverables versus planned) more challenging.

2. Intended results of the action

This chapter describes the intended results under the OP and the situation before the intervention as a point of comparison.

2.1. Description of the action and its intended results

The results framework of the OP 2022 for Romania included the following three measures and associated result outcomes and outputs:

Measure 1: Support on temporary protection (TP)

Result outcome: Effective implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD).
Result output: Enhanced capacity of the Member State to register beneficiaries of TP in the context of the TPD.
This measure includes support for the registration of beneficiaries of TP (e.g., data entry, printing and filling in of the relevant forms, flow management, interpretation services and the establishment of a

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help desk to support field offices), communication and information provision to beneficiaries of TP (e.g., individual or group information sessions during registration process, development and publication of agreed content, establishment of a data hub, information sessions for international organisations (IOs)/non-governmental organisations (NGOs)) and training (e.g., on TP in Romania to the asylum support team, the Romanian authorities and IOs and their respective implementing partners, registration procedures, on TP and other relevant topics).

Measure 2: Reception support for international protection applicants

Result outcome: Enhanced capacity of the Romanian authorities to provide first-line reception conditions.
Result output: Enhanced capacity of the host Member State to manage first-line reception for international protection applicants.

This measure includes support to the development of terms of reference for contracting specialised private services for reception of applicants in individual or collective locations, and support for reception-related training and exchange visits in other Member States. The OP also refers to material support such as equipment, works and services.

Measure 3: Voluntary transfer support

Result outcome: Effective implementation of voluntary transfer from Romania to other EU Member States of displaced people falling under TP.
Result output: Support for the voluntary transfer from Romania to other EU Member States of displaced people falling under TP.

This measure includes support with the coordination and harmonisation of transfer activities of eligible TP beneficiaries (e.g., design of tools, workflows and templates), support with tasks such as information provision, interviews, registrations or vulnerability assessments, provision of interpretation services, matching transfer reports with Member State' pledges, support to selection missions, and training and guidance.

The intervention logic of the OP is in Annex 3 to this report.

2.2.   Points of comparison

Asylum requests in Romania have been on the rise in recent years. From 2018 to 2021, the country registered 2 135, 2 590, 6 155, and 9 585 yearly asylum applications respectively[1]. In 2020, in a context of decreased applications due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic[2], the increase in applications in Romania was the largest amongst EU Member States and associate countries[3].

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[1] Eurostat. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00191/default/table?lang=en (extraction 30/11/2022).
[2] Coronavirus disease 2019.
[3] EASO Asylum Report, 2021. Source: https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-Asylum-Report-2021.pdf

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In view of the rising influx, Romania developed in August 2021 a National Strategy on Immigration 2021-2024, accompanied by an action plan. The international protection objectives of the strategy relate to the efficient management of the asylum system, compliance with European and international standards, and the response capacity of the authorities and infrastructure[4].

Romania had an overall reception capacity of about 1 100 places to accommodate rising arrivals in recent years[5]. Before the start of the OP, there were six Regional Centres for Procedures and Accommodation for Asylum Seekers[6], in addition to an emergency transit centre in Timișoara[7]. In March 2022, the regional centres in Timișoara and Bucharest were in the process of being renovated. In addition, the GII with the support of the EU/Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) prepared to increase the capacity of three of its regional centres by a total of 500 places: 300 in Galați, 100 in Radăuți and 100 in Timișoara. While there were notable peaks during 2021, the average estimated occupancy rate grew from 38% in January 2022 to about 71% in mid-March 2022[8]. Some of the reception centres such as the Radăuți and Șomcuta Mare were overwhelmed with their capacity standing at 207% and 122% respectively[9].

Several non-state actors, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, the Romanian National Council for Refugees and multiple NGOs, supported the asylum and reception systems. Many NGOs were supported by the 2020 EU/AMIF support programme providing financing for the social integration of refugees, assistance and legal counselling, social assistance, in-kind support, and medical and psychological assistance for asylum seekers. It also supported the modernisation of the national Eurodac system.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 substantially challenged Romania's asylum and reception systems. Sharing a large border with Ukraine, Romania was a significant entry point for those fleeing the war. In the month following the Russian invasion, already about half a million Ukrainian citizens had crossed the border into Romania, with over 3 000 of them requesting asylum during the first week of March 2022[10]. On 4 March 2022, the European Council activated the 2001 TPD[11] making the registration of beneficiaries of TP a key priority for the authorities. Romania transposed the Council Implementing Decision[12] into national legislation on 18 March 2022[13].

Persons fleeing the war in Ukraine received accommodation either in temporary camps or in other accommodation locations established by the County Committees for Emergency Situations. At the

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[4] EASO Asylum Report, 2021. Source: https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-Asylum-Report-2021.pdf
[5] AIDA/ECRE Asylum in Europe, last updated in May 2022. Source: https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/romania/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/
[6] AIDA country report, 2021. Source: https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/AIDA-RO_2020update.pdf
[7] EASO Asylum Report, 2021. Source: https://euaa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-Asylum-Report-2021.pdf
[8] Internal needs assessments.
[9] Data extracted from the official request for support letter from the Romanian Ministry of Internal Affairs to the EUAA, 4 March 2022.
[10] UNHCR operational data portal. Source: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine
[11] Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing TP. Source: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2022/382
[12] Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022.
[13] Government Decision No. 367/2022. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/romania-new-act-grants-temporary-protection-those-fleeing-ukraine_en.

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beginning of March 2022, there were 483 sites across the country with a total capacity of around 24 000 places of which about 10 000 places were occupied. These sites were managed by different entities, such as city halls, NGOs, universities, churches and private providers. Many were also hosted in private accommodation. By March, Romania established a 'Blue Dots' hub at Sighetul Marmaţiei, which was an initiative supported by UNICEF and other NGOs and provided medical screening, food and water, psychological, legal, and social assistance for children and their parents.

The Agency conducted a rapid needs assessment in March 2022, which recognised the disproportionate pressure on the Romanian asylum and reception systems. It prioritised registrations and information provision for TP, training, reception support, and voluntary transfers from Moldova in the context of the Ukraine crisis.

3. Implementation of the action: current state of play

This chapter describes how the situation in Romania evolved over the duration of the OP and gives an overview of the main results achieved.

The OP, signed on 28 March 2022, focused on TP and reception. It also included a measure on the voluntary transfer of TP beneficiaries, but this was not initiated. The Agency's support on the ground began in the first week of April 2022.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there were 2 559 244 border crossings from Ukraine and Moldova into Romania and 1 411 956 border crossings from the border back to Ukraine[14]. 106 786 individual Ukrainian citizens were registered in Romania, of whom 53% were female adults, 24% were minors and 23% were male adults[15]. In October 2022, Romania was the fourth receiving country for TP in the EU, after Poland, Germany and Italy[16]. Figure 1 presents monthly TP registrations, asylum applications and pending asylum applications (i.e., individuals whose asylum applications were pending at the end of each month) during the course of the OP. Between March and November 2022, Romania registered on average 10 066 TP requests per month, with a peak in May 2022 of over 20 000 registrations. As shown in Figure 1, TP registrations have largely overtaken asylum applications, which ranged between 450 and 4 270 on a monthly basis between March and October 2022. In this period, Romania received a total of 9 570 asylum applications, the highest number recorded in the last decade[17]. In the early months of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Romanian reception system was under pressure, with numbers stabilising and achieving an estimated occupancy rate of 47% in August 2022. The number of persons in reception, however, remains volatile due to the high turnover, Romania being a country of transit for many asylum seekers. While these centres were occasionally used for people fleeing Ukraine, the majority opted to live in private accommodation[18].

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[14] UNHCR operational data portal. Source: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

[15] UNHCR operational data portal (Extraction 30/11/2022). Source: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/97286 and https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/235?sv=54&geo=10782

[16] Eurostat. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/DDN-20221209-1

[17] Eurostat, data available until October 2022 (extraction 02/02/2023): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00189/default/table?lang=en

[18] Refugees International, 2022. Preparing for the Unpredictable: Ensuring the Protection and Inclusion of Refugees from Ukraine in Romania and Moldova. Source: https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2022/10/5/preparing-for-the-unpredictable-ensuring-the-protection-and-inclusion-of-refugees-from-ukraine-in-romania-and-moldova
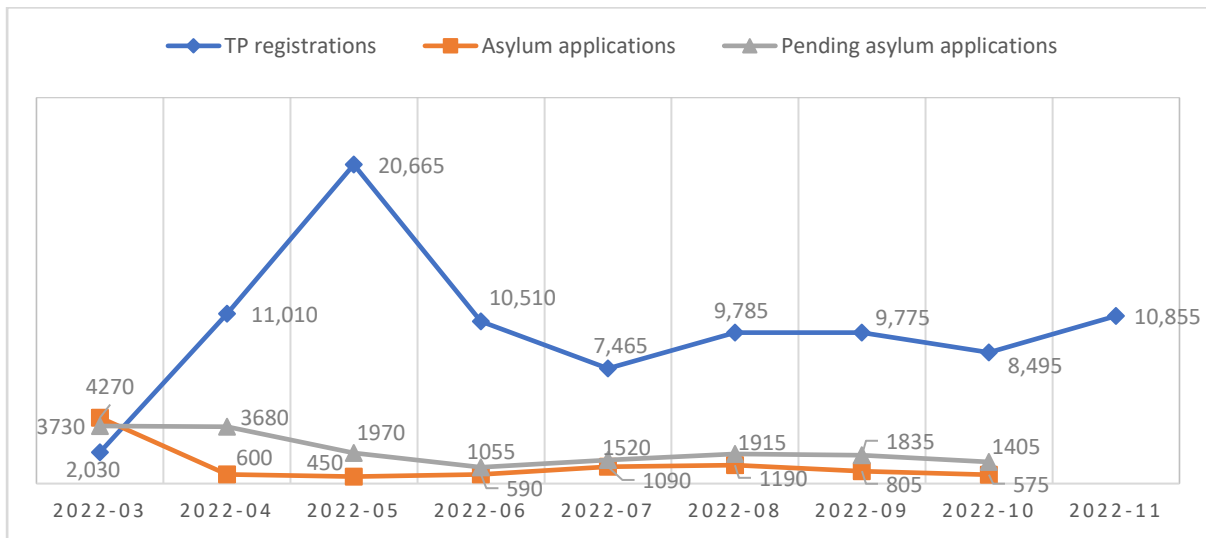
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Figure 1. Overview of TP registrations and asylum applications in Romania in the period March-October 2022[19]

The Agency's OP support was mainly aimed towards the GII[20] through its DAI, as the department responsible for asylum processes, the reception of asylum seekers and the implementation of the TPD[21]. The Agency, however, extended its support to the Directorate for Migration (DM)[22] since TP registrations also are organised at their designated DM offices (e.g., Constanţa and Sibiu).

In June 2022, Romania adopted the National Plan on Measures for Protection and Inclusion of displaced persons from Ukraine following the launch of the Refugee Response Plan in March[23]. The former outlines solutions related to the medium and long-term integration of refugees in areas such as child protection, health care, education or housing[24].

In the field of **TP** (measure 1), the aim of the Agency was to support the implementation of the TPD involving the following support actions:

1. Registration of TP beneficiaries and related support actions (e.g., file preparation);
2. Providing information provision sessions, involving a help desk to support field offices;
3. Providing TP-related training sessions.

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[19] Eurostat. Data available until October 2022 for asylum applications and pending asylum applications, and until November 2022 for TP registrations (extraction: 27/01/2023). Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/data/database.
[20] The GII falls under the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
[21] Registration of TP beneficiaries and related processes. Accommodation of TP beneficiaries is the responsibility of the State Department for Emergency Situations and the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, whereas the responsibility to access to related rights, such as health or education, falls under the responsibility of central and local authorities (e.g., Ministry of Health and National Health Insurance House, County General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection, etc.).
[22] DM is the GII department responsible for migration policy, issuance of visas and residence permits, among other areas.
[23] UNHCR operational data portal. Source: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/92257
[24] European Commission. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/national-plan-measures-protection-displaced-persons-ukraine_en. UNHCR. Source: https://www.unhcr.org/ro/14879-unhcr-welcomes-romanias-national-plan-of-measures-for-the-protection-and-inclusion-of-displaced-persons-from-ukraine.html

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By the end of 2022, the EUAA had facilitated 62 827 registrations[25], out of which 27 574 were fully carried out by EUAA personnel, implemented information provision sessions for 65 403 individuals and organised 42 training activities on TP. This support was delivered at various times in 13 of the 45 GII locations (including DAI and DM) as well as one border location which was supported with information provision activities (Sighetu Marmației). From September 2022, the Agency conducted all TP registrations where it was present. In December 2022, the Agency was operational in eight locations: two locations in Bucharest (Gociu and RomExpo), Galați, Rădăuţi, Șomcuta Mare, Constanţa, Sibiu and Brasov. The planned help desk was not activated.

Beyond the planned results, the Agency has contributed to a number of fit-for-purpose support actions such as the creation of a digital tool to support the flow management and file preparation process. It also contributed to the rollout of an information campaign on TP. The latter included the preparation and provision of targeted printed material and support for developing and updating content for the GII and other national information websites. The tailor-made information provision package also ensured that the audience was referred to the EC's information website for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. In addition, they were guided towards the EUAA's dedicated page on Ukraine containing additional information material (including country specific booklets).

The aim of measure 1 was to provide training[26] to registration and information provision experts (up to 26), flow managers (up to 6), GII personnel and other relevant actors working on the ground on registration procedures and other topics relevant to TP. In this area, the Agency exceeded plans and expectations. The Agency initially intended to train 150 GII staff but instead provided training to 274 participants. In addition, it provided training to 90 EUAA-deployed personnel, including external and Member State experts, horizontal and statutory staff and interpreters (27). Non-governmental staff were initially not included in the training plans. However, in view of increasing needs, 201 individuals (206 participations) from NGOs, IOM and UNHCR were trained in different sessions on TP. The latter was done in close collaboration with the GII.

Given the novelty of the OP, the Agency adapted its training offer by providing tailor-made training on 'Temporary Protection: Understanding the current framework in the context of the war in Ukraine' (adapted to the context in Romania), 'Provision of information and communication to people displaced from Ukraine' and 'Communication with and provision of information to asylum seekers'. These training sessions were completed by 565 individuals (652 participations)[27]. The overall completion and satisfaction rates for these training activities were respectively 93% and 95%. The training activities delivered to UNHCR, IOM and NGOs specifically received a 98% satisfaction rate[28].

In the field of **reception** (measure 2), the aim of the Agency was to support the provision of reception conditions through the creation of the terms of reference for contracting specialised (private) services for the reception of applicants in individual or collective locations. Some work began in August 2022 but has not been finalised. The Agency also foresaw the mobilisation of two reception experts and the

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[25] This includes also supporting activities such as file preparation.
[26] In addition to the standard training on induction foreseen for experts.
[27] Internal operational monitoring.
[28] The notion 'satisfaction rates' represents the aggregated percentage of the highest two scores in the five-point scale ('strongly *agree'* and '*agree')* reported in the training session feedback forms.

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organisation of training and material support. In addition, the Romanian authorities participated in technical exchanges under the Agency's permanent support activities.

In August 2022, a joint EUAA-GII mission to various reception centres around the country took place to re-evaluate the work that had been foreseen and to agree on the next steps. Following this needs assessment, the Agency prepared infrastructure support for the reception sector. In September 2022, an architecture firm reviewed the different sites and advised on preparatory works to ensure a smooth container deployment process, with the aim of increasing reception capacity. In December 2022, the Agency ordered 71 containers. These will be installed in 2023 in three different centres in Romania: 24 containers in Galați, 23 containers in Rădăuți, and 24 containers in Șomcuta Mare. The provision of these containers is intended to address the needs in reception centres such as registrations, interviews, NGO activities, social assistance, psychological counselling, archiving, childcare, social activities, printing, and sanitary services.

The support foreseen in the area of **voluntary transfers** (measure 3) did not take place as preconditions were not met.

As described in the OP, the Agency planned the following human resources:

- Under measure 1: registration and information provision experts (up to 26), flow management experts (up to six), and interpreters (up to 32);
- Under measure 2: reception experts (up to two);
- Under measure 3: case experts (up to 21), flow management experts (up to six), operations assistants (up to three), quality officers (up to three), and interpreters (up to 24).

To secure the abovementioned profiles, the Agency planned to make use of Member State and external remunerated experts.[29] Between April and December 2022, the Agency mobilised between 14 and 29 experts per month.[30] Out of these, Member State experts were more numerous ranging from 6 to 22 (or 44% to 71% of monthly deployments) between April and November 2022. In the month of December 2022, the Agency deployed no Member State experts but 17 externally remunerated experts (or 85% of all deployments). Between three and five statutory staff members were deployed as of May 2022 each month, in line with the plans. In the same period, a median of 26 interpreters supported the OP, against the 32 planned in the OP for measure 1.

The OP referred to preconditions such as joint operating procedures, quarterly measure steering committee coordination meetings, office space, a two-way data sharing, provision of necessary permits, and access to relevant databases. Many of these were in place by the end of the OP. The GII provided the Agency with an office on their premises until the latter found an external temporary solution. Data sharing was collaborative, and a special effort was made to allow the Agency's registration officers to connect to GII databases. The EUAA and Romania agreed on general joint operating procedures relating to TP at the inception phase of the OP. In addition, the holding of steering committee meetings was considered but not yet conducted. Romania did not activate a voluntary transfer hub to EU countries, which was a precondition to start measure 3.

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[29] This does not include interpreters.
[30] EUAA staff ranged between three and five per month.

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4. Evaluation findings

Building on the above, this chapter provides an analysis of the evaluation questions. It triangulates evidence from different data sources such as desk research, interviews, direct observation, and focus group discussions.

4.1. To what extent was the action successful and why?

The assessment of the **effectiveness** of the OP was challenging as its results framework did not include result targets. Some targets at output level were initially projected but not further used. This intentional exclusion of targets was justified due to the novelty of the OP and the unpredictable flows of arrivals and lack of baselines and historical data to inform adequate target setting. Nevertheless, it limits the extent to which progress could be assessed as there were limited points of reference.

The OP was composed of three measures, but mainly delivered on TP support (measure 1), which was prioritised. In the field of reception (measure 2), the Agency did not complete the initially intended activities but initiated instead a needs assessment to re-evaluate possible future support. With the ordering of 24, 23 and 24 containers for the reception centres of respectively Galați, Rădăuți and Șomcuta Mare, it boosted the perspectives of a more comprehensive support in the field of reception under the 2023 OP. This report can however not comment on the effectiveness of the containers as these were not yet installed by the end of the 2022 OP and were at the time of this evaluation subject to permit approval. Support for voluntary transfers (measure 3) was not activated, as the preconditions were not triggered.

On TP (measure 1), the Agency delivered on most of its intended activities and was flexible in supporting the evolving needs of the host Member State. Four main activities were foreseen: support to registrations, information sessions, training, and a help desk. By December 2022, the EUAA supported the GII with 62 827 registrations[31] and provided information sessions to 65 403 individuals. Some limitations (linked with the functioning of registration centres) were reported because of the limited availability of additional experts for deployment. The total number of deployments of the OP ranged between 27 and 65, including EUAA staff, Member State experts, external remunerated experts, and interpreters. The number of experts ranged between 14 and 28 per month, which was lower than planned. For example, in October and November 2022, the expert deployment rates averaged 59% and 47%, respectively.

The Agency organised 42 training sessions involving 565 individuals (652 participations) from governmental and non-governmental organisations and the Agency. These training sessions were provided to more participants than initially foreseen, including additional actors (e.g., IOs and local NGOs). Overall, the feedback from these sessions was highly positive, with a 95% satisfaction rate on average.

A help desk on TP was initially planned but did not materialise. According to interviewees, this was in view of the work already provided by other stakeholders. In addition, there was the need to prioritise the limited available resources to core registrations and information provision tasks.

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[31] This includes registrations as well as supporting activities such as file preparation.

The Agency had a very close collaboration with the GII and participated in monthly coordination meetings. In this way it ensured **coherence** with the different actions undertaken by the national counterparts. As the application of the TPD was new for all parties involved, there was a need to ensure coordinated information was provided to people fleeing Ukraine. In addition, monthly trialogue coordination meetings took place with the GII and the UNHCR to ensure coherence and complementarity. The container support for Galați and Radăuți concerns centres which were in the process of receiving additional EU/AMIF support. While the Agency support focused on containers for the different reception centre services, the aim of AMIF support was to increase the accommodation capacity.

At Agency level, internal coherence was secured through a pivotal intra-Agency collaboration, which provided support to the authorities in the implementation of the novel directive. Each centre designated Romanian speaking staff, which ensured that a multidisciplinary team for its implementation. This dynamic generated specialised support for information provision and fit-for-purpose training, and operational support.

The planned budget for the OP was about 3.8 million EUR. By the end of 2022, internal financial monitoring data indicated that the planned budget was committed. Funds for human resources were reallocated towards infrastructure support (containers) for the Romanian reception sector. This was possible because of the lower than budgeted deployment of experts. In the absence of planned result targets, the **cost efficiency** relationships seem adequate. It is difficult to comment on the cost efficiency of the material support in the reception sector, as the containers were only ordered in late 2022 and need to be installed in 2023 under the following OP.

How did the Agency respond to Romania's request, taking into account the novel nature of the OP? How did it work in practice, taking into account the different inputs and workflows needed?

This evaluation observed that the mobilisation of the Agency's operational response was very rapid. The request for support was received by the EUAA on 4 March 2022 and resulted in the signature of the OP on 28 March 2022. The first asylum support team was operational from the first week of April 2022 to support the GII. This rapid and efficient mobilisation was due to a number of enabling factors, such as the positive cooperation with the authorities and the mobilisation of internal Agency staff with previous working experience in Romania, as well as a swift response from a number of Member States in deploying experts as members of the asylum support team (10 Member State experts deployed by three Member States within the last two weeks of April). This, however, does not mean that the team was not confronted with challenges.

Some of these included:

- The uncertain geopolitical context, which led to unexpected new needs;
- The novelty of the area of support for TP, lack of guidelines, experience and expertise, and the need to build everything from the ground up, taking into consideration the ongoing working groups at EU level and guidelines issued by the European Commission;
- The limited availability of Agency staff to coordinate and support multiple OPs stemming from the activation of the TPD;

- The often challenging working conditions involving long shifts (in particular in April and May 2022) and occupational safety and health risks;
- The lower-than-expected deployment rates for externally remunerated experts and Member State experts. This was amongst others due to the limited availability of Member State experts in a context of EU-wide activation of the TPD and the complexity of the procedures to recruit external renumerated experts;
- Delays in access to the GII TP registration digital application, which limited a more comprehensive support on registrations until August 2022;
- Disruptions in the system used for registrations, leading to some delays in the productivity of deployed personnel.

How can the Agency better prioritise its operational response in view of the recent increase in the number of Member State requests for support? How can the Agency best respond to longer-term needs in Romania?

The OP was successful within its scope because it had a strong focus on TP and was supported by a number of matching Agency staff resources. The OP took place in exceptional circumstances, given the geographical location of Romania with its land and maritime border with Ukraine. In October 2022, Romania was the fourth largest recipient of requests for TP in the EU. Given the high number of people fleeing Ukraine and crossing into the country, there was unprecedented pressure on the Romanian national asylum authorities and institutions. The investment in the Romania OP benefitted from the collaborative readiness of the Romanian counterpart to receive the Agency's support, as well as active IOs and NGOs.

The expert mobilisation challenges encountered in this OP are likely to become more prevalent as operational support continues to expand. From a wider perspective, the increased number of OPs managed by the Agency can negatively influence the availability of Member State experts[32] as the Member States supported by the Agency are, in many cases, inclined to request additional expert support instead of providing it to other Member States. Building on the good practices in the field of training and RomExpo hub, the aim of the Agency needs to be the provision of support through strategic collaborative governmental and non-governmental partnerships.

While the OP 2022 focused on TP, there remain additional needs within the Romanian asylum and reception systems. Short term needs were identified in detail during a new needs assessment conducted in late 2022. Additional needs will likely arise in the field of reception with the ordering of support infrastructure for the reception centres of Galați, Radăuți and Șomcuta Mare.

In the long run, there may remain a need for support to the Romanian asylum and reception systems, in particular once the TPD is lifted.

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[32] This statement does not refer to the asylum reserve pool which has more legally binding arrangements under the new EUAA regulation. It refers rather to the availability of Member State experts for *ad hoc* calls for temporary deployments in other OP supported countries.

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4.2. How did the Agency make a difference through the action?

Interviewees recognised the **added value** of the Agency in the field of TP. As the TPD was new for all parties involved, the Agency played a defining role in supporting and developing structured communication. The Agency supported Romania through various channels (oral, printed, online) with the dissemination of (officially approved) information on the EU Directive. The Agency also ensured the dissemination of information through EC's and EUAA's dedicated websites. This level of support was made possible because of the close intra-Agency coordination, which saw the Agency's centres working together alongside national authorities to support their introduction of the TPD. The added value of the support was further enhanced through training for staff of the GII, UNHCR, and NGOs. These activities had a multiplier effect towards harmonised knowledge and communication on the subject matter. The tailor-made training activities on TP were eventually adapted and used by GII staff to deliver training themselves, leading to additional added value and increased sustainability of the support.

The registration support and related tasks for TP led to a reduction in the registration backlogs which were accumulated since March 2022. Already in April 2022, for example, the Agency supported 3 400 TP beneficiaries with information provision and file preparation[33]. This support allowed the GII to continue ensuring its commitments in the field of asylum, resettlement and reception. Multi-agency collaborations led to synergies and spin-offs. The support on information provision, interpretation and flow management during registration also enhanced the added value of the registration process for the TP seekers. In addition, the support led to unexpected spin-offs such as advice on TP and the development of a hands-on software application to accelerate the registration process. The flexible fit-for-purpose training support also enabled the response to specific needs. The OP benefitted from the Agency's thematic work on TP such as the production of information provision material and a practical guide for guardians of unaccompanied children fleeing Ukraine.

The added value of the Agency's support in the reception sector remains limited for 2022. The intended actions were not completed but a reassessment of needs allowed a better understanding of the Romanian reception sector. It is likely that these efforts will bear their fruits under the 2023 OP, with the installation of the 71 containers and additional support activities.

4.3. Is the action relevant?

As outlined in section 2.2, the need for implementation of the Council Decision on Temporary Protection[34] introduced an additional workload on an already stretched asylum system in Romania. In view of the geopolitical situation, the OP was very relevant. This is particularly the case for measure 1, where the Agency intended to support Romania with the implementation of this Council Directive. This assessment was supported by interviewees who believed that the OP deliverables adequately responded to the needs on the ground.

Given the novelty and the uncertain geopolitical context, the first months of support were a learning curve for the Agency. As outlined in the previous section, some of the initially identified actions (e.g.,

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[33] Internal operational monitoring.

[34] Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC and having the effect of introducing TP, (OJ L 71, 4.3.2022, p.1).

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help desk) were not prioritised, but these were largely compensated by the versatile approach to provision of support. This flexibility was also evident in the area of training, where the Agency adapted by providing additional tailor-made modules and reached out to additional stakeholders. For example, staff of IOs and local NGOs were not initially identified as a target group, yet training was provided to 201 of their personnel. Some modules, such as the 'Introduction to ethical and professional standards,' or 'Interpreting in the asylum context,' were adapted and delivered to EUAA-deployed interpreters dealing with TP, in order to deal with operational needs.

Official figures on reception capacity did not indicate mixed levels of pressure (see occupancy rates in section 3), but in practice there was a high level of fluctuation in view of the mobility of asylum seekers (often in transit). The reception measure was deprioritised during the first six months of the OP and the relevance of the originally identified activities was limited. While few results can be reported on the ground in 2022, the Agency managed to gain better understanding of the specific Romanian needs in the reception sector. By the end of 2022, after multiple consultations, it managed to order fit-for-purpose material infrastructure support for three selected Romanian reception centres. The selection of the centres was based on needs and infrastructure availability.

Measure 3, relating to the voluntary transfer of TP beneficiaries from Romania to other Member States, was not activated. This transfer mechanism, proposed by the European Commission and Romania, was included in the OP to allow for preparedness in the event of activation. Ultimately, it was not triggered and therefore not relevant.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The Romania OP was triggered as a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Sharing a large border with Ukraine, this led to over 2.5 million people crossing into Romania in 2022 in transit to different Member States and non-Member States[35]. This involved over 106 000 Ukrainians who registered for TP in Romania.

Romania requested the Agency's support which led to the signature of the OP in late March 2022. This was of significant **relevance** in view of the limited capacity of the GII, which was already overstretched in dealing with the gradually increasing flow of asylum requests. TP was a priority need for Romania. The Agency reviewed its reception support with an additional needs assessment and launched the procurement of infrastructure support to three selected reception centres. There was no need for support for voluntary transfers of Ukrainian TP seekers from Moldova through Romania.

This evaluation was limited to measuring the **effectiveness** of the OP as there were no result targets agreed upfront[36]. Most of the intended outputs on TP (measure 1) were implemented[37] in a flexible manner in line with the evolving needs of the partner country. By the end of 2022, the EUAA had

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[35] UNHCR operational data portal. Source: https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine
[36] The results framework includes targets at outcome level and some at output level. The latter were not monitored nor reported on.
[37] The help desk initially planned was deprioritised.

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supported the GII with almost 63 000 registrations and provided information provision sessions to over 65 000 individuals. Some challenges (linked with the functioning of registration centres) were reported because of the difficulty to mobilise additional deployed experts. During the period under review, the Agency did not produce the planned deliverables on reception (measure 2). It, however, gained a better understanding of the needs of the sector and prepared and ordered 71 containers for three reception centres. Support for voluntary transfers (measure 3) was not activated as this was ultimately not needed[38].

Despite institutional, structural, logistical, and contractual challenges, the Romania OP was **efficient** in dealing swiftly with the multiple workflows needed to set up the TP intervention. This led to a rapid mobilisation and response. The cost efficiency of the OP was adequate in view of the actual deployments of experts and interpreters. The preparation and contracting of infrastructure support was very fast. A future evaluation may be able to appreciate if this was efficient in function of the needs on the ground and the obtaining of the necessary permits.

The OP was very **coherent** in relation to internal and external stakeholders on TP. The close collaboration with the different stakeholders led to good practices in terms of multi-agency collaborations, fit-for-purpose training arrangements and versatile deployments. The operational support benefitted from the smooth cooperation between different Agency actors in the fields of operational training, knowledge development, security and logistics. In addition, the collaboration with the GII and UNHCR was instrumental and led to multiple good practice deliverables. Examples are the training sessions in favour of UNHCR and local NGOs, as well as the Agency's participation in the RomExpo one-stop shop. The selection of the reception centres for infrastructure support took into account complementarity questions with other funding sources (e.g., AMIF funding).

The main **added value** of the OP was to provide support to the GII in the field of information provision and registration for TP. The novelty of the TPD allowed the Agency to play a defining role in supporting the communication on the EU Directive to national stakeholders and TP beneficiaries. The added value of the initially intended activities under measure 2 was fair as these were not fully completed. The contribution of the material support to the three reception centres is promising but difficult to measure at this stage.

Table 1 gives an overview of the assessment of the evaluation criteria by result, based on the evaluation team's judgements derived from the analysis and the triangulation of available data sources.

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[38] This is supported by the preconditions defined in the OP.

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Table 1. Evaluation criteria by result[39]

	Measure 1. Temporary protection	Measure 2. Reception support	Measure 3. Voluntary transfer support
Relevance	Very good	Good	Insufficient
Effectiveness	Very good	Fair/good	NA
Efficiency	Very good	Fair/good	NA
Coherence	Very good	Good	NA
EU added value	Very good	Fair/good	NA

5.2. Good practices and lessons learnt

Despite the short implementation period of the OP, this evaluation identified several good practices, which merit to be continued or replicated.

- The **multi-agency collaboration** in RomExpo is a commendable example of how different stakeholders (EUAA, UNHCR, and NGOs), in close coordination with national authorities, can provide a one-stop shop to persons in need of TP. Through this set-up, people fleeing Ukraine had the possibility to access TP registration, education and health services, psychological counselling, and a cash support scheme in one setting;
- The **training component** was very flexible in responding to real needs. It developed fit-for-purpose training initiatives on TP and adapted these to the different target groups. In addition, it responded quickly to operational concerns by designing new training actions in response to new needs (e.g., training on code of conduct). The training for UNHCR and NGO groups on TP was also a good practice. This collaboration leveraged the use of information provision on the multiple available support services;
- The close collaboration between the **training focal points** of the Agency and the GII was instrumental at the different stages of implementation. The GII training focal point, for example, participated actively in the different activities and contributed to the quality review of different information and training tools;
- Beyond the needs assessment, **training planning** proved useful in framing the articulation between the different measures, their target group and the available training offered by the Agency;
- The OP, through its support on **information provision**, including content development, was proactive in the field of **external communication,** leading to online and printed deliverables and multiple collaborations within and beyond the Agency. Examples include the contributions to the GII public information website, to the governmental information platform and to the 'Let's speak asylum' project, and the development of videos, testimonials from Ukrainians and articles in internal newsletters;

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[39] The five evaluation criteria were rated using a four-point scale (insufficient, fair, good, very good). These ratings are judgements based on the triangulation of different information sources, such as interviews and internal data.

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- **Collaboration within the Agency** was very high under the Romania plan and was further boosted by Agency staff who had previous work experience in Romania. The implementation of the OP benefitted from inputs from training, information and communications technology, knowledge development, security and communication. A cluster approach for backstopping also allowed the clarification of financial workflows and specialised support on planning, monitoring and reporting tasks;
- The **close collaboration between the Agency and the GII** during the OP planning, implementation and monitoring stages was a key factor contributing to the flexibility and effectiveness of the plan. A dedicated event in early November 2022 allowed different GII stakeholders and the Agency to reflect on lessons learnt and optimal ways to collaborate;
- The geographic **flexibility** of experts was instrumental. External experts, in particular, accepted to participate in a roving team. This was activated when one GII registration centre was overwhelmed with a large contingent of TP seekers;
- The OP benefitted from a swift **mobilisation and installation** of the country coordination in Bucharest with rapid implementation of deployment and support actions;

The OP was confronted with a number of challenges. These included:

- The activation and implementation of the TPD was a novel area and the Agency needed to learn on the job;
- Space limitations for TP registration and challenging working conditions hindered the implementation of support, in particular when deployment was at its highest. This also affected the motivation of deployed experts, in particular Member State experts;
- Selected cases of low expert performance and flexibility, exacerbated by the emergency response conditions;
- The procurement of interpretation services and engagement of external experts was complex and led to delays;
- Coordination challenges in ensuring the clarity of tasks and roles to ensure optimal complementarity and synergies;
- Coordination did not always have access to sufficient guidance and methodology to deal with the multidisciplinary and practical challenges when setting up a new office and managing practical aspects of deployments and new operations;
- Being a new operation, staff with ongoing job assignments needed to leave their existing jobs temporarily to support the plan. While this showed flexibility and adaptability, a more structured and sustainable Agency response was flagged as necessary.

This evaluation gathered a number of horizontal challenges (and recommendations) which are beyond the scope of the Romania OP. These elements could be taken on board in future Agency-wide horizontal or meta-evaluations and include:

- The opportunity to strengthen the Agency's **preparedness for the start-up** of new country operations. The Agency could consider undertaking the following:

  o Better assessment of internal capacity before committing to activities under a new OP, in close collaboration between the different centres involved;
  o Exploration of alternative approaches to target setting to ensure that expectations are clearer towards the results of an OP;

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- Further facilitate internal staff mobility to new operations;
- Provision of clear information and training on available guidelines related to the setting up of a new operation for new country teams.

- The need to optimise the mechanism for the **deployment of experts**. Consider, for example:

  - Review the selection procedures for remunerated experts to allow for better outputs;
  - Clear and timely communication with potential external expert candidates on deployment setting and working conditions on the ground;
  - Alternative modalities to motivate a higher mobility (roving teams) of experts (e.g., mission reimbursement system);
  - The integration of performance-related matters for experts in existing systems (e.g., operational deployment system).

- With over half of the Member States under OP support, there is a need for a **strategic approach to multi-country OP planning**, taking into account risks and available capacities. Examples are:

  - The promotion of permanent support as an alternative for Member States to seek support;
  - Definition of clear criteria for committing to long-term OPs;
  - Mitigation of the risks hindering the deployment of Member State experts amongst countries under OP support.

5.3. Recommendations

This evaluation makes the following recommendations based on triangulation of findings and inputs from the interviewed stakeholders.

1. Agree on more **detailed Romania TP registration standard operating procedures** for division of tasks and workflow management between the different actors on the ground, building on lessons learnt and good practices from the operational support;

2. Facilitate better **working conditions** for Agency personnel and experts, such as the availability of emergency exits and improved sanitary facilities in supported locations;

3. Increase the **capacity of roving TP registration teams** to meet the demand on the ground;

4. Develop a **deployment scheme by groups of experts** to allow a more efficient approach to training and onboarding.

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Annex 1: Methodology and analytical models used

The aim of this exercise was to answer the following evaluation questions, covering the EC Better Regulation standard criteria, in addition to three specific questions.

Criteria	Questions to be answered
Relevance	Was the action adapted to the capacities of the host Member State? How well has the action been able to respond to stakeholders' needs? Did all key stakeholders demonstrate effective commitment (ownership)?
Effectiveness	Can the observed results be accredited to the operation? Were there other (unexpected) factors that influenced the results? *Priority question:* Was the progress of each result conforming to plan (both in quality and quantity)?
Efficiency	To what extent are the costs (including human resources) of the support justified given the results? *Specific questions:* • How did the Agency at large respond to Romania's request, taking into account the novel nature of the OP? How did it work in practice, taking into account the different inputs and workflows needed? (E.g., Member State experts and other nominations workflows) • How can the Agency better prioritise its operational response in view of the recent increase in the number of Member State requests for support? Learning from the OP, how can the Agency best respond to longer-term needs in Romania?
Coherence	To what extent is the operation coherent internally and externally?
EU added value	What is the added value resulting from the operation, compared to what could have been expected from Romania acting solely at national level?

The evaluation took into account good practices and lessons learnt, including those identified in other recent evaluations of new operations. Special attention was paid to the efficiency of the Agency's response in the early days of the OP, as well as the ways in which the Agency can better prioritise its operational support in view of increasing number of OPs, taking into account country specific needs.

To answer the above questions, the evaluation team used a mixed-method approach covering the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data sources. These included desk review analysis, individual and group interviews, and direct observation. The evaluation team undertook a mission to Bucharest from 5 to 8 December 2022, where face-to-face interviews and two site visits were conducted. Twenty-two individuals were interviewed by the evaluation team.

Environmental and social impacts were not addressed in this report.

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Annex 2: Evaluation matrix

Evaluation criteria	Operationalised questions	Interviews (individual /group)	Desk review	Direct observation
Relevance	Was the action adapted to the capacities of the host Member State?	X	X	X
	How well has the action been able to respond to stakeholders' needs?	X	X	X
	Did all key stakeholders demonstrate effective commitment (ownership)?	X		X
Effectiveness	Can the observed results be accredited to the operation?	X	X	X
	Priority question: Were there (unexpected) factors that influenced the results? Was the progress of each result conforming to plan (both quality and quantity)?	X	X	X
Efficiency	To what extent are the resources of the support justified given the results?	X	X	X
	Specific question: How did the Agency at large respond to Romania's request, taking into account the novel nature of the OP? How did it work in practice, taking into account the different inputs and workflows needed?	X	X	X
	Specific question: How can the Agency better prioritise its operational response in view of the recent increase in the number of Member State requests for support? Learning from the OP, how can the Agency best respond to longer-term needs in Romania?	X	X	
Coherence	To what extent is the operation coherent internally and externally?	X	X	
EU added value	What is the added value resulting from the operation, compared to what could have been expected from Romania acting solely at national level?	X	X	X

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Annex 3: Intervention logic

Needs/problems	Expected objectives
Rapid increase of arrivals and TP registrations	Support following request of Romania in response to disproportionate pressure to national asylum and reception systems following the invasion of Ukraine

Result impact

Provision of effective operational, technical and emergency support through the implementation of the measures in the agreed OP and in line with the Agency's mandate to enable Romania to implement its obligations under the Common European Asylum System and the TPD

Result outcomes

1. Effective implementation of the TPD

2. Enhanced capacity of the Romanian authorities in providing first-line reception conditions

3. Effective implementation of the voluntary transfer from Romania to other EU Member States of displaced people falling under TP

Result outputs

1. Enhanced capacity of the Member State to register beneficiaries of TP in the context of the TPD

2. Reception support for international protection applicants

3. Support to the voluntary transfer from Romania to other EU Member States of displaced people falling under TP

Activities

Provide support on: registrations for TP, establishment of a help desk to support field offices, address queries, information provision, delivery of TP-related training

Develop terms of reference for contracting specialised (private) services for reception of applicants

Support for the voluntary transfer of displaced people falling under TP

Inputs

Human resources (information provision experts, registration experts, flow management experts, reception experts, interpreters/cultural mediators)

Material resources (including communication/promotional material, infrastructure items, IT equipment, office supplies)

External factors

Migratory emergency context; European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs perspectives, national and international laws, policies, and practices; availability of financial and human resources; COVID-19 pandemic; actions by national counterparts and IOs and civil organisations

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