

Local Needs Analysis

Organisation: Social Care Directorate Arad (DAS Arad)

WP2

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D002.001- Arad Needs Analysis

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Deliverable Description

The Local Needs Analysis (LNA) will serve as the foundation for Andalusia and SkillLab to adapt the social innovation model and the Online Skill Profiling Tool.

Data was collected through surveys and interviews, with questions tailored to the three main target groups: refugees, case workers, and stakeholders. These questions were agreed upon in advance by representatives of the two cities, based on proposals submitted by SkillLab and Andalusia following the action points from the kick-off meeting.



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The LNA was developed through continuous collaboration among partners to ensure regular feedback and alignment. This process allows Andalusia and SkillLab to prepare relevant training content for the upcoming study visit in Seville.

Local Context

- The support system for Ukrainian refugees in Arad is composed of a mix of public institutions and non-governmental organizations. While functional, these services often operate in a fragmented manner. The following provides a comprehensive overview of the key resources available:
- **Initial Emergency Response: The Information and Support Center** Immediately following the outbreak of the war, the Social Care Directorate Arad (DAS Arad), in collaboration with other public institutions and civil society, established the Information and Support Center for Ukrainians. This crucial hub, operational for approximately two years, served as a centralized point for emergency aid. It provided guidance towards accommodation, access to medical and legal assistance, psychological counseling, and facilitated the distribution of material aid. Although this center is no longer functional, its existence demonstrated the capacity for a rapid, coordinated response and provided valuable lessons on the primary needs of the refugee community upon arrival.
- **Social Care Directorate Arad (DAS Arad)** DAS Arad continues to be the primary municipal point of contact for all vulnerable groups, including refugees. Its ongoing services include the initial evaluation of needs, providing official information on social rights and benefits available under Romanian law, and offering general social and psychological counseling through its staff. Refugees currently benefit from the general services offered by the directorate, but with the closure of the dedicated center, there is no longer a specialized hotline or a one-stop-shop service point exclusively for this group, making access to information more challenging.
- **County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Arad)** AJOFM is the main public body responsible for labor market integration. It provides core services such as



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registering job seekers, offering job mediation with local employers, and providing information on available vacancies. While AJOFM occasionally organizes general job fairs for the entire unemployed population, there have been no recent events specifically targeted at the Ukrainian refugee community. The institution has expressed a strong willingness to collaborate within the ECSILI project to better tailor its services and address the specific employment barriers faced by refugees.

- **Recognition of Qualifications (CNRED)** A significant structural barrier to meaningful employment is the official recognition of Ukrainian diplomas and qualifications. This process is managed at the national level by the National Center for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (CNRED), under the Ministry of Education. While the service exists, it is not a local Arad agency and presents considerable challenges for refugees. The process is often perceived as lengthy, bureaucratic, requires certified translations of numerous documents, and can be costly. There is a clear lack of local, accessible support—a guidance service—to help individuals gather the correct paperwork and navigate this complex national procedure effectively.
- **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** The local NGO sector provides critical, flexible, and community-based support that often fills the gaps left by the public system. Key actors include:
 - **The Union of Ukrainians in Romania (UUR) - Arad Branch:** Based in the nearby town of Târnova where a significant Ukrainian community resides, the UUR is a vital community hub. It provides essential social and recreational activities that help maintain cultural identity and combat isolation. Crucially, its Ukrainian-speaking staff have offered to organize and deliver Romanian language courses, directly addressing the primary barrier identified in our analysis.
 - **"Centrul de Vis" Association:** This grassroots organization, founded and run by a Ukrainian refugee, offers targeted support for the community, with a special focus on after-school activities for children and support groups for single mothers. It provides a safe space for socializing and peer support,



addressing the psycho-social needs of the most vulnerable members of the community.

- **The Romanian Red Cross - Arad Branch:** The Red Cross was a key actor in the emergency phase and continues to play a role in providing humanitarian and material aid, offering support with food, hygiene products, and other essential goods for families facing economic hardship.

Labour Market Information

In the Arad region, sectors with the highest labour demand are concentrated in automotive/manufacturing (particularly cable assemblies), logistics, and hospitality (HORECA). Emerging sectors include digital industries and private healthcare, though access to these is limited for the target group. Consequently, the most promising immediate employment opportunities for refugees are in manufacturing and services, yet these often lead to precarious, fixed-term contracts and do not match their previous qualifications. There is a well-identified regional skills gap for qualified personnel in technical and skilled trade roles. For refugees, the primary obstacle is not a lack of skills, but the lack of officially recognized degrees, licenses, or certifications within the Romanian system. This creates a severe mismatch between the high skill level of job seekers (e.g., teachers, engineers, economists) and the low-skilled jobs they are forced to accept. The labour inclusion support currently lacking is, therefore, not general job mediation, but tailored career counselling, clear pathways for professional requalification, and integrated support for overcoming linguistic and administrative barriers.

Career Field/Sector	Occupation ID (ESCO)	National Taxonomy ID/Descriptor	Alternative Titles in Polish	In demand?	Low entry barrier?	Regulated?	Career progression potential?	Salary range
Cleaning Services	911201	Cleaner	Cleaning staff	Yes	Yes	No	Limited	Low



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Food Manufacturing	751205	Frozen pastry products operator	-	Yes	Yes	No	Limited	Medium
Hospitality	941103	Kitchen assistant	-	Yes	Yes	No	Limited	Medium
Retail	522302	Shop assistant	Cashier	Yes	Yes	No	Limited	Medium
Sales	332303	Sales agent	Sales representative	Yes	Partial	No	Yes	Medium
Assembly/Industry	932906	Unskilled assembly worker		Yes	Yes	No	No	Low
Hospitality	516201	Hotel maid	-	Yes	Yes	No	Limited	Medium



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Ukrainian refugees in the municipality of Arad: an overview

According to data provided by the Arad County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Arad) in early 2025, a total of 635 Ukrainian citizens has been employed in the county since the beginning of the conflict. While this indicates a willingness to work, the number of active contracts is lower, reflecting job turnover and the precariousness of some positions. Insights gathered from the focus groups and observations from case workers allow for a more detailed qualitative overview of the approximately 150 Ukrainian refugees who have settled long-term in the municipality of Arad.

Age and Gender: The demographic is overwhelmingly female (approx. 90-95%), consisting mainly of mothers with children. The majority are of prime working age, typically between 30 and 50 years old.

Economic Situation: The community is in a vulnerable economic state. Having exhausted initial savings and with state financial aid programs concluded, households are now entirely dependent on their employment income, which is often low-to-medium and derived from a single earner. This income must cover all living expenses, including private market rent.

Education Levels: The educational background is diverse and often high. Many individuals hold university degrees and have professional qualifications as teachers, engineers, economists, or healthcare professionals from Ukraine.

Employment levels: A high percentage of the working-age population is employed. However, this is predominantly underemployment, with individuals working in roles that do not correspond to their education and skill level (e.g., a former teacher working part-time as a hotel chambermaid). This situation is a direct consequence of the language barrier and the non-recognition of their diplomas.

Local Stakeholders: an overview

The integration system for Ukrainian refugees in Arad involves a network of public and private sector professionals who have shown significant goodwill but currently operate in a largely uncoordinated manner. Key public actors include **DAS**



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Arad case workers and the **County Agency for Employment (AJOFM Arad)**. The non-governmental sector has been a crucial pillar of support, with organizations like the **Union of Ukrainians in Romania (UUR) - Arad Branch**, the **Romanian Red Cross - Arad Branch**, and the **"Centrul de Vis" Association** providing essential community support, cultural activities, and direct aid. Private sector involvement primarily consists of **local employers** in the manufacturing and service industries who have hired refugees. A notable, though now inactive, entity was the **Information and Support Center for Refugees**, managed by DAS Arad, which provided critical services during the emergency phase and whose expertise remains a valuable lesson. This network, while active and willing, currently operates without a formal, integrated strategy, leading to gaps in service provision.

In summary, the current services offer a foundational safety net. Refugees primarily benefit from public entities by receiving official guidance on social rights and access to job mediation, while NGOs provide essential community-based support, including material aid and vital language courses that foster autonomy. (Source: Information compiled from the Romanian Government's official support platform and UNHCR Romania reports).

Methodology

The primary methodology used for this analysis was qualitative data collection through three distinct Focus Groups, conducted in August 2025. This method was chosen to facilitate in-depth discussion and gather nuanced insights that surveys cannot capture. Participants were engaged through formal invitations sent by DAS Arad, leveraging existing professional networks and direct contact with the refugee community. The questions and discussion points, developed in collaboration with project partners, were open-ended and designed to explore the participants' lived experiences, professional challenges, and perceptions of the existing support system. For the focus group with refugees, an anonymous questionnaire was also distributed to gather sensitive information, and all materials were provided in Romanian, English, and Ukrainian to ensure full comprehension.



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Participants

Participant	Number	Average Age	Gender	Other Info	Engagement methodology used (f.gs, Interviews, Surveys)
Refugees	7	35-45	85% F 15% M	Primary mothers, employed in Arad, with a desire to settle long-term.	Focus Group, Questionnaire(See Annex I)
Case Workers	7	40-50	85% F / 15% M	Includes 4 designated case workers and 3 project management team members from DAS Arad.	Focus Group
Stakeholders (Employers, NGOs, Civil Society)	4	40-55	70% F / 30% M	Representatives from UUR Arad, Red Cross, Centrul de Vis, AJOFM, and an expert from the former refugee center.	Focus Group



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Outcomes

The needs analysis run through the three focus groups provided a clear and consistent picture of the current situation, leading to several main takeaways for the purpose of the project.

The Language Barrier is the Central Obstacle: Across all three focus groups, the inability to communicate effectively in Romanian was identified as the primary impediment to successful integration. For refugees, it affects every aspect of life, from accessing healthcare and banking to understanding employment contracts and social rights. For case workers and stakeholders, it is the main challenge in providing effective services.

Underemployment is Systemic and Demotivating: There is a critical disconnect between refugees' qualifications and their current jobs. The non-recognition of diplomas, combined with the language barrier, forces highly skilled individuals into low-skilled labor. This not only represents a waste of human capital for the local economy but also impacts the refugees' self-esteem and long-term financial stability.

The Support System is Fragmented and Needs Coordination: While individual organizations (both public and private) are willing to help, they act in a disconnected manner. The lack of a formal collaboration protocol leads to overlaps in some areas and significant gaps in others (e.g., legal counselling). A unified, multi-agency approach is required to create clear referral pathways and provide holistic support.

A Shift from Emergency Aid to Empowerment is Needed: The needs of the refugee community have evolved from basic survival to long-term integration. The focus must now shift towards building autonomy. This involves providing tools for skill development (language courses), professional recognition (SkillLab application), and civic integration, rather than passive financial support.

There is Strong Potential for a Local Partnership: The stakeholder focus group revealed a unanimous and proactive willingness from all key local actors to collaborate. The concrete offer from the Union of Ukrainians to provide language courses is a testament to this potential. There is a clear opportunity for DAS Arad to act as a facilitator in creating a formal, local integration pact.



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Resource and operational assessment in anticipation of the model implementation phase

The Local Needs Analysis conducted in Arad highlighted both the strengths of the existing support ecosystem for Ukrainian refugees and the structural barriers that continue to hinder their long-term social and labour market integration. Discussions with refugees, case workers, and local stakeholders confirmed that while a range of employment, social, and community-based services are available, these services often operate in a fragmented manner, with limited coordination and insufficient mechanisms for long-term follow-up.

Refugees identified Romanian language proficiency as the single most important factor affecting their integration outcomes, influencing access to employment, public services, healthcare, and community participation. Case workers and stakeholders further emphasized the need for stronger cooperation between social and employment services in order to address the multidimensional challenges faced by refugees, including labour market access, social inclusion, qualification recognition, and administrative support. Participants also highlighted the importance of strengthening outreach efforts towards the Ukrainian community through trusted community-based organisations that can facilitate engagement and participation in integration activities.

Within this context, the following needs and resources were identified as priorities for the implementation phase:

Need	Resource	Organisation responsible
Improved Romanian language skills and communication capacities among refugees	Delivery of online Romanian language courses tailored to the needs of Ukrainian refugees based on the ECSILI methodology	Union of Ukrainians in Romania (UUR) – Arad Branch



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Improved coordination between social and employment services to address the multidimensional needs of refugees	Development and implementation of a formal collaboration protocol between DAS Arad and AJOFM Arad, including referral pathways and joint case management arrangements	DAS Arad, AJOFM Arad
Increased outreach and engagement of the Ukrainian refugee community in integration activities	Cooperation with community-based organisations and targeted outreach actions through the Centrul de Vis Association to identify, engage, and support beneficiaries	DAS Arad, Centrul de Vis Association



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