

**The results of the investigation conducted at
Isaccea border crossing point, Tulcea county, on March 23, 2022**

The People's Advocate Institution proceeded ex officio to protect the fundamental right to life and physical and mental integrity and the right to health care for immigrants arriving from Ukraine to Romania, in the area of the Isaccea Border Crossing Point.

In this context, on 23.03.2022, the representatives of the Constanța Territorial Office carried out an investigation at Isaccea locality in Tulcea county, where there is an important border crossing point with Ukraine, in order to obtain clarifications from the representatives of the competent authorities / public institutions present, regarding the object of the ex officio proceeding of the People's Advocate.

1. Isaccea border crossing point, Tulcea county

At the Isaccea border crossing point, a command centre was organized, composed of representatives of the Tulcea Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, the Border Police, the General Inspectorate for Immigration, the Tulcea Public Health Directorate, the Tulcea County Council and the Tulcea County Prefect's Institution. At the level of this command centre, decisions are made to ensure the necessary support for those arriving from Ukraine (transport, accommodation, etc.). It is located about 3 kilometres away from Isaccea.

During the investigation, at the Isaccea border crossing point, discussions were held with representatives of the following public authorities / institutions: Tulcea Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, including SMURD, Border Police, the General Social Assistance and Child Protection Directorate Tulcea, Tulcea City Hall.

In addition to the work points of public institutions / authorities, in the vicinity of the customs there are numerous stands belonging to NGOs, with food, clothing, hygiene products and other products necessary for those arriving in the country, a mobile first aid tent set up by representatives of an NGO from Spain and animal feed.

Immediately in the vicinity of the Isaccea border crossing point, an advanced operational point of ISU Tulcea is organized, especially for the situation of immigrants arriving from Ukraine.

The only input at this border point is the naval one. Third-country nationals usually arrive in waves. Currently, about 700 people cross the border each 24 hours, compared to the previous period where flows of 4000-5000 people were registered in 24 hours. Moreover, at least half of the people who enter Romania return to Ukraine. At the time of the investigation, there was a low influx of people arriving in Romania, but there were periods when their number was much higher.

There is no communication between the Romanian and Ukrainian authorities regarding the number of passengers transported by ferry. Both the staff of the authorities working on the dock, as well as the volunteers involved from the Red Cross, UNCHR, ARDA, identify the needs of each person who arrives, among whom there are women with children, elderly or people with disabilities. They are immediately provided with baby prams for very young children or even wheelchairs for people with disabilities. These categories of people are taken out of the normal flow and have priority, being taken directly to customs or according to needs, in the specially arranged area "mother and child", to be given the special assistance they need, etc.

The perimeter of access to the dock was provided by the I.S.U. Tulcea with the help of the Tulcea Gendarmes Inspectorate and it ensures a smooth flow, guiding newcomers to the tents in order to process their documents and identify them. There is also another flow created for people who arrive and travel with their own means of transport.

There are translators on both flows, who inform the newcomers about the registration operations and the preparation of documents for this purpose. It is specified that upon arrival, they can formulate their option regarding the status they want to choose for the period in which they want to remain on the Romanian territory. In the tents where they are initially housed, they are provided with free internet access and information, leaflets, etc. The capacity of the tent is for 600 people. Depending on the number of people in each transport, they are distributed in several tents where they are offered cold food and tea, gloves and scarves, when the weather was very cold. Thus, for the large flows of 800 people, the processing time was of maximum two hours. These people are given a free mobile SIM card with international minutes for each family.

Upon entering the country, the immigrants are picked up by the gendarmes and accompanied to the triage area where they are asked what they want to do next. ISU volunteer translators and firefighters talk with the immigrants to identify the next steps needed to get them into the country in good condition. It is specified that the Isaccea area is a transit area, most of the people who arrived there, have the necessary documents, but there are also cases in which some people have to be fingerprinted, etc.

ISU firefighters and volunteers were provided with badges, inscribed in Ukrainian, English and Romanian, specifying the service for which each was responsible: transport, accommodation, translator, volunteer. This makes it easier for immigrants to ask for the support they need. At the same time, in order to have a control of the volunteers, a command centre was created where they are registered with name and surname, telephone number, address.

Leaflets with useful information in Ukrainian are also distributed, as well as a Guide on the legal regime, rights and obligations of Ukrainian refugees in Romania.

The first impact structure is the Red Cross, which identifies the needs of women and children and provides them with hygiene items or medicines that can be bought without a prescription. At the same time, *Save the Children* provides a location where mothers with infants can rest and are provided with items of immediate necessity, food, hygiene, etc.

Regarding the medical assistance provided, there are three medical resources in the mobile camp in Isaccea: the first resource is provided by SMURD and has competencies for minor emergencies, a car which has the capacity to provide assistance for 2 people, in a state of medium severity, the shift change being ensured at 12 hours; the second medical resource is the ambulance with medium competencies, which changes shifts every 3 hours. There is also a team of doctors from Spain, specialized in emergency medicine, who have set up a tent equipped with medical equipment and medicines, and deal with the severe cases. For example, it was the case of a person with pre-infarction, or the care of newborns of 4 days, lipothymia, etc.

At the same time, there are staff members from DGASPC Tulcea who register people with special needs, unaccompanied minors, etc. and who also provide technical support for producing the forms, leaflets, posters distributed in the reception centres.

The current stock of items managed by ISU Tulcea, includes new blankets, collars, gloves, hygiene materials, baby products, all goods being brought daily from regional warehouses, depending on current needs, according to the number of people arriving, etc.

Thus, at the exit of the customs, there is a second checkpoint, where there is also a translator present, to ensure that people who were not previously registered do not enter the country, because there have been cases when among the refugees arrived people such as terrorism suspects.

Once the documents are processed, the people arrive at the customs area. There are three categories of people, some of them are expected by relatives or friends, and leave Isaccea together. The second category of people are these without the possibility of a personal means of transport, who actually want to get to the big cities in Romania, or the main cities, air or rail nodes, usually Bucharest, where they can take other means of transport, to leave from Romania to other destinations. They are housed in two other tents located at the exit of the border point, until a means of transport is identified to take them to the desired destination. In this area we identified a family

with a minor child who was waiting to be taken by friends to get to Constanța. The people were satisfied with the way they were received and hosted in Romania, the space where they were now, the fact that there were beds to rest, as well as a playground for children. They had been provided with food and hygiene items, as well as counselling by volunteers.

In this area people are offered hot food, non-stop, provided by an NGO, as well as other hygiene items.

The third category of people, these who want to stay in our country, are taken by ISU minibuses and transported to accommodation centres in Tulcea. This is done, so that the respective persons do not fall prey to human trafficking, even if, so far, no such situations have been registered in this customs point.

A database has been developed by the Police in collaboration with ISU, in which all means of transport are registered, as well as the names of drivers who transport foreign nationals in personal vehicles.

Regarding the organization of the transport, it is offered free of charge to all those who wish. Thus, there is a schedule prepared by ISU Tulcea, with a database for transport and accommodation. At the same time, currently the routes are organized, depending on the need, by the Government Decision no. 337/2022, with an annex made by the C.J.S.U., so that the private operators who currently provide this transport, can subsequently receive their payment.

An ATM was also installed in the area for persons coming from Ukraine who want to withdraw money.

At the beginning, mostly people who had the financial means arrived, but in time, people who needed assistance began to come. There is a possibility that in the future the flow of immigrants will increase again at the border.

We also spoke with the UNCHR Representative, who was at the Isaccea border crossing point, together with other colleagues, in order to provide support to all refugees in need.

❖ Representatives of the Isaccea Border Point

From 24.02.2022, third-country nationals who arrived in Romania, on an exceptional basis, were allowed to enter the country also in the absence of mandatory travel documents (passport). There is no agreement / treaty between Romania and Ukraine to allow Ukrainian citizens or other persons with other citizenships, located on the territory of Ukraine, to enter Romania, only on the basis of the identity card. However, given the situation in the neighbouring country, starting with 24.02.2022, third-country nationals, both Ukrainian citizens and persons of other citizenships, were allowed to enter Romania.

At the time of the investigation, 19,750 women and 13,828 minors had passed through the Isaccea border crossing.

The representatives of the General Inspectorate for Immigration present at customs intervene when the people who arrive at Isaccea express their desire to apply for asylum; they are accommodated in the camp and taken to the office of the General Inspectorate for Immigration, in order to process applications. IGI representatives proceed with the registration of immigrants' data, their verification in the database, fingerprinting, photography. Most of the asylum seekers in Isaccea were sent to the Galati Regional Centre for Procedures and Accommodation for Asylum Seekers.

2. Isaccea City Hall Tulcea County

During the investigation, the mayor of Isaccea presented us with a number of issues regarding the steps taken by the local authority to accommodate in optimal conditions the immigrants from Ukraine.

The city hall of Isaccea currently offers a hot meal to a number of 65 people, who remained in the locality, these people being hosted by families from this city. The hot meal is provided at the

home of these people, by a specialized catering company. The management of the Social Assistance Directorate within the Isaccea City Hall stated that the community nurse knows Russian, thus providing the necessary medicines for the Ukrainian citizens, under the strict supervision of the family doctor working in the city. At the same time, all Ukrainian citizens hosted in Isaccea are registered at Isaccea City Hall and their number is reported daily to the Tulcea Public Health Directorate.

Currently, in Isaccea, there is a reception centre for the night, within the local Baptist Church, and the Social Assistance Department of Isaccea City Hall is involved in hosting at this location, if Ukrainian citizens want this, because, currently, people from Ukraine are usually taken directly from the border crossing point by the authorities and transported to the city of Tulcea.

We mention that at the level of Isaccea there were two temporary accommodation centres, in the sports hall of the city which had a capacity of 40 places and in the local Vaccination Centre with a capacity of 15 beds, which were organized with the support of public authorities, and are currently closed, because the city of Tulcea, located at only 36 km of Isaccea, has a larger accommodation capacity. At the same time, Tulcea Municipality has a hospital for people who need medical assistance.

The mayor's office provided support to ensure all the necessary conditions at the level of these reception centres, including through the involvement of employees and volunteers. The infrastructure (lighting, cleaning, sanitation, cesspit emptying) and cleaning in the customs area were initially provided, starting with 24.02.2022, from the funds of Isaccea City Hall, but now they are provided by the private operator who performs the ferry transport.

At the same time, the expenses for the provision of food, medicines and passenger transport were provided from the Isaccea City Hall budget.

With regard to the provision of transport, this issue has been regulated in the meantime by the adoption of Government Decision 337/2022 on granting free transport and facilities for the foreign nationals or stateless persons in special situations from the area of armed conflict in Ukraine.

A large part of the resources were provided by NGOs, and managed at the county level by the Institution of the Prefect of Tulcea County and at the local level by the Social Assistance Directorate (DAS) within the Isaccea City Hall and distributed to cover all requests.

3. Institution of the Prefect of Tulcea County

From the discussions with the prefect of Tulcea county, according to the C.J.S.U. no. 43 / 16.03.2022, Tulcea County Committee for Emergency Situations updates "The centralized situation of road transport operators in Tulcea County for the transport of foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations coming from the armed conflict zone in Ukraine". It is specified that the situation of the means of transport will be updated and will be approved by decisions of the Tulcea County Committee for Emergency Situations. Given the dynamics of the flow of foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations from the area of armed conflict in Ukraine, it is estimated that 4,000 people a week need transport.

The following routes were established: • Isaccea - Bucharest; • Isaccea - Constanța; • Isaccea - Galați; • Isaccea - Tulcea; • Isaccea - Iași, which will be completed, as the case may be, by decisions of the County Committee for Emergency Situations, depending on needs.

At the same time, by Decision the C.J.S.U. no. 44 / 16.03.2022, in order to ensure a climate of normalcy in the current context, through the care of social services at the level of local public authorities, there will be carried out, weekly, actions to evaluate the necessary conditions for foreign citizens or stateless persons, following the issues related to social needs, community integration, etc.

The sub-prefect of Tulcea county was appointed responsible for coordinating the aforementioned activities. In the same context, the local public authorities within which are

accommodated foreign nationals or stateless persons in special situations, coming from the area of the armed conflict in Ukraine, will submit to the Institution of the Prefect of Tulcea County, weekly, the list of necessary means of subsistence, which will be provided from stocks organized for this purpose. The President of the Tulcea County Branch of ACOR coordinates the relations with foreign nationals or stateless persons in special situations coming from the area of armed conflict in Ukraine in order to involve them in volunteer actions for the storage of the necessary items.

In order to ensure the subsistence needs of foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations who come from the area of armed conflict in Ukraine and who are accommodated in Tulcea County, the following warehouses are set up: - Cantina Municipala warehouse located on Viticulturii Street, no. 8; ACOR warehouse - located on Viticulturii street, no. 8; - Sports Hall Depot - located on Isaccai Street no. 24; - Warehouse of the Assistance and Social Protection Directorate - Str. Isaccai no. 36; - Red Cross Warehouse - located on Str. Grigorie Antipa (near Tulco).

Thus, all the authorities present were organized in an exemplary manner in order to manage the flows of people arriving at the Isaccea border crossing point. In conclusion, during the investigation by the representatives of the People's Advocate Institution, in Isaccea, a very good mobilization and collaboration was found, both of the competent local and county public institutions and authorities, as well as of the non-governmental organizations, in order to provide humanitarian aid for people arriving from the conflict zone in Ukraine.