

Temporary Protection Update

Republic of Moldova

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The activation of Temporary Protection (TP) by the Government of the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter “Moldova”) provides Ukrainian refugees with a more secure legal status. In its first year, TP has granted access to a number of rights and services, including employment, temporary accommodation, emergency and primary medical assistance, public education for children, and social assistance for families with children and unaccompanied children.

On 28 February 2024, the Moldovan Government approved the extension of TP until March 2025, and also modified the underlying government decision approving TP from January 2023 with some important changes.

As of 1 April 2024, **42,263 individuals** have been granted temporary protection in the **Republic of Moldova**

In addition, 6,973 citizens of Ukraine have been granted resident permits, either permanent or temporary. As well, 404 Ukrainian refugees are asylum-seekers or have been granted refugee status or humanitarian protection.

Key Changes to the Temporary Protection regime since 1 March 2024



ID documents issued to TP beneficiaries have been renewed automatically.



Authorities can carry out unannounced checks at self-declared addresses of TP beneficiaries.



TP beneficiaries can now travel abroad beyond 45 days without losing their TP status.



Ukrainian adults crossing the border with internal passports and national ID cards can only enter/exit from and to Ukraine once.



Ukrainians can no longer enter Moldova with expired travel or identity documents*



TP beneficiaries have access to expanded health services.

**Persons without valid documents for entry may still access the territory if they request asylum.*

Consultation Process

On 22 January 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) published a draft of the government decision extending TP for public comment. UNHCR, through the Protection Working Group (PWG), encouraged all partners to review and provide feedback on the draft decision to MIA. UNHCR submitted its own comments on 2 February, expressing its support for the extension of TP and providing inputs on the proposed changes to the TP regime overall. Comments were also submitted by other humanitarian actors.

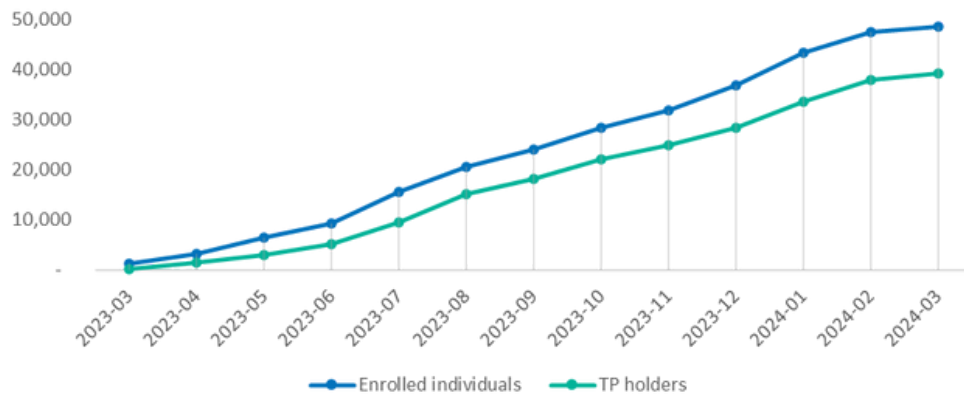
The National Congress of Ukrainians in Moldova (NCUM) organized a quick survey to consult refugees on the proposed changes, which were included in its comments. Among the concerns raised included the ability of refugees to be self-employed and start a business, as well as concerns about the proposed text allowing for unannounced house visits from the authorities to confirm residence.

Access to territory

A number of changes were implemented regarding the border crossing requirements for Ukrainians. Among the positive changes is the removal of the 45 cumulative days travel restriction for TP beneficiaries. Under the amended law, Ukrainians will not lose their TP status regardless of how many days they spend outside Moldova, unless it is determined that they have voluntarily repatriated to Ukraine or resettled in another country. However, the amended TP decision now also includes certain restrictions with regards to access to the territory. Expired documents will no longer be valid to cross the Ukraine–Moldova border. As well, adults crossing the state border with internal passports/national ID cards, as opposed to biometric passports, can benefit from only one entry/exit from/to Ukraine.

Eligibility and registration

Registration for TP has steadily increased since it came into effect in March 2023 and continues to rise, particularly after the simplification of the TP registration procedure in 2023 which allowed TP applicants to provide self-declarations to prove their residence in Moldova.



According to the government decision extending TP, the QR codes on all TP cards issued prior to 1st of March 2024 will be automatically extended until 1 March 2025. Social service and medical providers should be able to confirm the person’s legal status through the QR code. The General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM) has stated that TP beneficiaries can approach IGM offices for a new card indicating the extended validity of their TP status if they wish. This will provide peace of mind for refugees who want to carry an ID document that clearly indicates their lawful stay, as well as better ensure access to services and facilitate interactions with law enforcement and/or border authorities when entering or exiting the country.

Among the restrictive amendments approved by the Government in the recent TP decision is the requirement for non-Ukrainian family members to present a valid national identity in order to enrol for TP, in addition to the previously required proof of relationship to the otherwise eligible family member. UNHCR is concerned that this provision may result in family separation, as, for a variety of reasons, persons fleeing Ukraine may not be in possession of valid identity documents.

TP & Employment

Currently, to lawfully work in Moldova, Ukrainians must either be beneficiaries of TP or have another legal status that grants them the right to work. TP holders can register with the territorial subdivision of the National Employment Agency (NEA) to access employment support. As of March 1st, 1,316 Ukrainian citizens were officially employed in Moldova, according to the NEA. Various assessments, however, have indicated that the majority of adult refugees are working informally in Moldova or online with employers from abroad, including Ukraine. The draft TP amendment published for comment allowed TP beneficiaries to work based on the entrepreneurial patent (*patenta*). There had been significant advocacy undertaken to include this right in the TP law given the interest of many refugees to become self-employed. The *patenta* was not an ideal solution –for example, it still required refugees to have healthcare to apply, which they currently have no access to – but it was a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, this provision was dropped in the final law that was adopted. It will require further discussion with the authorities to find a workable alternative to allow refugees to be self-employed and open businesses.

Furthermore, to support refugees in their usual activities, the Government approved the allowance for TP holders to have their private vehicles on the territory of Moldova for a period of one year.

TP & Health Care

Under the TP law that was initially adopted in January 2023, TP holders were eligible for pre-hospital emergency care, primary healthcare, hospital care in case of medical-surgical emergencies, outpatient dialysis, oncological care, and emergency dental care. The amended TP law expands the medical services available to TP beneficiaries to include compensated medicines and medical devices, and outpatient specialized medical care. The Ministry of Health has since issued an order providing details on these services.

Another positive development was the issuance of a government decision on 3 April that includes TP beneficiaries with formal employment contracts in the state's compulsory health insurance system. This will allow TP beneficiaries to access the state health insurance, and the medical services that are covered, under the same rights and obligations as Moldovan citizens.

Access to many of the health services now available to TP beneficiaries, however, requires that they be registered with a family doctor. As of end February 2024, however, only 5,150 TP holders had done so. With the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), a communication campaign is underway to inform both service providers and TP beneficiaries of their health care rights, the latest changes to the law, and the need to register with a family doctor.



Ukrainian refugee Sergey, 7, draws at the desk where he attends online classes with his school back in Ukraine. The family have found shelter in a former university dormitory in Chisinau, Moldova, alongside 80 other Ukrainians. ©UNHCR/ Andrew McConnell

TP & Education

Under the TP government decision adopted in January 2023, children with TP status can access Moldovan public schools "subject to the possibilities of the educational system" under the same conditions established for minor citizens of Moldova. As of end February 2024, approximately 2,264 Ukrainian children, including 632 pre-schoolers, had officially enrolled in Moldovan schools. While this represents a 20% increase over enrolment figures from the previous year, the numbers remain stubbornly low. Most school-age children in Moldova are believed to be pursuing online education within Ukraine's education system. On 4 September 2023, MER issued an instruction clarifying that a child's legal status does not affect their access to education. Enrolment requires minimal documentation, and parents can easily submit applications to any school. In-person school enrolment, however, is not mandatory at this time.

No changes regarding access to education were included in the TP decision. In the 29 February Education Working Group meeting, MER shared that they are working with school principals who have 9th and 12th grade Ukrainian students enrolled, to ensure that these students receive the support needed to pass their exams at the end of the school year. MER is also seeking the support of partners to continue providing extensive Romanian language support. Should some students not pass their exams, MER has stated that they will explore how to ensure continued educational access for them.

UNHCR and UNICEF continue to recommend that MER monitor the enrolment and attendance of Ukrainian children either in Moldovan schools (in-person) or Ukrainian schools (on-line) to ensure that all children of compulsory school age are attending school, in coordination with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education as needed.

TP & Cash Assistance

In 2024, UNHCR's cash assistance program will undergo significant changes aimed at enhancing effectiveness and targeting vulnerable refugees from Ukraine and their families residing in Moldova. In a first phase, refugees will be asked to obtain legal status in Moldova if available to them, which grants them access to governmental services and ensures their secure stay within the country. Legal status may include Temporary Protection, humanitarian protection, refugee status, asylum, stateless status and permanent or temporary residency. As of 01 March 2024, 25,000 beneficiaries of UNHCR's cash assistance programme had confirmed their legal status with UNHCR. UNHCR has been working to confirm the situation of the others.

In the second phase of the changes to UNHCR's cash assistance programme, targeting will prioritize assistance for those most in need, ensuring support reaches those who are most vulnerable. It is expected that this phase will begin in April 2024.

The amended TP law introduces a new provision that TP beneficiaries can access financial assistance granted by international organizations according to criteria developed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP) and MIA. UNHCR is in ongoing discussions with MLSP and MIA on cash programmes. The amended TP law also provides that beneficiaries of TP will have access to cash assistance programs operated by international organizations to support vulnerable people during the cold period of the year. MLSP had earlier stated that TP holders could access the government's Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund (EVRF). The draft TP law published for comment said the same but was later revised to refer only to programmes of international partners. It is unclear if this reflects a change in MLSP policy. This year's EVRF programme is only open through March 2024.

Information Campaign



UNHCR collaborated with the IGM, local authorities, and Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) partners to conduct outreach efforts. TP fairs were organized in various regions of Moldova to raise awareness and address refugees' questions about TP, as well as to pre-enrol those who wished to obtain TP. UNHCR and partners pre-enrolled 1,455 refugees over 13 TP fairs across the country.



Animated videos explaining TP, application procedures, and beneficiaries' rights and obligations were translated into Romani and edited to include sign language. Over 99,000 printed materials in Russian, Ukrainian, Romanian, and English have been distributed nationwide, including a dedicated leaflet for older people and people with disabilities.



Information sessions for frontline workers reached over 960 individuals from various organizations. Additionally, UNHCR's partners disseminated information through 63 social media outlets, highlighting the latest TP updates and the importance of securing legal status in Moldova. This outreach included a live session on Moldova for Peace Telegram and TikTok videos from the Moldovan National Youth Council.



UNHCR is currently developing animations with IGM, other UN Agencies and line Ministries, to inform refugees about their rights under TP status, as well as to update on the changes encompassed in the recent decision.

UNHCR supported the Government's preparations for TP through technical input into draft legislation and action plans, as well as concrete support: renovating and furnishing IGM installations at central and local level, reinforcing registration capacity with training of 96 IGM staff and supporting capacity of 25 additional staff, procuring registration equipment like vehicles, computers, biometric scanners, and card printers, building a custom data system that connects with other government systems, and collaborating on a joint information campaign for refugees, service providers and local authorities.