Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

Moldova

PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT 2025

QUARTER 1 - FINDINGS OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In 2025, the Participatory Assessment transitioned from being a periodic exercise to an ongoing exercise conducted in collaboration with UNHCR partners and Accountability to Affected People Task Force members. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with forcibly displaced persons of various gender, age and social profiles are being conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the country, including the left bank of the Dniester River. To ensure a timely and data-driven response to the needs and challenges faced by refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons quarterly factsheets and an interactive dashboard have been developed and are regularly updated. *[1]*

During the reporting period from January to March 2025, a total of nine FGDs were conducted, engaging 82 participants, with approximately 76% being women and 24% men. Four discussions included refugees aged 30–49,*[2]* three with people in their pre-retirement age (50–55+) and older persons (60+), one focus group discussion with Ukrainians evacuated from the Gaza Strip and one with refugees from Syria.

KEY FINDINGS:

Across all profiles, there was consistent appreciation for the safety that Moldova provided. Ukrainians recently evacuated from the Gaza Strip reported feeling physically secure but socially isolated due to the remote location of the Refugee Accommodation Center (RAC), which is located in a rural area. Regardless of background, most refugees from Ukraine expressed an intention to remain in Moldova until peace prevailed in Ukraine. Some older individuals also considered permanent settlement in Moldova or relocation to EU countries, as they had lost their homes and lacked the resources to rebuild their lives in Ukraine. They highlighted the importance of social engagement, citing Community Service Centers (CSCs) as vital spaces for maintaining connections and accessing support. In contrast, Syrian refugees —many of whom had resided in Moldova for several years—demonstrated stronger signs of integration. Numerous participants had established businesses and families, contributing to their local communities. However, the participants mentioned occasional incidents of discrimination, particularly in the housing sector.

Most Ukrainians had Temporary Protection (TP) status, which had generally been accessible upon arrival in Moldova. However, uncertainty about the extension of TP remained a concern for the participants of the FGDs conducted before the end of February 2025, primarily due to a lack of available information at the time.*[3]* Syrian nationals largely held humanitarian protection status, while a smaller number had refugee status or had applied for Moldovan citizenship by the time of the FGD. Some applicants reported waiting periods exceeding two years to obtain

[1]https://app.powerbi.com/viewr=eyJrIjoiZTY0NDg2MzYtYTFlZC00MGQwLWI3MDgtZDAyNjM5OTg1ZGVjIiwidCI6ImU1YzM3OTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBjLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjh9

[2]A few Roma refugee representatives participated in one of the focus group discussions.

[3]The Government Decision No 21/2023 on granting temporary protection to persons displaced from Ukraine was modified and was extended for one more year on 28 February 2025 - HG93/2025..

Moldovan citizenship from the time of application. Meanwhile, holders of humanitarian protection continued to face challenges related to the access of bank accounts and other financial services.

Housing remained a complex issue. While RAC residents generally described conditions as acceptable, many experienced stress due to shared facilities and tensions arising from rule violations by other residents. Regardless of background, several refugees—particularly those seeking greater autonomy—had moved to private accommodation but struggled with high rental costs. People from Syria reported discrimination when attempting to secure housing in the private market. Older refugees living in rural areas faced limited transportation options, and sanitation conditions in RACs remained a pressing concern, particularly due to the lack of gender-segregated toilet facilities. In some cases, participants living with host families had to pay utility bills due to insufficient financial resources, while those renting informally without contracts were at heightened risk of eviction.

Access to healthcare remained a challenge across all profiles. Adults aged 30 to 49 often relied on private clinics or traveled back to Ukraine for specialized services due to long waiting times and limited public healthcare availability for those participants living outside Chisinau. In particular, FGD participants of Roma ethnicity reported discrimination in health settings and insufficient medical support in RACs, including difficulties accessing medication due to the disrespectful attitude of the doctors. Pre-retirement age and older persons benefited from medicine coverage under Temporary Protection but still encountered shortages of specialists and transportation barriers such its infrequency and additional costs. Across all groups, dental care remained a critical unmet need. In addition, none of the participants of any FGD had access to free health insurance.

FGD participants reported that employment pathways remained narrow, largely due to language barriers, unrecognized qualifications, and lack of inclusive job opportunities. Refugees from the Gaza Strip with medical backgrounds found it particularly difficult to secure employment in the field due to legal and bureaucratic requirements, language barriers, and perceived discrimination based on cultural appearance. As a result, many remained dependent on humanitarian assistance.

> *An older person from Hincesti: "**Each of us dreams of a world without fear and war—a world where we don't wake up to explosions in the night, and our children don't sleep on the floors of bomb shelters instead of in their own beds.**"*

Cash assistance was reported as inconsistent and FGD participants reported that they did not feel that there was clear communication about the reduction in the cash transfer value.*[4]* Many adults, particularly those aged 30 to 49, expressed confusion regarding eligibility criteria of the UNHCR cash assistance. Pre-retirement and older persons excluded from assistance programs increasingly relied on previous savings and coped by reducing food purchases. With humanitarian coverage reduced and living costs on the rise, access to food, medicine, and other basic needs became increasingly difficult, especially in major cities.

Across locations, participants reported challenges in accessing social services, often citing lack of information and systemic inefficiencies. Residents in RACs were often unaware of their rights and faced inconsistent support from social services. Some, despite contacting institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, received no clear solutions. All the participants reported uncertainty about their social rights. Older refugees, however, appeared more aware of NGO support than government support, which often filled the gaps left by limited state assistance.

[4] https://help.unhcr.org/moldova/faq-changes-to-unhcr-cash-assistance-in-moldova/

Finally, education remained a major concern for refugee families. Language barriers and curriculum differences presented ongoing challenges. Ukrainian children who had been evacuated from the Gaza Strip who attended online school programs offered by Palestinian schools, faced difficulties in reaching consular services in Romania to attend final exams due to logistical and financial constraints. Ukrainian students struggled with Romanian language exams, leading to failed grades and the inability to receive formal certification, as a result many refugee children were not enrolled in local schools.*[5]* While Syrian and some Ukrainian families reported smooth school enrollment, all the Palestinian and many Ukrainians families encountered obstacles, as described above.

> *An older person from Causeni: "**Our life is on pause; our luggage is ready to go** "*

NEXT STEPS:

- Refer and advocate with relevant institutions and organizations to ensure access to attend final exams including support with travel arrangements, administrative requirements.

- Ensure timely and transparent communication regarding UNHCR cash assistance eligibility and changes. Disseminate updated information through RACs, CSCs, and refugee activists' network. Provide targeted outreach to older persons and other excluded groups to clarify support options and referral pathways.

- Refer reported cases of discrimination and inadequate medical support to Roma mediators for follow-up. Advocate with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and Ministry of Health for culturally sensitive healthcare and improved access to medication within RACs.

- Take actions for advocacy and engage relevant stakeholders to find joint solutions that enable refugees with medical professional backgrounds to secure employment, addressing legal, bureaucratic, and language barriers.

*Focus Group Discussion conducted with **Refugees from Syria**.*
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[5] This situation concerns mainly Grade 9 students, for whom failing the Romanian language examination has, in some cases, led to schools preventing their promotion to the next grade. While national education policy generally allows students to progress despite failing one or more subjects—except in Grade 12, where graduation and certification requirements apply—there has been inconsistent interpretation and application of these rules at the school level. A Ministerial Order is expected in the coming weeks to clarify it.