Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

Protection Working Group (PWG)

Meeting Details	
Date	*19 November 2025*
Time	*15.30 - 17:00 (hybrid)*
Co-chairs	*Katie Lampe, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR* *Flore Rossi, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF* *Vanessa Bordin, GBV Officer, UNHCR* *Ashereen Jessy Kanesan, Gender & GBV Specialist, UNFPA* *Sean Sager, Protection Officer, UNHCR* *Alexandru Zubco, Directorate for the Prevention of Torture, Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Moldova*
Reporting	*Sara Sivkova,* Associate Protection Officer, *UNHCR, sivkovas@unhcr.org*
Emails	*lampe@unhcr.org* ; frossi@unicef.org ; terguta@unfpa.org ; bordin@unhcr.org ; *sager@unhcr.org*
Talking points	
1. Situational Updates (CDA) 2. CP Updates 3. GBV Updates 4. Protection Updates	

a. Update on UNHCR's MPCA Programme
5. Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) by REACH
6. AOB/Partner Updates

Participants

Sean Sager, UNHCR	***Victor Morari, Ombudsman Office***	***Andrei Pavlenco, NP Women's Initiatives***	***Adriana Procopciuc, HEKS/ESPER***
Katie Lampe, UNHCR	***Irina Cojocaru, NRC***	***Alla Hnatyshyna, FSF***	***Irina Sandu, CNPAC***
Carolina Sclifos, UNHCR	***Irina Stefan, Laolalta***	***Elena Sirbu, ROMNI***	***Bruma Nicolae, Concordia***
Sabina Sandy, UNHCR	***Sergei Muntean, ACTED***	***Marcel Straton, Lumos***	***Zaslavet Andriana, A.O RCTV Memoria***
Sergiu Gaina, UNHCR	***Olha Florynska, OHCHR***	***Iris Hamberger, Jugend Eine Welt***	***Veronica Pastela, ANPCV***
Angeliki Kourtesi, UNHCR	***Ion Foltea, IOM***		
Flore Rossi, UNICEF	***Rei Sulo, IOM***		
Vanessa Bordin, UNHCR			
Ashereen Kanesan, UNFPA			
Sara Sivkova, UNHCR			
Tetiana Stoianova, UNHCR			
Alberto Tonon, UNHCR			
Svetlana Jioara CDA			

Please note, that there were more participants online, however, they did not share their name and organizations in the chat.

Summary of discussions and agreements/ action points

Agenda	Discussion	Agreements/ Actions
Introduction *Sean Sager, Protection Officer, UNHCR* *sager@unhcr.org*	This **PWG was led by the PWG co-chair, Sean Sager (Protection Officer, UNHCR).** The PWG co-chair welcomed participants, thanked them for their presence, and presented the agenda.	
Agenda Point 1 **Situational Updates** *Svetlana Jioara, CDA/LCA*	**CDA Representative Update on Border Crossing Points (BCPs):** Palanca BCP During the reporting period (mid-October to mid-November), 11 asylum seekers (AS) were registered at the BCP. The majority were citizens of the Russian Federation (RF) with expired or outdated passports who applied for asylum in order to be granted entry into the territory of the Republic of Moldova (hereafter referred to as Moldova), with the stated intention of visiting the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Chișinău. A smaller number of AS were Ukrainian citizens who had previously overstayed the legally permitted 90-day period of stay in Moldova and were subsequently denied entry. No asylum claims were observed at the green border.	

	The State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (SBGSU) was present near the entry barrier along the transit road and was observed stopping vehicles. Men of conscription age who were denied entry into Moldova were escorted back by SBGSU vehicles in an unknown direction. Third-country nationals (TCNs) continued to be subject to additional verification procedures and were required to wait several hours at the BCP before being allowed to proceed. Individuals who could not provide a valid reason for travel, or who lacked a visa or a valid passport, were denied entry into Moldova. The majority of TCNs were citizens of the RF or other post-Soviet countries. A medium flow of cars and buses was observed in both directions, with regular bus services operating without interruption. The flow of pedestrians also remained at a medium level. No unaccompanied or separated children were reported. Most persons arriving in Moldova originated from Odesa, Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, and Dnipro. Some were beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (TP) in Moldova or other EU countries and were travelling to Ukraine to visit relatives. A smaller number of individuals were entering Moldova for the first time and intended to remain for an indefinite period. While there was a continued flow of travelers heading to vacation destinations, the number was significantly lower compared to the summer months. Most individuals returning to Ukraine also originated from Odesa, Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, and Dnipro. Some reported travelling to check on relatives or property, while others returned for an indefinite period due to difficulties adapting to life in host countries.	

	Several individuals were fined for overdue vignettes and for overstaying the legally permitted 90-day period of stay in Moldova. <u>Otaci BCP</u> During the reporting period, 56 asylum seekers, all Ukrainian citizens, were recorded crossing the green border to enter Moldova. Some individuals reportedly crossed into Moldova by swimming across the Dniester River. All asylum seekers were documented and transported to the Inspectorate General for Migration (IGM) office for the processing of their claims. An intense flow of cars and buses was observed in both directions. Similarly, pedestrian movement remained high, with the majority of individuals travelling to and from Mogilev-Podolsk, primarily for grocery shopping. During monitoring interviews, some refugees reported that several regions of Ukraine were experiencing power shortages and indicated their intention to relocate to Moldova for the winter period to stay with relatives. Most arrivals originated from Vinnytsia and Vinnytsia region, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, and Kyiv region. Some individuals were transiting through Moldova en route to EU countries where they benefit from Temporary Protection, while others were entering Moldova to visit family members. Those returning to Ukraine originated from Vinnytsia and Vinnytsia region, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, and Kyiv region. Several individuals indicated that they were returning as conditions in their areas of origin had stabilized or due to fatigue from prolonged displacement. A small number of individuals were fined for overdue vignettes.	

	<u>Chisinau International Airport</u> At Chișinău International Airport, CDA monitored approximately 60 flights, with monitors present on most weekdays (Monday to Friday). Several individuals were denied entry into Moldova, primarily nationals of post-Soviet countries (including the RF, Armenia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), as well as China, Morocco, and Turkey. The reasons for entry denial were not consistently disclosed to CDA monitors. No unaccompanied or separated children were identified at the airport. Third-country nationals continued to undergo additional screening procedures. **Discussion:** The UNHCR co-chair asked whether any new trends had been observed following the legislative change in Ukraine introduced in August 2025, which allows Ukrainian men aged 18–22 to travel abroad. CDA did not observe any significant increase in the number of men in this age group travelling to Moldova. However, CDA noted an increased number of male minors travelling to Moldova before reaching the age of 18, accompanied by relatives. The UNHCR co-chair also inquired about any observed changes related to the recent amendments to Ukrainian passport regulations. Ukraine has reverted to regular passport requirements, meaning Ukrainian citizens can no longer use outdated passports for international travel and must obtain individual passports for children, as children can no longer be recorded in their parents' passports for international	

	travel. CDA has not yet observed any changes in travel patterns linked to the implementation of this regulation. The UNHCR co-chair further asked whether the recent increase in shelling and bombardments in Ukraine had resulted in a rise in the number of individuals travelling to Moldova to seek shelter. CDA reported that only a small number of such cases had been observed and assessed this as an isolated phenomenon rather than a broader trend. The LUMOS representative asked about the current number of refugees residing in Moldova. UNHCR explained that the most recent figures are available on the Operational Data Portal, which reflects monthly Border Police statistics and currently indicates approximately 130,000 refugees. However, these figures may differ from official statistics on the number of individuals currently residing in Moldova. In addition, IGM maintains data on TP beneficiaries (currently approximately 85,000), as well as on residence permit holders and asylum seekers.	
CP Update *Katie Lampe, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR* *lampe@unhcr.org*	**The CPSWG co-chair provided updated for Child Protection sector:** Due to ongoing budget constraints, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will need to scale down some Child Protection activities in 2026. This will include a reduction in the number of partners and selected prevention activities. The Child Protection Sub-Working Group (CPSWG) co-chair encouraged organizations with available or additional funding for child protection activities to reach out to the CPSWG co-chairs, who may redirect them to relevant partners and facilitate bilateral coordination meetings.	

	The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) informed participants that it has secured funding for 2026 and will maintain its existing partnerships for child protection activities. In the event of identified protection gaps, partners were encouraged to contact UNICEF, which may be able to support the continuation or coverage of specific activities. UNICEF will also continue advocating with donors for sustained financing of child protection interventions. On the left bank of the Dniester River, the de facto authorities have issued new legislation stating that all children born in this area will automatically obtain so-called "Transnistrian citizenship" without the need to submit legal documentation. The CPSWG co-chair cautioned that parents must still take action to register their children with the Moldovan authorities in order to obtain an internationally recognized identity document. Child protection partners were encouraged to inform beneficiaries on the left bank of this requirement. The UNICEF co-chair noted that there have been no updates so far regarding the revision of the National Plan on Child Protection. However, the CPSWG continues to closely monitor developments and will share further information once the revised plan is officially launched. The UNICEF co-chair also informed participants that the relevant Ministry is currently reviewing the existing Government Decision on Social Services, which was circulated the previous week for consultation. The deadline for submitting comments was set for 24 November.	

	Discussion: The UNICEF co-chair informed participants that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) remains concerned about the situation of refugees in light of the reduction in financial and food assistance. Additional concerns were raised regarding the decrease in support for Moldovan host families assisting refugees, previously provided by the World Food Program (WFP). MLSP indicated that it is unable to cover the resulting funding gaps and appealed to protection partners to continue monitoring risks affecting children and other vulnerable groups. Where child protection concerns are identified, partners were encouraged to reach out to UNICEF, which may be able to support with selected social protection services, including case management. The UNHCR co-chair provided updates regarding Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs). The Relocation Technical Group—comprising the Protection Working Group (PWG) and the Basic Needs Working Group (BNWG)—met with MLSP to discuss the planned 2025 RAC Assessment, scheduled to take place in the first half of December. As part of the assessment, each of the 18 remaining RACs will be visited by partners, who will conduct interviews with RAC managers, observations of shelter conditions, and focus group discussions with residents.	
GBV Updates *Veronica Pastela, National GBV Agency* *Tetiana Stoianova, Senion Protection Assistant, stoianov@unhcr.org*	**The National Agency for Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (NAPCV) provided an update on the upcoming 16 Days of Activism** The 16 Days of Activism campaign will be launched on 25 November and will be implemented by the NAPCV, with the support of UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Council of Europe, and the World Bank. The Republic of Moldova is presiding over the campaign for the second consecutive year, building on the success of the previous	UNHCR will share information about the upcoming march and the methodological guideline for the 16 Days of Activism campaign communication.

	edition. The campaign will be launched in three localities across Moldova: Bălți, Cahul, and Chișinău. Partners were invited to participate in activities marking the 16 Days of Activism, beginning with a march scheduled for Tuesday, 25 November, around noon. As part of the campaign, UNHCR organized an art exhibition from 25 November to 19 December at the National Museum of History of Moldova. The illustrations featured in the exhibition were developed based on real-life stories shared by participants of the Girls Shine programme and other empowerment sessions. All partners were invited to attend the exhibition. The UNHCR Senior Protection Assistant presented a tipsheet on ethical communication during the 16 Days of Activism campaign, which is available in the shared presentation folder here and at the UNHCR data portal in Romanian and English.	
Protection Updates *Yigit Anil Gurer, Programme CBI Officer, UNHCR* *gurer@unhcr.org* Sergiu Gaina, Legal Officer UNHCR gaina@unhcr.org	**Update on the MPCA Programme Changes & Initial Reassessment Findings** From 15 October to November 2025, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) initiated a Reassessment exercise, reviewing its entire active caseload of 7,800 households, comprising approximately 15,750 individuals. During the exercise, UNHCR, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP), conducted joint monitoring visits to Cash Enrollment Centres to ensure that data collection adhered to established procedures. At the central level, technical teams from MLSP and UNHCR met regularly to review household profiles and validate eligibility outcomes.	UNHCR to share the presentation on the shared drive.

	As of 17 October, approximately 81% of households had been verified and reviewed. At that stage, a no-show rate of approximately 18% was recorded. A grace period was granted to all households that did not attend their scheduled interviews. More information about vulnerability profiles of the beneficiaries are available on the shared disk presentation here. **Discussion:** The UNICEF co-chair asked about measures to mitigate risks for the most vulnerable individuals and the transition of assistance to MLSP. UNHCR explained that funding constraints began in 2024, when a reduction of its assistance caseload became necessary. At that stage, the reassessment exercise was launched to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees continued to receive financial assistance. However, due to ongoing budget constraints, parts of the caseload had to be deprioritized once again, with a continued focus on supporting the most vulnerable beneficiaries. UNHCR reported that it is continuing negotiations with donors to increase funding as part of its mitigation efforts, while also engaging with MLSP to explore the possibility of absorbing part of the caseload into national systems. The objective is to identify durable solutions, including for dual nationals, with a view to enabling access to ajutor social or other social assistance schemes administered by MLSP. UNHCR continues to advocate for the transition of eligible cases to MLSP systems or other support programmes; however, the current national system is not able to absorb the entire caseload, estimated at approximately 16,000 individuals.	

	Within the Cash Working Group, some partners indicated that they have available funds to support selected beneficiaries during the winter period. UNHCR is working to strengthen referral mechanisms to ensure that individuals excluded from MPCA can access alternative support programmes, either through MLSP or via partners. UNICEF indicated that it may be able to provide additional support for vulnerable children over the coming year. IOM noted that it could offer limited assistance to mixed-status families, including TCNs, through a one-time payment under its Cash for Protection scheme. **UNHCR legal officer provided an update regarding TP extension** The Government has confirmed its plan to extend the current Government Decision granting Temporary Protection (TP) to displaced persons from Ukraine. The extension is expected to enter into force on 1 January 2026. Compared to last year's extension, several changes are envisaged to Government Decision No. 21, including: • Online application requirement for the extension (as opposed to last year's automatic extension); • A 90-day application window for TP extension (1 February–30 April 2026); • TP remaining valid throughout the application period; • Up to 90 days for the authorities to issue a decision; • Collection of additional data during the process (including school enrolment, health status, and income status);	UNHCR to share information with PWG regarding the provision of comments for the Temporary Protection extension.

	• Children aged 14 and above will be invited to the Inspectorate General for Migration (IGM) to provide fingerprints. Once the revised Government Decision is issued for public consultation, UNHCR will share the relevant information with Protection Working Group (PWG) members by email. Depending on the consultation timeframe, partners may be encouraged to submit comments directly and subsequently share their inputs with PWG for consolidation, following the same approach as last year.	
Agenda Point 3 **GBV & CP updates** *Felicia Bulat, Senion Assessment Officer, REACH Initiative* *felicia.bulat@reach-initiative.org*	**The presentation of the Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS) provided by the REACH/IMPACH representative:** The SEIS is a collaborative process collecting the opinions of refugees regarding their needs and serves as key information for the 2026 Response Plan planning. The SEIS covered information from 532 households, including some 1,128 individuals. The collection of data was from 21 May to 7 July 2025. The data analysis is conducted by the REACH Initiative and the UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe (RBE). More information is available on the shared drive here. **Discussion:** The UNICEF co-chair encouraged partners to read the report and take a look at the socio-economic findings of the survey. The survey shows that many respondents indicated having limited access to the social protection system, which may have protection indications. The representative from REACH confirmed that only 6% of respondents were under the government social protection scheme.	UNHCR to share the presentation on the shared drive

	The UNHCR co-chair explained that this year SEIS included questions about the intentions of refugees wishing to stay or return to Ukraine in case the war ends. UNHCR noted that over the years, it was observed in the border monitoring exercise that the intention of refugees has slightly shifted, increasing the number of those who were undecided or did not know if they wanted to return to Ukraine.	
AOB *All participants*	**The representative from Laolalta shared a few findings from the Social Listening activity:** The Social Listening report produced by Laolalta presents an analysis of refugee and host community posts and discussion threads shared across online social media platforms. The report analyses approximately 3,000 social media threads collected from Facebook, Viber, and Telegram. Findings indicate that cash assistance and legal aid were the dominant topics discussed online, together accounting for over 70% of all feedback captured. During the reporting period, analysis showed that refugees rely on cash assistance not only to cover basic needs such as food and rent, but also to meet healthcare costs and other everyday expenses. Many refugees highlighted that seasonal assistance, particularly winter cash support, is essential to cope with rising living costs during the winter months. Overall, cash assistance remains the preferred modality among refugees, as it offers flexibility, dignity, and the ability to address individual needs. With regard to legal aid, refugees were primarily seeking pathways to obtain Moldovan residence permits, largely due to uncertainty surrounding the extension of Temporary Protection (TP). Refugees from mixed-status families were particularly	

	interested in options to legalize their stay. In relation to work permits, refugees reported that eligibility criteria are difficult to meet, especially the minimum salary threshold, which was described as exceeding what the current labour market can realistically offer. In the healthcare sector, respondents reported barriers related to registration with family doctors, limited understanding of which medical services are covered under TP, and difficulties accessing specialized healthcare services. Limited access to mental health services was also highlighted across multiple regions. Regarding accommodation, refugees noted a significant increase in rental prices, in some cases doubling or tripling since 2023, which has made it increasingly difficult to maintain stable housing. As a result, many refugees reported being pushed into short-term or informal accommodation arrangements, which are often unsafe or unstable. Similarly, food and non-food assistance, particularly hygiene kits, was reported to be less available, leaving many vulnerable individuals at heightened risk and feeling excluded from support. In the area of employment, many threads focused on questions related to job opportunities, particularly short-term and flexible employment. Key barriers included language gaps, unclear work rights, and discrimination. At the same time, some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the National Employment Agency were noted for organizing job fairs, which have supported refugees in accessing employment opportunities. The mid-year report could be accessed at: SOCIAL LISTENING REPORT MID-YEAR 2025 – Laolaltă	

Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

Moldova Operational data portal: Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation

If you have any difficulties accessing the Inter-agency shared folders or if any modifications are necessary to the minutes of the PWG please contact: sivkovas@unhcr.org