

Moldova Refugee Inter-Agency Child Protection Update #01 – March 2022



Photo: UNICEF Moldova

OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION FOR CHILDREN

Context

Children and families have been welcomed in Moldova by Moldovan citizens, volunteers, civil society, and authorities, who have given them access to safety. Few are attending school in Moldova, and many are separated from their fathers who remain in Ukraine. The children live in transit or temporary accommodation, either in refugee accommodation or hosted by Moldovan families.

Key statistics

- Over **387,151** people have entered Republic of Moldova, as of 29 March 2022, of which **36% are children and 65% are women**.
- An estimated **140,000 children** have passed through Moldova and **36,000** remain on the territory.
- Child Protection partners estimate that at **least 2% of children** would be separated or unaccompanied, which would mean at least 780 UASC and over 1000 children at risk currently in Moldova.
- To over **5,500** children and caregivers were provided integrated services.
- The authorities have identified **11** unaccompanied children and placed them in emergency care.

Child Protection risks

- Psychosocial distress because of displacement, lack of education, and separation from family.
- A lack of information puts children and caregivers at risk during travel and lodging.
- Family separation increases women's and UASC's caregiver burden.
- Risks of violence, abuse, and exploitation, including child labour and physical discipline.
- Specific risks for girls, gender-based violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation, and human trafficking.
- Specific situation of children with disability and minority children (Roma).

From experience in other refugee settings, children living in women-headed households with many children and a low socioeconomic status are the most vulnerable to violence, abuse, and exploitation. [see: here](#).

ACHIEVEMENTS- PROGRESS MADE SO FAR

The Child Protection Sub-Working Group has identified the following priorities:

- **Ensure movement of children and families is safe, dignified, and supportive**

When refugee families and children arrive in Moldova, child protection and other actors are working together to provide accurate and accessible information that allows children and their families to informed decisions as to their options and ensure child friendly information and counselling is available. Safe transport that while waiting to travel or travelling, children and their caregivers are safe from exploitation and abuse, and that children's specific needs are addressed including child friendly waiting areas. It also means that after entering the territory of Moldova children and caregivers with specific needs are identified and provided support on the journey and upon arrival – including children with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children, and older persons caring for children.

- **Ensure children and families are safe and receive timely child friendly assistance in Moldova**

Child protection actors are working with all stakeholders to ensure that refugee reception and accommodation centers, cash assistance and education is child sensitive and contribute to mitigating risks to children. This means integrating child protection activities within refugee reception and accommodation centers, ensuring child safeguarding and undertaking safety audits to identify and address any risks to women and children. Child protection actors are also working with cash enrolment to ensure that vulnerable children and families are prioritised for cash assistance and identified during enrolment and referred to child protection services.

- **Provide integrated services to children and families through Blue Dots and community outreach**

Child protection actors, through community outreach and Blue Dots are identifying the needs of families and children and referring them to basic services such as health, education, accommodation, and non-food items. The Blue Dots provide an integrated package of information and counselling for children and families, psychosocial support, child and family friendly spaces and legal assistance. They also serve as an entry point to identify and refer children and families with specific needs such as disabilities, medical needs, women at risk or unaccompanied or separated children. Mobile psychosocial and multisectoral teams are working with refugees and host communities to provide structured

activities for children and psychosocial support for families, particularly mothers and grandmothers caring for children under difficult circumstances.



Photo: UNHCR Moldova

- **Identification and support to separated, unaccompanied and other children at risk**

In response to the unprecedented number of refugee children transiting through and staying in Moldova, the identification, screening, and support of children at risk is being strengthened. Due to increased refugee numbers, border authorities prioritized efficient entry, making systematic screening of children at risk difficult.

With fewer people entering and leaving Moldova, the Border Authorities, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, UNICEF, UNHCR and partners are stepping up screening and referral of children at risk, including UASC. The Local Guardianship Authority has deployed staff at Palanca and Otaci border. Blue Dots have Child Protection Specialists who receive referrals from other agencies. UASC and other at-risk children are being identified through more systematic screening of families traveling by bus, plane, and cash enrolment sites.

To date, most unaccompanied and separated children who have been identified have been cared for by their extended family or known and trusted adults or have been reunified with family members upon arrival in Moldova— as such the priority has been to identify, assess and support these existing family care arrangements. Assessment and support to these families have been undertaken by the guardianship authorities, AVE Copii, UNICEF and UNHCR (the later as part of the flight transfer programme of families to various European countries).

A key priority is to ensure that all frontline workers, whether at the border, Blue Dots or cash enrolment sites, understand that they must refer any child travelling with a family they did not live with before the war to child protection actors and not

only the child travelling alone. As screening and identification improves, establishing an information management system to ensure all identified UASC are assessed and followed up, families are supported, and unaccompanied children are provided with alternative care is a priority to ensure no child or family falls through the cracks.

- **Strengthening national child protection systems.**

While the national child protection system, with integrated services provided by authorities and regulated local civil society organizations, required improvement even prior to the crisis, it was not designed to handle the current refugee influx's scale and nature. As such, assisting government authorities and national civil society organizations dedicated to child protection in scaling up and adapting existing services and procedures to the refugee response is a critical priority.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection has established a guardianship system for unaccompanied and separated children, an emergency care center for unaccompanied children has been identified, and the foster care system is available to accommodate unaccompanied children as needed. With the support of UNICEF, UNHCR, and relevant NGOs, an interinstitutional mechanism between MIA and MLSP is being developed to update procedures and clarify roles and responsibilities.

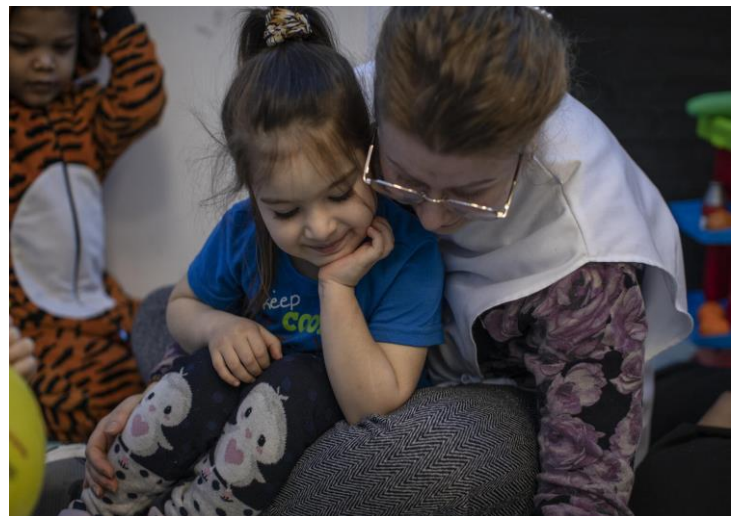


Photo: © UNICEF/UN0611000/Moldova

CHALLENGES

- The rapid movement of children and families means traditional, static programming and services are not responsive enough or adaptable to the changing needs. This requires both adapting existing national services and complimenting with mobile teams.
- There is a need to ensure coordinated equitable response that increasingly focuses not only on the border locations or refugee accommodation sites but also on services for

- refugees living in host communities to avoid duplication and gaps in the response.
- Understanding which families are vulnerable and ensuring they are prioritised. Previous refugee responses have demonstrated that separated children or unaccompanied children who are cared for by families close to them are not necessarily the most vulnerable, while those in female headed households, with large numbers of children and without the economic means or support networks to support their families or care for their children are the most at risk of violence, abuse and exploitation including GBV for girls.

WAY FORWARD

- 1. Child Friendly transport, accommodation, and cash**
 - 1.1. Reinforcing the protection of children and identification of children at risk at the border, in transport and accommodation services.
 - 1.2. Scaling up child protection services in cash enrolment sites and referral of vulnerable families and children to integrated services.
- 2. Scaling up integrated services**
 - 2.1. Capacity building and ensuring quality in existing Blue Dots and scaling up the Blue Dots from 3 to 6 during April.
 - 2.2. Finalizing the mapping of services being provided and developing interagency capacity building plan to maximise their impact.
- 3. Strengthening identification of UASC and children at risk and best interests' procedures:**
 - 3.1. Ensuring more systematic identification and response to UASC and children at risk in a coordinated way with

- all relevant partners through clear SOPs and capacity building of all relevant partners.
 - 3.2. Finalising updated procedures for UASC and developing and rolling out SOPs and referral pathways on the identification and response to UASC.
 - 3.3. Ensuring all UASC are assessed, referred to appropriate services and followed-up.
- 4. Supporting children, families, and communities to protect children**
 - 4.1. Develop and disseminate interagency child friendly information.
 - 4.2. Implement Service-user feedback mechanism.
 - 4.3. Coordinate assessments, monitor, collate and dissemination of information about child protection risks and responses through the CPWG.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

UNICEF and UNHCR co-lead the child protection response for refugees and the Child Protection Sub-Working Group (CPSWG) in Moldova in support of and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development. Specific taskforces on UASC and Blue Dots are operational and meet as needed.

Members of Child Protection Sub-Working Group (CPSWG)

Ministry of Labour and Social Protection | Ministry of Internal Affairs | Municipality of Chisinau | Ombudsman | UNICEF | IOM | UNHCR | UN Women | UNFPA WHO | OSCE | USAid | IsraAID | Terre des Hommes | Copil Comunitate Familie | Partnership for Every Child | CNPAC | Centre for support and development of civic initiatives "Resonance" | Asociatia pentru Abilitarea Copilului si Familiei AVE Copiii | Law Center of Lawyers | Caritas | Keystone | Catholic Relief Service | INTERSOS - Organizzazione Umanitaria | Children's Emergency Relief International | CNPAC | Women Law Center | La Strada | International Rescue Comittee | Norwegian Refugee Council | Plan International | Weword | Child Holland | People in Need | Clear Global | Church World Service | VDMC | Internews | Street Child Home | Hope and Home for Children | Faros Elpidas | Dorcas | World Vision

Efforts by Government and People of Moldova in providing protection and assistance to refugees needs international solidarity and shared human commitment.