Background
Between 24 February and 8 August, 558,359 refugees arrived in Moldova from Ukraine. While many move on to the European Union, over 88,780 refugees remain in the country at the time of writing and more arrive each day. 85% of those who stay are female, elderly persons and/or children. Moldova is struggling with a serious economic crisis and inflation, in addition to the humanitarian situation. This is deepening the poverty in the country with limited resources and existent more than 620,000 individuals in an absolute poverty (estimated that additional 250K-500K will be under poverty line in few months). Inflation rate reached over 30%, highest in the region and Europe. Unpredictable energy prices are another disquieting economic indicator among the society and expected to create considerable burden in the household expenditure in near future -especially during the wintertime. There is no important difference between refugees and host communities in respect to their socio-economic conditions and resort to negative coping strategies.

According to the result of the Multi-Sectorial Needs Assessment (MSNA) almost eight out of ten families (76% in overall -74% for community, 78% for refugees) having spent their savings to cover their main needs followed by reducing health costs, education expenditures and withdrawal children from school. This increases the concerns that many more refugees and host community members will be in a worse situation when the savings are consumed. Additionally, the humanitarian assistance is one of the main sources of income for refugees and host community (overall 62% -59% for refugees and 62% for community). Additionally, during July 2022, UNHCR conducted a participatory assessment with a total of 249 individuals (163 Ukrainian refugees and 86 Moldovan nationals) ranging from 17 to 70 years old, and which provided further evidence of the challenging socioeconomic situation of refugees and host community members, and the possible impact of winter season on their ability to meet their basic needs.

According to the findings of the participatory assessment, rising living and utilities costs are further deteriorating living conditions of refugees in private accommodations. Majority of refugees living privately and in host community state that cash assistance value is mostly spent on rent and utility bills. According to those interviewed, the cost of living and basic needs (such as food, clothing etc.) is on the rise and there is growing fear that they will not be able to cover winter related expenses. Regarding Moldovan households, those interviewed are worried as to whether refugees would be able to cover the costs of utilities during winter. Moreover, concerns were raised regarding community perceptions on the access of refugees to assistance and support, vis a vis the support provided for local community falling below the poverty threshold. Concerns have been also shared by both refugees and host communities related to disproportional access to assistance and information by those living in rural areas, as contrary to Chisinau and other urban areas.

Based on this context, needs for additional resources (cash) to manage to a certain extent the expected surge in energy and gas prices (utility bills) during winter will be prominent for both refugees and local population. Social safety network coverage is limited, and national systems are gearing up to provide additional social assistance for winter to local population, with donor funds. Refugees accommodated in RACs will need additional items for a decent living during winter months (blankets, heating devices, clothes).

With the onset of Winter, it is necessary to assess and implement measures to provide seasonal support for both the refugee and host-community populations in support to measures being implemented by the Government of Moldova, with particular attention to priority populations. In this regard, the Refugee Coordination Forum is working with sector and partners on the development of a viable Inter-Agency Winterization Plan for Moldova.

The present document presents key planning assumptions to be considered by RCF sectors and partners when developing sector specific winter strategies and planning/adjusting their winter related programmes.

Planning assumptions and considerations
- Increasing inflation rate and prices: inflation 30% for August compared to July (source: National Bank of Moldova); increase of gas prices—by 61%, electricity—by 20%.
- Impact of the energy crisis, which may cause potential shortages in the supply of gas and electricity, as well as increased pressure on host communities.
- Potential shortage of winter-related goods in the local markets.
- The complex crisis entails an increased demand from all the population groups that require an increased preparedness from the suppliers. This might lead to delays in supply and/or further tensions.
- Additional inflows from Ukraine due to winter, which may result in an additional amount of up to 40,000 new refugees entering the country during the winter season independent of underlying trends.
- Internal mobility must also be considered as higher numbers of refugees may move from host communities to refugee accommodation center as a strategy to cope with the winter period. This factor may entail an increased need for individual-based assistance - such as cash and personal NFIs.
- Mitigation of tensions through the promotion of social cohesion by supporting Moldovan households in close coordination with the national and local authorities, recognizing their leadership in the response.
- Difficulties to access the local labor market and/or sustainable sources of income also represent an additional layer of challenge for refugees during the winter season, as the inability to access a stable income source may result in failure of covering their basic needs and only exacerbate the existing vulnerabilities.
Priority Populations
In the context of winterization in Moldova, the following population groups should be prioritized:

**Refugees**
- Refugees residing in RACs constitute a priority group due to increased socioeconomic hardship and lack of security of tenure. Special attention should be given to those refugees in RACs who belong to one of the following groups: members of the Roma community, older persons, persons with disabilities, and persons at risk of statelessness who may face difficulties to access rights and services.
- Refugees hosted by Moldovan Households also constitute a priority group due to increasing utility prices and the impact this may have on the socioeconomic situation of both refugee and host families.
- Refugees renting private accommodations without a stable source of income face additional challenges in the winter season which might impact their ability to meet basic needs. Relevant factors include increasing utility bills and rising rental prices in some areas, which may trigger further movements into refugee accommodation centers if no support is timely provided.
- Refugees with protection needs, including GBV survivors, children at risk, and victims of human trafficking.

**Host communities**
- Support to the host community during winter will be key to ensuring social cohesion and mitigating the overall socioeconomic impact of the winter season. Winterization support to Moldovan households must complement the assistance package offered by the government and must be closely coordinated with relevant government counterparts. The following criteria should be taken into consideration when identifying potential beneficiaries: people with disabilities, members of minority groups, and households facing socio-economic hardship.
- Moldovan households living in rural areas and dwellings not fit for the winter period (low temperatures on the premises, especially absence of at least one warm room (with temperature below 16 degrees Celsius), no access to warm water, heating system, and insufficient insulation.
- Additional gender and age considerations should be taken into account when targeting Moldovan households, including prioritization of female single-headed households and households with older persons or with 3+ children.

**Third country nationals**
- Third-country nationals are likely to face increased barriers to local integration due to documentation and language-related issues. Humanitarian support will be key to allowing this population group to cope with additional winter-related needs.

Winter Response by the Government of Moldova
- **Financial Aid for Winter Period:** A monthly payment on the value of 700 MDL (36.5 USD) from November until March will be made to persons receiving state pensions and/or social allowances with low income.
- **Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund:** through the Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund - approved in July 2022 - households facing energy vulnerability will be granted compensations for the payment of energy bills as a measure to reduce the impact of rising energy prices. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, an online platform will be launched in October to facilitate the access of eligible households to energy compensation.
- **Firewood price and distribution:** Vulnerable households or those who heat exclusively with firewood will be able to buy up to 3 cubic meters of firewood at a fixed price during the first phase (October – November). In a second phase (December – January), the Government Forest Agency (Moldsilva) will provide additional volumes depending on the existing need and stocks. According to the government, 658,000 households use traditional wood-burning stoves as the main source of heating.

**Winter needs and request support expressed by the Government of Moldova**
During consultations with the Government, the following areas in need of support due to the winter season were identified:
- **Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund:** organizations interested in supporting host community members – and who are able to do so – are encouraged to support the Government’s Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund to expand the provision of winter assistance and compensations to social and economic vulnerable Moldovan families.
- **Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs):** While the number of RACs with a population residing in them has been gradually declining over the course of the year, a considerable amount of 74 RACs with more than 3,130 people staying are still active as of the beginning of August. These centers face challenges in coverage of utility bills amid increasing energy costs. Around 30 RACs are not insulated to effectively preserve the warmth in the cold season. Additionally, 28 RACs have needs related to repairs to their insulation system, which equally affects the ability to preserve the warmth. Apart from the insulation, 18 RACs are not connected to the central heating grid, having either autonomous heating or relying on individual heaters. Additional interventions in RACs include repair, maintenance, and improvement of electrical systems to support high-powered electrical heating devices, as well as winter arrangements for rooms dedicated to children’s activities. Also, the provision of NFIs, including beds, winter blankets, and winter clothes was highlighted. In line with all the above-mentioned, both insulation activities and the installation of electricity generators have been highlighted by the government as a means to make RACs more energy effective and prepared for the winter season.
- **Social Institutions:** There is a variety of social institutions for the most vulnerable population groups (e.g. placement centers for people with disabilities, centers for the victims of trafficking, etc.) that host individuals at higher risk, including refugees. Similar to RACs, these institutions also require autonomy from the centralized grid as well as insulation activities.
- **Health and educational facilities:** support for the winterization of health and educational facilities have also been highlighted by the government. Support to ensure uninterrupted service provision may include installations of electricity generators, improvements/repairs to insulation and electrical systems, and distribution of hot meals.
- **Awareness Raising:** Develop and promote awareness raising campaigns among refugees and Moldovan households on rational consumption of energy and ways to promote energy efficiency during winter.
Climatic conditions

The climate of Moldova is moderately continental, characterized by relatively mild winters with little snow, long warm summers and low humidity. The average annual temperatures vary between 6.3°C in the North to 12.3°C in the South. Warm weather lasts about 190 days. This overlaps with the distribution of the refugee population in Moldova: 11% of refugee population resides in Southern areas (UTA Gagauzia, Cahul, and Causeni) leading to potential prioritization of activities related to border points and social institutions in the Northern part of Moldova.

Compared to Ukraine, the winters in Moldova are not as harsh, with average amount of days with the temperature below 0°C reaching up to 60, while in Ukraine this figure is higher (81-100 days). The coldest month in Moldova is normally January with average temperature reaching −7°C.

Map 1. Average amount of frost days in Moldova. Aggregated data for 2015-2021

Map 2. Average amount temperature in Moldova during winter season (December to March). Aggregated data for 2015-2021

Map 3. Distribution of known refugee population as of 13.08.22

Source: World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal
### Recommended activities

#### NFI distribution

**Description**
- Prepositioning and stockpiling of non-food items, notably appropriate items to increase thermal comfort (high thermal blankets, quilts, mattresses).
- Prepositioning and stockpiling of core relief items, notably winter jacket; ‘valienke’ felt boots; thick socks; woollen hats; woolen scarves; thermal underwear.
- Prepositioning and stockpiling of core relief items, notably stoves, heaters, radiators and other heating appliances.

#### Cash and monetized assistance

**Description**
- Multi-purpose cash. Cash is preferred modality expressed by the population in concern throughout various studies. The coordination with Cash Working group should be maintained.
- Vouchers to purchase goods and items from local markets. Vouchers are recommended only for the areas where the access to banking system is limited.

#### Improvements (e.g. accommodation insulation) of private infrastructure

**Description**
- Many newly-occupied dwellings have not been subject to thermal upgrades previously, and would include doors and window improvements including double-glazing, and installation of ceiling insulation. An element of this activity will also include the provision of toolkits for people with necessary skills to perform minor repairs and winterization of shelters and housing in the rural areas.

#### Improvement of collective sites/RACs (including WASH rehabilitation)

**Description**
- Critical repairs of Refugee Accommodation Centers to improve heat retention and winter efficiency, including fixing leaking roofs, sealing gaps and replacing inefficient windows, with the aim at assuring minimum insulation standards (restoration of the “thermal envelope”, similar to the scope of light and medium repairs of houses). Include repairing existing (or installing a new) heating system where necessary.

#### Support for the improvement of community infrastructure and public spaces in host communities (e.g. health, education facilities)

**Description**
- Same as above, relates to non-refugee related social infrastructure, health, and education facilities.

#### Food distribution

**Description**
- Food distribution to the most vulnerable population whose financial means were depleted.
- Support to refugees in RACs.

#### Procurement and supply management for medicines, vaccines, devices, consumables, including laboratory items

**Description**
- Support to the vulnerable population groups due to increased exposure to seasonal diseases.

#### Financing/payment for health services (non-cash)

**Description**
- Same as above

#### Assessments

**Description**
- Ensuring timely rapid baseline assessments to identify key areas of intervention and existing gaps. Should be conducted in collaborative and complementary manner

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The Inter-Agency Coordination Team is working with the government on the systematization of winter-related support requests shared by LPA and other government institutions to be shared with Refugee Coordination forum partners for further coordinating coverage of the expressed needs.

**Contacts**

Diego Nardi, Inter-Agency Coordination Officer – nardid@unhcr.org

Yuri Arnautov, Information Management Officer – arnautov@unhcr.org

RCF Functional mailbox – mdachrcf@unhcr.org