



Protection Working Group

Meeting Details	
Date	<i>28 February 2024</i>
Time	<i>14.00 pm – 16.00 pm (hybrid)</i>
Chair	<i>Andrew Painter, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR, Sector Coordinator</i> <i>Carolina Cazaciuc, Coordinator on Refugee Rights, Ombudsperson Office, Co-Chair</i>
Reporting	<i>Sara Sivkova, Senior Protection Assistant, UNHCR</i>
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Agenda	



Welcome & Review of Agenda

1. Opening Remarks & Overview of Agenda
2. Situational Update (CDA)
3. PWG Updates
 - Protection Advisory Group
 - 2024 Workplan Overview
4. Overview of TP extension
5. Presentation on PSEA Risk Assessment
6. Partner Updates
7. AOB



Participants			
Andrew Painter, UNHCR	Svetlana Jioara, CDA	Peter Fenoy, HEKS Moldova	Rebecca Oswago,
Sean Sager, UNHCR	Oleg Palii, CDA	Josh Fairclough, INGO Forum	MdM
Diego Nardi, UNHCR	Danielle Pedretti, HelpAge	Ilinka Leger, HEKS/ EPER	Evghenia Hiora, UN Women
Alberto Tonon, UNHCR	Sergiu Zubco, IOM	Rebecca Oswago, MdM	Natalia Albina, HOPE4
Iana Pinzaru, UNHCR	Serghei Muntean, ACTED	Casey O'Neill, CWS	Satomi Konno, AAR Japan
Sabina Sandu, UNHCR	Anton Balan, ACTED	Irina Stefan, Laolalta	Natalia Sorbala, Dorcas Moldova
Sara Sivkova, UNHCR	Catalina Turevici, ACTED	Irina Cojocar, DRC	Roman Ceban, Comisia Migratia
Pierre Chacon, UNHCR	Andrei Hincu, CARE & SERA	Gonta Mircea, DRC	Tania Chebac, Comisia Migratia
Natalia Stelea, UNHCR	Romania	Hanna Ursol, PiN	Valentina Ungureanu, Secretariatul
Alexandra Cuznetova, UNHCR	Chaza Ghandour, ICRC	Kyriakos Giaglis, MIA/NORCAP	Comisiei Migratie
Alexei Buzulan, UNHCR	Rodrigo de Rezende, ICRC	Vistoria Ionita, CNPAC	Tatiana Bogaci, NRC
Catalina Birsanu, UNHCR			Tatiana Zaloj, Tdh Moldova
			Zinaida Adam, UNDP



Regional Refugee Response
for the Ukraine Situation

Daniel de Moraes, UNHCR

Martha Glover-Short, CRS

Carolina Cazaciuc,

Eirina Aletra, CRS

Ombudsperson Office

Martina Kunze, Youth One

Martina Gastaldello,

World

OHCHR



Summary of discussions and agreements/ action points

Agenda	Discussion	Agreements/ Actions
<p>Agenda Point 1</p> <p>Welcome & Review of Agenda</p> <p><i>Andrew Painter, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR</i></p> <p>painter@unhcr.org</p>	<p>The PWG co-chair welcomed participants, thanked them for their presence, and encouraged them to attend in person for future meetings, in order to have more engaging discussions. He presented the agenda, and no objections were raised.</p> <p>If any modifications are necessary to minutes of the PWG, please contact: sivkovas@unhcr.org</p>	<p>Agenda presented and agreed</p>



<p>Agenda Point 2</p> <p>Situational Updates</p> <p><i>Svetlana Jiora, CDA/LCA</i> svetlana.jioara@cda.md</p>	<p>CDA representative provided updates for January and February from the BCPs:</p> <p>There has been a continuous rise in the number of asylum seekers, particularly Ukrainian men, crossing the green border irregularly. At Palanca BCP, there were 74 asylum seekers, with 51 attempting to cross the green border. In Otaci BCP, 19 asylum seekers were recorded, with 16 attempting to cross the green border. Notably, a decrease in fines imposed on Ukrainian citizens for exceeding the 90-day stay limit was observed. This indicates a heightened awareness among Ukrainians about the permitted duration of stay in Moldova.</p> <p>At Palanca BCP, a high volume of vehicular traffic and a moderate flow of pedestrians in both directions were observed. Intelligence services from both Ukraine and Moldova were present at the BCP. Ukrainian border guards were seen on Moldovan territory near the UNICEF tent, entry barriers, and the transit road, rigorously inspecting vehicles.</p> <p>Regular buses operate without disruptions. NGO Gloria organized 19 humanitarian buses that evacuated 314 refugees, while an additional bus, co-organized by NGO Gloria and 'Be an Angel,' was utilized. Most refugees hailed from various regions of Ukraine, traveling to or from the Palanca Bus Station to the BCP, with transportation facilitated by IOM.</p> <p>Since 24 January, following the lifting of the state of emergency, Ukrainian citizens have been permitted to enter Moldova using birth certificates and internal identity cards. However, upon leaving Moldova, they are required to obtain an official travel document at the Ukrainian consulate. In practice,</p>	<p>UNHCR to share the TP Intentions Factsheet when finalized.</p>
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individuals with only a birth certificate or internal ID must contact the Ukrainian consulate to request white travel documents. CDA identified several of these cases involving single women traveling with children.

Starting 1 March, a new bus line will be established for travel between Odesa and Chisinau, with discounts offered to persons with disabilities and families of military personnel.

During the reporting period, 34 cases of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) were reported. The guardianship authority (GA) is available during the day and 24/7 via phone. From 1 March, the GA will not be present at the BCP and will arrive only if their presence is required.

Most Ukrainians coming to Moldova are from Odesa, Odesa region, Kyiv, and Zaporizhzhia. Third-country nationals (TCNs) underwent additional verification, leading to several hours of waiting before crossing the border.

At **Otaci BCP**, only two cases of unaccompanied minors were identified during the reporting period. There was ongoing regular movement of pedestrians and cars toward Mogilev-Podolsk for grocery shopping. Brief halts occurred in BCP operations due to alarms in Mogilev-Podolsk. The majority of arrivals were from Vinnytsia, Kyiv, and Zhytomyr, destined for Germany and other EU countries.

At least 16 Ukrainian citizens faced fines of 600 lei for exceeding the legally permitted 90 days in Moldova. Some individuals returned to Moldova, claiming asylum and claimed asylum in order to enter Moldova. Russian citizens encountering difficulties returning to their home country due to



expired documentation were advised to travel to Chisinau and visit the Russian embassy to obtain a white passport for travel.

Several Ukrainian men were denied exit from the country by the Ukrainian border police.

Discussion:

The UNHCR representative underscored that, according to the ongoing TP Intentions and Experience Assessment, awareness levels regarding the incurrence of fines and challenges in returning to Moldova were notably high among the refugee population, with approximately 89% exhibiting awareness. The findings from the second round of the assessment will be disseminated in March.

Regarding the surge in asylum seekers, UNHCR noted a comparable increase in the number of Ukrainian men identified crossing to Romania at Leuseni and Sculeni BCPs. Presumably, this rise can be attributed to anticipated legislative changes in Ukraine, specifically amendments to conscription laws (lowering the conscription age and relaxing requirements), with potential implications on access to consular services in asylum host countries. Concurrently, in early December, Ukraine enacted new legislation restricting movement within a certain distance from its borders, thereby limiting the freedom of movement for men near to the BCPs.



<p>Agenda Point 3</p> <p>PWG Updates</p> <p><i>Andrew Painter, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR</i> painter@unhcr.org</p>	<p><i>Protection Advisory Group (PAG)</i></p> <p>The UNHCR co-chair elaborated on the process for selecting new members of the PAG through the PAG Selection Committee, which includes representatives from UNHCR, the Ombudsman Office, ECHO, IOM, and Terre de Homme. This committee identified eight individuals to join the PAG, contributing to advocacy efforts within the PAG and PWG structure.</p> <p>The PAG functions as a small group of protection partners responsible for providing policy and strategic direction for the Protection Sector and the PWG as a whole. The newly elected members include two representatives from UN agencies (OHCHR, UNICEF), two from international non-governmental organizations (INTEROS, NRC), and three from local non-governmental organizations (CDA, NCU, HelpAge).</p> <p><i>2024 Workplan Overview</i></p> <p>At the PWG 2024 Planning Workshop conducted in January, participants engaged in an evaluation of the accomplishments and challenges encountered by the PWG in 2023. The outcomes of group exercises served as the foundation for constructing the 2024 PWG Workplan, which incorporates various new activities. These include a heightened focus on fostering the active participation of government counterparts in the PWG, increased engagement with local CSOs, the formulation of an advocacy strategy plan, monitoring of referral mechanisms, and the establishment of a shared capacity-building plan and monitoring system. The work plan was presented during the meeting and will be disseminated to members after the meeting.</p>	<p>UNHCR to share the 2024 Work Plan</p>
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<p>Agenda Point 4</p> <p>Overview of TP extension</p> <p><i>Valentina Ungureanu, Secretariat of the Ministry of Internal Affairs</i></p>	<p>The representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) a provided presentation on the TP extension overview.</p> <p>On 28 February 2023, the General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM) announced that the draft Government Decision (GD) on granting temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine had been approved, with TP extended until 1 March 2025. Highlights of the decision are below:</p> <p><u>Preamble:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extends TP for a full year, until March 2025.• TP identity documents to be automatically extended for one year. The plastic reads it is valid until March 2024. <i>[NB: MIA has said separately that QR codes on the TP cards will automatically be extended so that services can continue, but that TP-holders can also request replacement cards if they want.]</i> <p><u>Amendments to initial government decision granting TP (GD 21/2023):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family members of Ukrainian nationals must have a valid identity card to be eligible for TP.• Expired documents will no longer be valid to cross the Ukraine-Moldova border <i>[NB: In principle, an individual only in possession of expired documents would be able to seek asylum to enter the territory.]</i>• Adults crossing the state border with internal passports/national ID cards can benefit from only one entry/exit from/to Ukraine <i>[NB: those only with national passports/IDs will not be able to exit the country towards Romania, putting aside whether Romania would have accepted them for admission.]</i>	<p>UNHCR will share the presentation with PWG.</p>
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- General Inspectorate of Police, in coordination with General Inspectorate of Migration (IGM), can carry out unannounced checks at self-declared addresses of TP beneficiaries *[NB: No information on consequences of not being home during visits included in the decision]*
- Beneficiaries of TP can access financial assistance from international organizations according to criteria developed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) *[NB: UNHCR had understood that the provision would state that eligibility criteria would be developed jointly by MIA, MLSP and development partners. The phrase “development partners”, though, was dropped from the final text. MIA has told us informally that discussions on eligibility criteria will continue with UNHCR as before.]*
- TP holders can register with the territorial subdivision of the National Employment Agency to access employment support.
- In addition to emergency and primary health care, TP holders can now also benefit from compensated medicines and consultations with specialists.
- Removal of the 45-day limit on absence from the country. Refugees will not lose their TP status if they stay outside Moldova for longer than 45 days.
- Allowance for TP holders to have their private vehicles on the territory for a period of one year.

The full presentation can be found on the [shared disk](#).

Discussion:



IOM brought up a concern regarding the recent shift in policy requiring official travel documents for returning to Ukraine. Until recently, Ukrainians could enter and exit Moldova toward Ukraine using their internal IDs or birth certificates. However, with the conclusion of the state of emergency, this practice is set to change. The representative from the Ministry of Internal Affairs clarified that the rules for entering Moldova or continuing further west remain unchanged. However, a new requirement has been introduced for re-entering Ukraine, necessitating the possession of an official travel document.

PiN inquired about the validity of Ukrainian car plates in Moldova. The representative from the Ministry of Internal Affairs clarified that the car plates used by Ukrainians were always temporary, and they are permitted to retain them. For other foreigners in Moldova, they are officially allowed to keep their original car plates without registering them for up to 90 days of stay in the country. If they exceed this period, registration becomes necessary, but they can still continue using their original car plates.

In response to HelpAge's question regarding access to medical healthcare and secondary healthcare for TP card holders, the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that the entitlements for TP cardholders to access healthcare includes access to certain healthcare services and medicines for free, based on a list that the Ministry of Health will create by the end of March.

The representative from the Ombudsman Office raised a question concerning situations where parents need to retrieve their child in Moldova using a one-time entry card to accompany the child back to Ukraine. In such cases, individuals should encounter no issues as they are issued temporary



documents, or they can request temporary travel documents for this purpose.

UNHCR inquired about the inclusion of a provision in the Draft Decision on Patenta - rights for self-employment in Moldova. The Ministry of Internal Affairs advocated for its inclusion in the draft decision; however, the regulation of self-employment through this type of patent has not been incorporated so far. Further revision may be necessary to address this amendment on self-employment.

UNHCR asked about the government communication campaign on the new changes in the government decision and how can the PWG network support this awareness raising to make sure the refugees are aware of the changes. MIA explained that other Ministries were not initially involved in the awareness raising due to the Draft Decision not being finalized yet and it was constantly undergoing revisions. The coordination of the information campaign will follow after the launch and wants to include UNHCR and other partners in the process. IGM published on its [website the summary](#) of the points that the Decision will bring.

UNHCR on the registration with the National Employment Agency (NEA) for TP holders. The Commission for Migration representative explained that for now, employers are not obliged to register with NEA, it is only recommended to do so.

IOM asked about regulations surrounding the Refugee Accommodation Centres (RAC), as some of their beneficiaries were not allowed to be accommodated there due to not coming directly from Ukraine but were before staying in Romania. Based on the Ministry of Labour and Social



	<p>Protection (MLSP), only the vulnerable refugees who are crossing directly from Ukraine can be accommodated in RACs. Ukrainians coming from Romania are no longer considered for placement.</p> <p>The Ombudsman Office recommended to issue an Informative Note in the context of the automatic extension of the TP and the confirmation of the validity of the document for the national public authorities directly involved in the provision of services for the beneficiaries of temporary protection. The recommendation comes in the context of preventing possible abuses by public institutions and it is important for the monitoring process of human rights.</p>	
<p>Agenda Point 5</p> <p>Presentation on PSEA Risk Assessment</p> <p><i>Diego Nardi, UNHCR</i></p>	<p>UNHCR representative provided a presentation of the PSEA Inter-Agency Risk Assessment findings.</p> <p>All findings could be accessed in the report on the shared disk.</p> <p>The next PSEA Inter-Agency Risk Assessment in Moldova will be conducted in 2025.</p>	<p>UNHCR will share the report and findings on the shared disk</p>



<p>Agenda Point 6 & 7</p> <p>Partner Updates</p> <p>AOB</p> <p><i>Andrew Painter, Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR</i></p> <p>painter@unhcr.org</p>	<p><i>Change in UNHCR cash assistance policy.</i></p> <p>In December 2023, UNHCR announced a change in its cash assistance policy, requiring all beneficiaries to verify their legal status in Moldova. Individuals facing difficulties in obtaining legal status were referred to legal aid and provided assistance on a case-by-case basis.</p> <p>Although the initial deadline for regularizing status with cash centers was set for the end of January, UNHCR decided to extend the countdown to the end of February. This extension was implemented to afford beneficiaries more time to acquire any necessary legal status in Moldova.</p> <p><i>A recent incident in RAC in Comrat</i></p> <p>Last week, an incident occurred at the RAC in Gagauzia, where two cars owned by Ukrainian refugees were vandalized by an unknown individual. In both cases, the Romanian words "Afare," which translates to "get out," were written on the vehicles before they were set on fire. One of the cars sustained significant damage. It's important to note that the residents of this RAC include both Ukrainian and Roma refugees.</p> <p>This incident followed two previous occurrences. The first involved similar text written at the gates of the RAC, while the second was the vandalization of the statue of V.I. Lenin near the RAC. The residents expressed fear following these incidents.</p> <p>The Ministry of Internal Affairs released an article acknowledging the incident and reported that three suspected perpetrators had been detained</p>	<p>UNHCR will share more information on the incidents in RAC if any new development occurs.</p>
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for 72 hours. One of them was also implicated in a similar incident in Vulcanesti.

UNHCR is actively monitoring the situation through community mediators and colleagues from ACTED shelter.

Discussion:

The UNHCR representative explained that this particular RAC, Congaz was identified by MLSP to be closed in the next phase of the RAC Consolidation process. This incident may influence the decision of the residents to stay or leave the area when asked to relocate.

The PiN representative pointed out that this incident of vandalizing Ukrainian cars was not the first occurrence and that similar incidents were happening in Chisinau before however, the majority of the Ukrainians do not wish to involve the law enforcement authorities.



Information collection and relevant links

Moldova operational data portal: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10784>

UNHCR Regional Bureau for Europe: The Implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive - Six Months On (October 2022)

<https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/unhcr-regional-bureau-europe-implementation-temporary-protection-directive-six-months-october-2022>

If you have any difficulties accessing the Inter-agency shared folders do not hesitate to contact sivkovas@unhcr.org