

PROTECTION BRIEF #3

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

April 2024



Operational Context & Analysis

As of 31 March 2024, nearly 1,500,000 refugees and third-country nationals (TCN) had arrived in the Republic of Moldova¹ from Ukraine since 24 February 2022, the highest per capita number of Ukrainian arrivals in Europe. While most continued westward to the EU, some 118,750 Ukrainian refugees and 9,500 third-country nationals had chosen to remain in Moldova, of whom 58% were female, 44% were children, and an estimated 19% were older persons.

In responding to the emergency, Moldova has displayed remarkable generosity and unity, rallying authorities at every level to address the pressing needs of those seeking refuge from the war in neighboring Ukraine. The government’s response has been supported by civil society, host communities, international NGOs, the private sector, committed volunteers, and UN agencies, to ensure access to protection and services for those forcibly displaced.

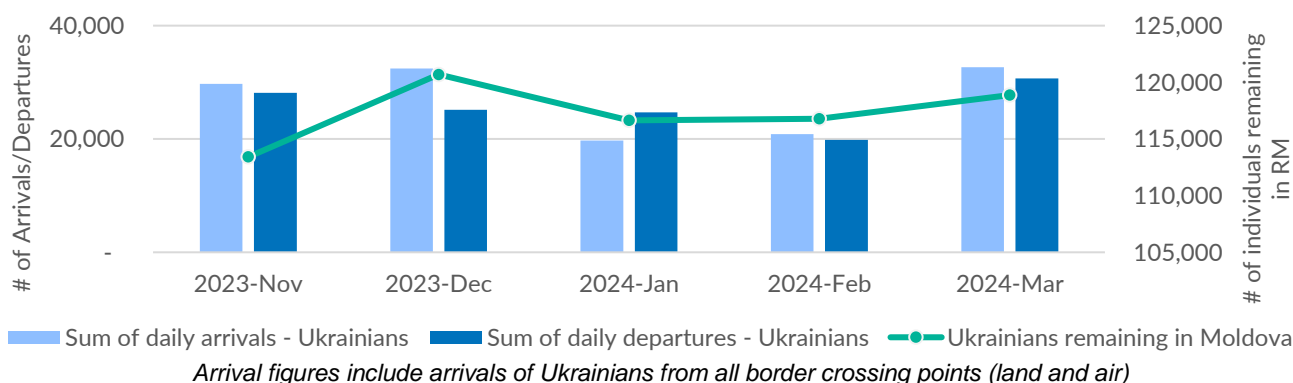
UNHCR has been actively engaged in monitoring, documenting, and analysing the profiles, needs, and intentions of refugees, to enhance and promote evidence-based protection interventions throughout the country. Since May 2022, it has been conducting protection profiling and monitoring activities, including at accommodation sites, centres for humanitarian aid distribution, Community Service Centres (CSC), and other locations.²

This report encompasses the outcomes of 950 interviews, comprising 2,505 household members, conducted between 1 December 2023 and 31 March 2024.³ Reference is also made to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant interviews (KIIs) conducted by UNHCR and its partners over the same period.⁴

Key Trends & Figures



Cumulative Arrivals & Departures (1 November 2023 – 31 March 2024)⁵



¹ Henceforth referred to as "Moldova."

² UNHCR partners are also conducting border monitoring activities at border crossing points and transit hubs using a separate monitoring tool.

³ In November 2023, UNHCR revised its protection profiling and monitoring tool. Therefore, some analysis provided in this report cannot be compared to previous reporting periods.

⁴ During the period from January to March, eight Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Ukrainian refugees across various locations in Moldova (Balti, Rezina, Ungheni, Donduseni, and Stefan Voda) were conducted, targeting different age groups and people with vulnerabilities, including single parents, persons with special needs (PWSN) and older persons

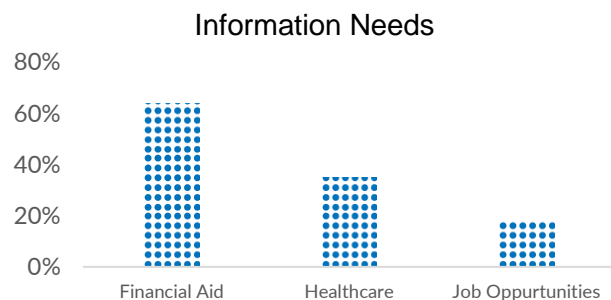
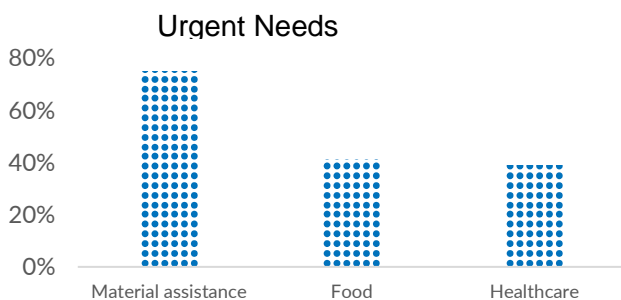
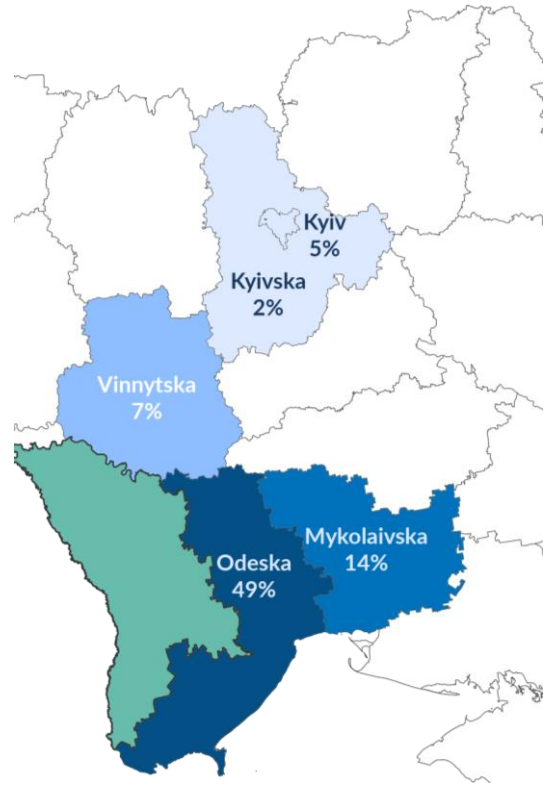
⁵ Republic of Moldova: Daily population trends. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/248?sv=0&geo=680>

Profiles & Displacement Patterns

The most common household profile of those surveyed during the reporting period was single adults with dependants (35%), with an average head of household age of 49 years old. This data continues to mirror the overall demographic pattern of refugees in Moldova, where 84% of surveyed households comprise women and children. The relatively low number of adult men continues to be generally attributed to their participation in the Ukrainian armed forces. Around two-thirds of respondents stated that they still had immediate family members in Ukraine, 61% of whom reported that they have faced challenges reuniting in Moldova. Out of those who reported difficulties reuniting with family members, 90% stated that the current martial law in Ukraine, including the inability of men to leave the country, was the main factor in preventing reunification. Since departing from Ukraine, changes to family composition have been infrequent, reported by only 6% of respondents. Among these respondents, 47% reported a birth in the family, 45% reported a death, and 10% reported a divorce. Of those who reported changes in their family composition, 10% faced challenges in registering the vital event and obtaining corresponding documents in the host country due to long wait times and/or unawareness of procedures.

Among the 950 surveyed households, 5% reported having children separated from both parents, marking a slight increase from the previous reporting period (4%).⁶ The most commonly surveyed age cohort was individuals aged 35-59. Individuals aged 60 and above constituted 24% of the surveyed population, up from 20% in the previous reporting period. Notably, households reporting family members with specific needs, including disabilities or serious medical conditions, increased from 15% to 34% over the new reporting period.⁷

The overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) stated that they had urgent needs, a slight increase from the previous round (89%). Material assistance continues to be the most urgent need cited among surveyed households (74%), followed by food (41%) and healthcare (36%). Notably, healthcare emerged as a less pressing concern (60% to 36%) as compared to the previous reporting period. However, out of the 81% of respondents who indicated having at least one information need, healthcare was indicated as the primary information need (35%) after financial assistance (62%).



Accommodation types varied amongst the 988 households surveyed. 43% were being hosted by relatives, 32% were renting private apartments/homes, and 17% were being hosted by others (non-family members). Those residing in collective accommodations accounted for only a small percentage (8%) of those surveyed. Among those renting apartments, around 70% stated that they had formal rental contracts with the owner. For those respondents who did not have a rental contract, 71% stated that this was due to the landlord's

⁶ These children, mainly aged between 16 and 18, can depart Ukraine without being accompanied by a parent but may be referred by the Moldovan Border Police (BP) to the Moldovan Guardianship Authority (GA) for an assessment of their care arrangements before being allowed to enter the country.

⁷ Top difficulties reported were walking (69%), seeing (33%), and hearing (29%).

refusal. Notably, the overwhelming majority (70%) of respondents stated that there was no limit to their current length of stay in their current accommodations.

“There are relatives, friends, family, children, and grandchildren, who often go to their hometowns to see relatives, spouses, brothers, and sisters who stayed in Ukraine. We keep in touch and communicate and make friends with the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. They are very open, and we easily find a common language as we live close by. The only wish is to return to Ukraine.” - FGD participant in Dondusheni

Only a small percentage (2%) of respondents had arrived to Moldova for the first time during the reporting period, with more than one-third (38%) of respondents surveyed having arrived during the first quarter of 2022. Similar to the previous reporting periods, respondents largely originated from Odeska (50%) and Mykolaivska (14%) oblasts.⁸ Over half of respondents (51%) confirmed that they had visited Ukraine at least once since their initial departure, 74% of whom stated that they had returned to their previous place of residence. The average duration of stay for the majority of those who returned to Ukraine was less than two weeks (as indicated by 88% of respondents who had returned to Ukraine), with the primary purposes of return being to visit relatives (42%), check on property (21%), and obtain documents (16%). These results are largely unchanged from the previous period.⁹ Nearly all of the respondents who returned home (99%) stated that they did not encounter any difficulties returning to Ukraine or re-entering Moldova.

Protection risks

Access to Temporary Protection & Documentation

On 28 February 2024, the Moldovan Government approved the extension of temporary protection (TP) until 1 March 2025, while also modifying certain provisions of the underlying initial government decision approving TP. TP remains the main form of secure legal status for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova. The rate of issuance of TP identity documents continued to increase during the reporting period at a pace of about 1,000 individuals a week. According to statistics provided by the General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM),¹⁰ as of 31 March, 51,556 persons had pre-registered for temporary protection, of whom 42,263 had been issued temporary protection documents.¹¹ This represents an almost doubling of the number of individuals with TP documentation since the end of the last reporting period.¹²

98%

Of respondents faced no difficulties during the temporary protection application/extension process

In addition to TP, according to IGM statistics, as of the end of March 2024, some 10,000 Ukrainians who arrived in Moldova after 24 February 2022 had obtained another form of legal status in the country, including residence permits (6,973), confirmation of Moldovan nationality (~2,300), and submission of applications for asylum or granting of refugee status or humanitarian protection (460). Taken together, this means that about 52,265 Ukrainians and family members had obtained a secure legal status in Moldova by the end of March 2024. This constitutes about 75% of the 71,000 Ukrainians who had resided in Moldova for more than 90 days.¹³

Data from the profiling and monitoring survey showed that 89% of respondents had applied for TP as of the end of March, an increase from the previous reporting period (83%). The majority of respondents surveyed had applied for TP between April and September 2023 (66%), with fewer respondents applying between October and December 2023 (14%). It is positive to note that, for those who arrived to Moldova for the first time in the first quarter of 2024, 84% had already applied for TP during this period.

⁸ Other regions of origin were evenly split between Donetsk, Vinnystka, Kharkivska, Khersonska, Dnipropetrovska, and Kyiv city.

⁹ For those returning to Ukraine to obtain documents, 75% went to retrieve identity documents.

¹⁰ Government statistics on TP beneficiaries, as well as on Ukrainian nationals with other forms of legal status, can be found [here](#).

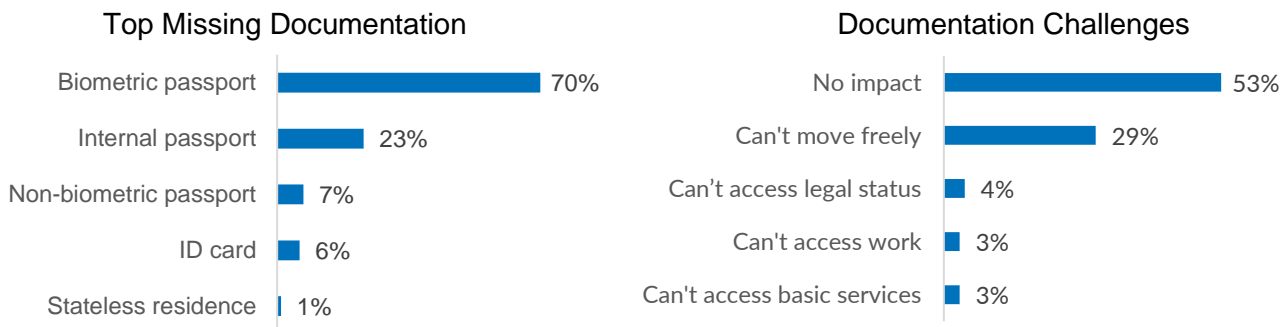
¹¹ The discrepancy between government statistics on TP enrollment and data collected through protection profiling and monitoring can be attributed to the specific locations where the survey was conducted. These locations include humanitarian access points, community service centres, registration centres for financial assistance, etc., where refugees generally have greater access to information and assistance.

¹² The previous reporting period ended on 30 November 2023. As of 30 November 2023, 31,055 persons had pre-enrolled for TP, and 24,266 had been issued TP documents.

¹³ Statistics provided by IGM as of mid-January 2024.

As per the government's decision to extend TP, QR codes on all TP cards issued before 1 March 2024 were automatically extended until 1 March 2025. Social and medical service providers can verify legal status using these QR codes. TP beneficiaries may request a new card from IGM offices to reflect the extended validity of their TP status. UNHCR has supported the issuance of replacement cards with the extended validity date indicated to provide reassurance to refugees about their lawful stay in the country, ensure access to services, and ease interactions with law enforcement or border authorities.

Several changes have been made to border crossing requirements for Ukrainians under the new TP extension, including positive changes such as removing the restriction on travel outside the country of 45 cumulative days. However, the amended TP decision tightens documentation requirements to enter and exit the country. Expired documents are no longer valid for crossing the Ukraine-Moldova border and adults using internal passports/national ID cards instead of biometric passports can only enter/exit Ukraine once. Those without the necessary documents can still seek asylum to enter Moldova if needed. UNHCR will be monitoring the implementation of these changes as part of its border monitoring activities.



Positively, evidence from protection monitoring indicates that missing documentation is not a widespread problem among Ukrainian refugees. Only 7% of respondents reported at least one household member missing documentation or having expired documents, an increase, however, from the previous round (2%). The primary missing documents reported were biometric passports (70%), followed by internal passports (23%), and non-biometric passports (7%). For those respondents with family members missing documentation, over half (57%) stated that this did not affect their daily lives, while 28% found it challenging to move freely as a result. Generally, respondents expressed confidence in their ability to replace or renew documents in Moldova, with 61% stating it was easy to do so, while 17% did not know. Among the 22% who reported difficulty renewing or replacing documentation in the country, nearly half (47%) cited long wait times, while 27% stated that they were unaware of how the process works.¹⁴ This is in line with what was reported during KIIs in Balti, Ocnita, and Rezina, with respondents indicating long wait times, high prices, and complexity using the online registration system.

Access to Healthcare

Among those surveyed during the reporting period, healthcare was indicated as the third most urgent need (36%) after material assistance and food. For those aged 60 and above, this number was almost double (62%). Twenty-five percent (25%) of households indicated having at least one family member with a serious medical condition, a notable increase from the previous reporting period (14%). Of the 51% of respondents who had visited Ukraine at least once since their initial departure, 14% indicated that the main purpose of the visit was to access healthcare, which was less than the previous reporting period (25%). However, for those aged 60 and above, this number was slightly higher (20%). Challenges in accessing healthcare services in Moldova were mentioned at all locations during the KIIs. The main challenges cited included lack of coverage for medications

¹⁴ Affordability and perceived unavailability of services were equally mentioned by 13% of respondents as barriers.

and secondary healthcare, language barriers, limited availability of healthcare facilities in certain areas, and associated transportation costs.

62%

Of respondents aged 60 and above indicated healthcare as an urgent need

35%

Of respondents indicated healthcare as an information need

14%

Of respondents returned to Ukraine to access healthcare

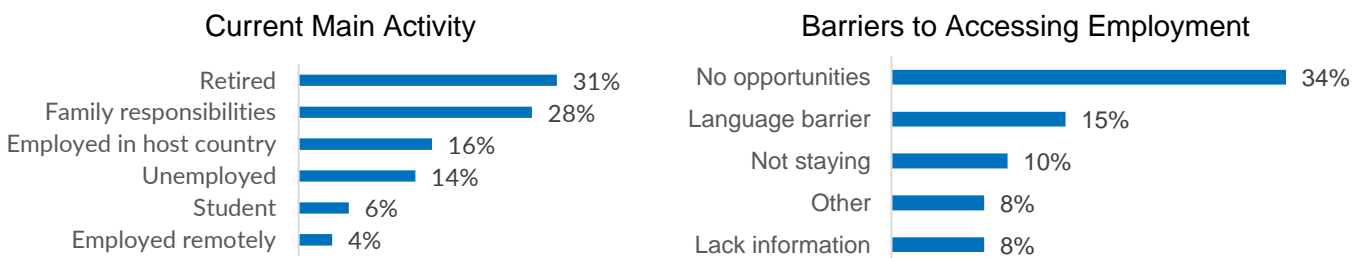
Under the TP law that was initially adopted in January 2023, TP holders were eligible for emergency and primary health care and certain specialized services.¹⁵ The amended TP law expanded available medical services to include compensated medicines and medical devices, and specialist consultations. While these are positive developments, Ukrainian refugees remain unable to benefit from the state health insurance programme, which provides affordable access to other services, such as rehabilitative care and complex diagnostics.¹⁶ Also, to access non-emergency health care services that are available to TP beneficiaries, individuals must register with a family doctor. As of the end of February 2024, only 5,150 TP holders had done so.

“In the health system there are some challenges because not all people are well informed about TP and its benefits.” - FGD participant in Causeni

A continuing challenge is that many refugees and healthcare providers lack information on the services available to TP beneficiaries, which can result in some refugees being asked to pay for services which should be provided either for free or at a reduced cost. With the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), ongoing efforts are being made to educate both service providers and TP beneficiaries about their healthcare rights, recent legislative changes, and the importance of registering with a family doctor.

Access to Livelihoods Support & Employment

Survey results from the current reporting period continue to show that the Ukrainian refugee population in Moldova is well-educated overall, with 64% of respondents having completed higher education, including university. Similar to the last two reporting periods, over half of those surveyed had been employed or self-employed before leaving Ukraine (57%). In contrast, of those surveyed, only 20% were employed in Moldova or working remotely from Moldova at the time.



Relatively low employment rates, however, do not mean that individuals are not trying to find work. The main reasons cited by those who described themselves as “unemployed” were limited job prospects (32%) and language barriers (17%). Employment and livelihood support were among the most commonly mentioned issues during FGDs and KIIs that took place during the reporting period. Participants highlighted challenges such as the need for comprehensive Romanian language courses, limited job opportunities for low-skilled labor, particularly for individuals over 50, and the importance of language proficiency for effective communication and job prospects.

Statistics from the National Employment Agency (NEA) of Moldova continue to show low employment rates for Ukrainian refugees in the country. As of 1 March 2024, some 1,320 Ukrainian refugees were formally employed

¹⁵ Outpatient dialysis, oncological care, and emergency dental care

¹⁶ A government decision on 3 April includes TP beneficiaries with formal employment contracts in the state’s compulsory health insurance system. This will allow TP beneficiaries to access the state health insurance and the medical services covered under the same rights and obligations as Moldovan citizens

in Moldova, with contracts registered with the NEA, representing only a small increase from the previous reporting period (1,250). This figure, however, does not include those working informally or remotely, or those working formally but whose contracts had not been registered with the NEA by their employer. Out of the 20% of respondents who indicated being employed in Moldova or working remotely, around one-quarter (23%) stated that they did not have a formal contract with their employer. Positively, among employed respondents, there were generally no significant concerns related to exploitation.¹⁷

Currently, to lawfully work in Moldova, Ukrainians must either be beneficiaries of TP or have another legal status that grants them the right to work. While the draft TP amendment included a provision to allow TP beneficiaries to work based on the entrepreneurial patent (*patenta*), it was removed when the final law was adopted. There had been significant advocacy undertaken to include this right in the TP law given the interest of many refugees to become self-employed. Further discussions with the authorities are ongoing to address this issue.

CALLS TO ACTION

Promote and monitor access to temporary protection: UNHCR welcomes the positive steps taken by the Moldovan Government to extend TP for Ukrainian refugees and to expand the rights associated with that status. However, access to certain rights, notably to the state health insurance programme and certain social protection services, remain unavailable. Efforts should be made to expand access to these essential services, ensuring inclusivity and support for vulnerable individuals and families. Additionally, planning for the post-TP legal regime is essential, requiring proactive engagement with relevant stakeholders to secure continued support and rights for Ukrainian nationals in Moldova beyond March 2025.

Continue to improve access to healthcare: Expanded access to healthcare services under the amended TP law and, for those who are formally employed, to the state health insurance programme are major achievements. Despite these improvements, UNHCR encourages government officials to expand access to the state health insurance programme to all beneficiaries of TP so that they may access the full range of health services that may be needed. Efforts should also be intensified to increase awareness among refugees about the need to register with family doctors to access available healthcare services and among refugees and healthcare providers about the range of available health services to TP beneficiaries.

Improve access to livelihoods and employment opportunities: Survey findings continue to indicate that the refugee population is well-educated overall, with a large percentage having been employed before arriving in Moldova. Moreover, evidence shows that many refugees would like to be employed but face challenges related to language, suitable opportunities, and the ability to open their own businesses. It is recommended to prioritize language training programs to improve communication skills. Additionally, initiatives should be undertaken to enhance job placement opportunities and support self-employment ventures.

Acknowledgements

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¹⁷ A vast majority, 98%, reported having access to their earnings, while only a small percentage, 3%, reported working excessively long hours.