

Terms of Reference

Inclusion and Solutions Working Group

Moldova

1. Background

Since 24 February 2022, approximately 1,880,125¹ Ukrainians have arrived in Moldova, the highest per capita number of Ukrainian arrivals anywhere else in the world. While most arrivals continue westward to the EU, 135,861² refugees have chosen to remain in Moldova, of whom 58% are female, 42% are children and 19% are older persons. Since the onset of the crisis, the Government of Moldova and UNHCR have established an inter-agency (IA) mechanism to coordinate the humanitarian response, one which encompasses coordination within and across all sectors throughout Moldova, covering responses at the border crossing points (BCP) and in the country, and has drawn on government, UN agencies and NGO comparative expertise, supported by an integrated information management system.

The National Programme for the Phased Integration of Foreigners represents the government's comprehensive strategy to operationalize the Temporary Protection Regime (TPR). Its key component is a social protection sub-strategy focused on reviewing labour immigration regulations, providing employment-promotion training for foreign citizens, and continuing financial aid and social care services for displaced people and their families. The government already provides essential social protection benefits to refugee families with children, including childcare support, childbirth grants, and disability allowances, as well as access to social services such as child protection and gender-based violence response. Some targeted assistance is also delivered through externally funded government programmes. However, access to broader social protection remains limited, and the sustainability of existing support relies heavily on donor funding. To effectively include refugees in the national social protection system and address life-cycle risks, it is crucial to ensure sufficient and predictable funding for the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP). The estimated cost of including the most vulnerable refugees in MLSP-run programmes is approximately USD 60 million over a period of one and a half years. At the same time, Moldova's social protection system remains overstretched and under-resourced, facing both financial and institutional limitations. This not only hampers service delivery for its citizens but also constrains the government's ability to absorb the refugee caseload into national systems. Despite efforts to align humanitarian cash assistance with national schemes, limited fiscal space prevents the inclusion of non-citizens, and government institutions often lack the technical, human, and financial capacity to fully take over assistance and service provision—resulting in continued reliance on humanitarian actors. Labour market inclusion remains low among refugees, with an estimated 46% employed and 45% working informally. Key barriers to formal employment include skills mismatch, limited flexible work options, language barriers, and care responsibilities. Additionally, issues related to access to finance and financial services, entrepreneurship education, and legal obstacles to self-employment further hinder refugees' economic inclusion. Although Temporary Protection (TP) status facilitates simplified access to the labour market, limited financial resources hinder access to active labour market measures provided by national authorities. Consequently, refugees continue to rely on support from the humanitarian and development community for this type of employment assistance

¹ [UNHCR Moldova: Population Trends as of 31/12/2024](#)

² *Ibid.*

While the nexus approach calls for strategies that promote employment and economic inclusion, productive work opportunities should be paired with social insurance to strengthen the overall social protection and self-reliance of refugees in Moldova.

2. Objectives

The ISWG has been established as part of the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) to support the realization of the objectives set in the Refugee Response Plan (RRP), particularly its strategic objectives 2³ and 4⁴. It aims to provide a national forum for technical guidance and strategic coordination to humanitarian and development actors at the national and local levels, working to promote and support government-led inclusion in national social protection, affordable housing, communal infrastructure, economic and employment inclusion, livelihoods and localization efforts. ISWG will support national and local governments in creating an enabling environment for the socio-economic inclusion and medium-term integration of refugees, while strengthening the resilience of host communities. It will support approaches that address the needs of highly vulnerable refugees and Moldovans alike, ensuring a coherent response that fosters additional dividends including poverty reduction, social cohesion and continuing solidarity from the public to support refugees. **Annex 1** includes key definitions and guidelines regarding the thematic areas the ISWG will focus on.

The main objectives of the ISWG are to:

- Ensure coordination among the different stakeholders to streamline inclusion and solutions efforts.
- Provide strategic guidance and technical expertise for effective refugee inclusion and for the implementation of the work plan.
- Facilitate effective information-sharing to improve situational awareness and decision-making.
- Identify relevant gaps and opportunities in the above-mentioned areas.
- Conduct research and build an evidence base to inform policy, advocacy, and programmatic decisions.
- Strengthen technical and institutional capacities at national and local levels for effective refugee inclusion.
- Enhance information management and coordination to ensure complementarity of efforts and harness the capacities and comparative advantages of its members.

3. Structure

³ RRP SO 2: Support Moldova in their efforts to include refugees in national systems – decent work, social protection, health, education, child protection services – with a particular focus on outreach and inclusion of vulnerable groups and including, age gender and disability considerations.

⁴ RRP SO 4: Advance the localization of the response in Moldova, by supporting national and local civil society, municipalities and local authorities, as well as coordination structures, sharing and building capacities and supporting sustainable programming.

The Inclusion and Solutions Working Group is co-chaired by the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and UNDP. The ISWG comprises UN agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations—including refugee-led and women-led organizations—and other actors participating in the Refugee Response Plan (RRP). The ISWG is linked to other coordination structures under the RRP as follows:

- A Social Protection Advisory Group (SPAG) comprised of ten influential organisations from the government, donors, international agencies and local actors supports the ISWG on broad policy and strategic issues.
- The Basic Needs Technical Working Group (Shelter, Site Management, WASH, Food Security, NFIs and Transportation) and the Cash Technical Working Group both sit under the ISWG and address ad hoc and technically specific issues.
- The ISWG will closely coordinate with the Protection Working Group (on legal status, access to rights, child protection, and gender-based violence), given the links with MLSP programmes under this Working Group and to ensure coherent messaging and advocacy to the MLSP.

4. Accountability and Responsibilities

Consistent with the overall objectives, priorities, and targets in the RRP, sector strategy documents, and other relevant national and regional strategies, the ISWG is accountable and responsible for:

- Address inclusion challenges and solutions needs of refugees and host communities through timely, coordinated, and evidence-based action led by relevant actors.
- Facilitate collaboration among ISWG members, government counterparts, donors, and other stakeholders on needs assessments, planning, prioritization, implementation, reporting and evaluation exercises.
- Support information management and data-sharing structures including systematic data collection and analysis on the situation and needs of the affected population, disaggregated by age, gender, and diversity (AGD), to inform evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation.
- Strengthen accountability to affected populations (AAP) by ensuring that all ISWG members incorporate consultative and feedback mechanisms that enable refugees and host communities to participate in shaping response efforts.
- Advocate for adequate and sustained funding for inclusion and solutions activities implemented by the government, humanitarian and development actors, civil society organizations (including Refugee-Led Organizations and Women-Led Organizations), and other key stakeholders.
- Coordinate with other Working Groups in the RRP working on social protection issues to ensure joint initiatives and advocacy promoting access to MLSP benefits, services and schemes for refugees and vulnerable Moldovans.

The core functions of the ISWG are unpacked in **Annex 2**.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Co-Chair arrangements

The ISWG is co-chaired by the MLSP, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and UNDP who will share equitably the management workload. The co-coordinators are responsible for:

- Reporting to and sharing relevant information to/from the ISWG members and to the relevant technical groups in alignment with the Refugee Coordination Model.
- Ensuring effective implementation of the inclusion and solutions response and addressing identified gaps.
- If delegated by the Refugee Coordination Forum and/or Inter-Sector Coordination Group, the ISWG may also lead broader inter-sectoral coordination and information management efforts related to inclusion and solutions, including advocacy.
- Chairing the coordination meetings and following up on action points and agreed deadlines with members.
- Representing the ISWG in planning and strategic meetings, and other in-country and regional platforms, as appropriate.
- Ensuring ISWG coordination and collaboration with other RCF sectoral working groups.
- Providing guidance and support to technical task forces and sub-national coordination mechanisms such as Local-Refugee Coordination Forums (L-RCFs).
- Ensuring that inclusion and solutions strategies and priorities are integrated into regional/national plans and policies.
- Facilitating information sharing and exchange of best practices/lessons learned between the ISWG members.
- Advocating and mobilizing resources on behalf of the Working Group and in collaboration with MLSP.

The MLSP will have a permanent co-chairing role whilst UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and UNDP will co-chair on a rotational basis, with the following roles undertaken at each ISWG meeting:

- Develop the agenda and presentations in consultation with the other 3 UN agency co-chairs and technical working group chairs.
- Facilitate the meeting and ensure discussions remain focused and productive.
- Handle meeting administration, including taking the attendance sheet, drafting the meeting minutes, and subsequently sharing the attendance list, minutes, and presentation with all members.

Membership

Membership of the ISWG is open to all local and international partners who are active (or who plan to be active) in the inclusion and solutions component of the Refugee Response Plan (RRP), with a focus on the social protection system, economic empowerment and employment inclusion and localization, as follows:

- Each organization nominates one focal point for each meeting and a back-up contact person. For continuity, the same person should attend each meeting if feasible. Member organizations can nominate replacements if the designated focal point or back-up leaves the organization.
- The person representing their organization should be a specialist in an area relevant to the ISWG's scope of work, such as social policy, social protection, refugee inclusion and solutions, housing, or localization approaches in Moldova.
- Each member is responsible to:
 - Represent and take decisions on behalf of their organizations.
 - Regularly attend the ISWG meetings and share information about activities, available and expected funding, trends and gaps, including geographical and programmatic gaps.
 - Coordinate planning and assessments with the Working Group members to avoid duplication and address gaps.
 - Contribute to policy and strategy development pertinent to refugee inclusion and solutions component.
 - Contribute to RRP planning and reporting as needed.
 - Actively take part in the implementation of the ISWG's responsibilities and work plan.
 - Endorse and disseminate ISWG standards, guidelines and tools.

6. Working modalities

The ISWG will convene regularly [frequency to be determined by members, but initially once per month], with *ad hoc* meetings scheduled as needed to address urgent issues. Sessions will be held in a hybrid format, with the location communicated in advance based on the availability of the UNHCR main conference room (5th floor, Le Roi Business Centre, Strada Sfatul Țării 29) or MLSP conference facilities. An agenda will be shared with members ahead of each meeting, and minutes will be recorded and circulated for comments prior to finalization.

7. TOR Amendments

The Terms of Reference (TOR) will operate for 12 months, until the end of 2025, and will be renewed for the second year of the current RRP in 2026. Amendments to the TORs may be proposed by any of the members of the ISWG.

Annex 1 - Key definitions & guidelines

In the context of refugee inclusion and solutions, several key definitions and guidelines inform the framework for action:

Social Protection: Social protection refers to the set of policies and programs aimed at preventing or protecting all people against poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion throughout their life cycles, with a particular emphasis towards vulnerable groups. Social protection can be provided in cash or in-kind assistance, through non-contributory schemes providing universal, categorical, or poverty-targeted benefits (such as social assistance), contributory schemes with social insurance being the most common form, and by building human capital, productive assets, and access to jobs.⁵ Social protection systems can also be leveraged to reduce risks of violence, and increase access to services and economic advancement opportunities and empower vulnerable groups.

The ISWG will leverage non-contributory social assistance benefits and services to ensure that refugees and vulnerable populations can access cash or in-kind support to meet their basic needs. This includes provisions for basic income security for children, individuals of working age who are unable to earn sufficient income due to their vulnerabilities, and older persons. While the working group will engage with broader social protection discussions, specialized aspects will be addressed by other relevant coordination mechanisms. Access to child protection and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) services will be overseen by the respective Child Protection and GBV sub-working groups, and access to disability and age-related services by the Disability and Age Task Force, while access to healthcare and health insurance under contributory social protection schemes will fall under the purview of the Health Working Group. These different groups will work closely with the ISWG on opportunities to reduce risks of violence, enhance access to services and assistance and promote the safety and well-being of the refugee population, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Socio-economic inclusion: Refers to the process that supports refugees, stateless persons, third country nationals and other forcibly displaced persons moving from Ukraine, in integrating into the economies and social fabric of host countries and communities.

Livelihoods: The capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. Livelihoods activities and interventions include temporary work schemes and cash for work, community infrastructure work, training opportunities and career guidance, financial and technical assistance for small business, women economic empowerment, etc., and are essential to fostering the inclusion of refugees and vulnerable host communities. The ISWG will leverage upskilling, reskilling, and training opportunities, along with entrepreneurship support, to promote economic empowerment and labour market inclusion of refugees. Aiming at addressing barriers to labour market inclusion, it will also collaborate with the Education Working Group and the Ministry of Education and Research on specialized issues such as diploma recognition and Romanian language training.

Social and Affordable Housing: Social housing in Moldova consists of publicly owned housing units allocated for lease to individuals or families whose income does not allow them to purchase or rent housing

⁵ This definition was established within the framework of the Inter-Agency Social Protection Assessment (ISPA) tools development; an initiative of the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B) that brings together representatives of international organizations and bilateral institutions to enhance coordination and advocacy related to social protection.

under market conditions. The primary objective is to provide affordable and stable accommodation for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, older persons, single-parent households, and families with multiple children. Affordable housing refers to housing that is reasonably priced relative to household income, ensuring that low- and moderate-income individuals or families can afford it without experiencing financial hardship. The ISWG will help the government explore how to expand the stock of social and affordable housing and advocate for policy and legal reforms to ensure refugees' inclusion in related government programmes and remove barriers to equitable access. In addition to ongoing programs that focus on consolidating Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs), also known as Temporary Placement Centres for persons displaced from other countries and transitioning them into long-term specialized accommodation centres and facilities, as well as initiatives like Rental Assistance Program and small-scale property repairs, several key long-term initiatives will be prioritized. This includes supporting the government in the development of a “National Affordable Housing Strategy”

Equitable Access to Services and Communal Infrastructure: This refers to ensuring that both displaced and host populations can benefit from essential services and shared public spaces whilst fostering social cohesion, resilience, and long-term inclusion. This includes investments in communal infrastructure, such as multifunctional Community Service Centres (CSCs) that act as service delivery hubs and cultural integration spaces, as well as Peaceful Coexistence Projects (PCPs) that enhance recreational areas, educational and childcare facilities, and public amenities to promote interaction and inclusion.

Localization: Localization in the refugee response context refers to empowering municipalities, local authorities, and civil society organizations (CSOs) to lead and implement tailored, sustainable solutions for refugee inclusion as part of an area-based approach catering for the needs of all vulnerable populations. This approach strengthens local governance structures and community-driven initiatives, aligning refugee inclusion efforts with national strategies and local development priorities.

Key initiatives include supporting the development of Local Action Plans (LAPs) within the Cities of Solidarity framework, which integrate refugees into municipal planning and public service delivery. Additionally, this includes supporting Local Refugee Coordination Forums (L-RCFs) in eight cities in their transition toward government-led structures with a long-term focus that extends beyond the humanitarian response. Localization also entails strengthening the capacity and role of CSOs, including Women-Led Organizations (WLOs) and Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs), through grants and capacity-building efforts, enabling them to fill critical service gaps, build social capital, advocate for refugee issues and foster civic participation. By prioritizing locally driven, inclusive solutions, this approach enhances social cohesion, strengthens governance, and ensures that refugee inclusion becomes a core component of sustainable local development.

Annex 2 – Core functions of the ISWG

The core functions of the Inclusion/Solutions Working Group include:

- **Strategic leadership:** Lead the planning process for the development of an inclusive response plan as well as the preparation of appeal documents based on the Regional Refugee Response Plan for Ukraine Situation and the Mechanisms for the Phased Integration of Foreigners. Provide strategic guidance to technical working groups (TWGs) under the ISWG, ensuring coherence across assistance services. Promote standards, guidelines, and best practices to enhance effective and sustainable refugee inclusion.

- **Information management:** Manage information to support decision-making and improve knowledge to better identify relevant gaps and opportunities. Facilitate the information flow between ISWG members and other fora to minimize duplication, including by developing a matrix of *Who is doing What Where and When* (4Ws) of activities. Monitor and report on activities in line with the RRP. Encourage communication and information sharing between partners as well as between the different sectoral working groups to support strategic priorities.
- **Inclusion and solutions analysis:** Provide strategic guidance and advice on the implementation of inclusion and solutions analyses. This includes the setup of mechanisms to measure the impact and evolution of risks; the development of messaging, provision of analysis to support advocacy and resource mobilization for inclusion and solutions based on evidence and outcomes of the monitoring mechanisms. Conduct research and build evidence to strengthen the ISWG's performance and make sure research and assessments activities are coordinated among Working Group members.
- **Technical support:** Provide technical support to partners, foster capacity building and development, including supporting needs assessments, project design, proposal development and advocacy initiatives; promote inter-sectoral collaboration in support of the inclusion and solutions response. Develop and adapt standard operating procedures (SOPs) and referral pathways. Improve data and information management for evidence-based programming.
- **Joint inclusion and solutions response:** Coordinate the response in accordance with the overall Moldova RRP, and, in collaboration with other regional structures, as relevant. Ensure coherence between all actors when working on needs/gaps analysis; agree upon recommendations for the response and to foster aligned planning and reporting among the members in line with the ISWG strategy.
- **Advocacy.** Advocate with key stakeholders to develop, consolidate and implement sectoral strategies, identify advocacy gaps and develop appropriate joint advocacy messages and tools for government and other counterparts. Ensure cross-cutting issues are reflected in the ISWG's activities.
- **Capacity development.** Identify the capacity development needs of all stakeholders involved in the inclusion and solutions response. Provide technical support, as required, throughout the design of targeted operational responses to ensure they are in line with the strategic priorities, the evolving nature of the crisis and needs of forcibly displaced and stateless persons.
- **Accountability to Affected People (AAP).** Ensure that AAP is at the centre of the humanitarian response through robust community-based feedback and complaints mechanisms to guarantee participation and inclusion, communication and transparency, feedback and response with an age, gender, and diversity approach. Coordinate efforts to strengthen host community resilience by implementing support initiatives that benefit both refugees and local populations, while promoting awareness and ensuring equitable access to essential services.
- **Nexus approach.** Strengthen links between the refugee response and development initiatives that are either under the auspices of the government and/or international development actors. This

includes sharing of protection analyses pertaining to refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people and hosting communities.