



Catalysing the Integration of **Ukrainian Talent** into the **Moldovan Labour Market**

Over 130,000 Ukrainian refugees in Moldova, primarily skilled women, represent an untapped economic asset. Despite documented labour shortages, only 29 percent of working-age refugees are in paid work. Survey findings point to systemic barriers: language gaps (36 percent of job seekers), skills mismatch and non-recognition of diplomas (13 percent), and scarce, affordable childcare. While Temporary Protection (TP) grants the right to work, these obstacles drive underemployment and reliance on social assistance. Targeted, practical interventions can turn this challenge into mutual gain, advancing refugee self-reliance and meeting Moldova's labour needs. Recommended measures include sector-specific Romanian language programmes, fast-track credential recognition, expansion of subsidized childcare, micro-grants for entrepreneurship, and employer-focused job-matching through the *Agenția Națională pentru Ocuparea Forței de Muncă* (ANOFM)—Moldovan National Employment Agency. Implemented through clear lead agencies and partner coordination, these measures can accelerate inclusion and reduce fiscal pressure.

Context and Opportunity

As of November 2025, more than 130,000 Ukrainians—mostly women and children—had sought refuge in Moldova. Emergency aid arrived swiftly; the challenge now is long-term economic integration. Refugees seeking employment often encounter Romanian-language requirements, unclear regulations, informal hiring practices, scarce childcare, and limited access to credit, training, and information.

Using Socio-Economic Assessment of Refugees and Host Communities (SERHC 2024) data, 1,400 micronarratives, and comparative policy analysis, this brief identifies constraints in Moldova's labour market and outlines practical policy responses. Testimonies reveal a large share of people who are unemployed, in precarious jobs, and experiencing rising psychological stress, even though labour shortages persist in agriculture, hospitality, social care, construction, and IT.

Temporary protection status formally grants unrestricted access to work, yet in practice, many refugees accept low-skilled positions because vacancies in their own professions are rare, and employers often require different skill sets. Fragmented, underfunded support services further blunt integration efforts.

The potential is substantial as more than 80 percent of working-age refugee respondents (18–64 years) report having professional experience, 77 percent hold vocational or higher qualifications, and 63 percent are keen to join self-employment programmes. Only 29 percent, however, have found paid work, over half of households rely mainly on social assistance, and nearly half of job seekers cite insufficient Romanian language as their primary barrier to employment. Targeted language courses, affordable childcare, streamlined recognition of qualifications, and coordinated funding could unlock the potential of this workforce and benefit Moldova's economy.

Obstacles to Economic Participation

Refugees in Moldova face several key barriers that hinder their ability to find employment and achieve economic self-reliance, as evidenced by survey data.



Human Capital

Language Barriers

Limited Romanian language skills are the most frequently cited obstacle for adult refugees. Approximately 36 percent of refugees report this as a significant barrier to employment.

Mismatch of Skills and Jobs

Around 13 percent of refugees cannot find job openings relevant to their professional background or education level. This leads to underemployment or engaging in time-bound/seasonal employment, as many highly skilled individuals are offered low-skilled jobs or jobs outside their expertise. Barriers to the recognition of foreign credentials also persist.



Care and Finance

Limited Childcare Options

A lack of affordable childcare is a major constraint, especially since most refugees are women and often sole caregivers. While this issue is common for both refugees and host community members, 11 percent of refugee households cited limited access to childcare as a barrier to employment.

Lower Wages & Limited Access to Credit

Around 10 percent of refugees perceive that salaries in Moldova are too low compared to what they earned in Ukraine. The income gap, combined with rising inflation and living costs, can discourage skilled refugees from accepting offers of employment.

Additionally, 34 percent of refugee households live on less than 4,000 Moldovan lei (MDL) per month, and a further 29 percent fall within the 4,001 to 6,000 MDL band. This makes it difficult to cover basic needs, while most refugees lack access to credit or financial tools that could support business investments or skills development.



Information and Administrative

Information Gaps & Limited Uptake of ANOFM

Around 2 percent of refugees lack information on how and where to look for jobs in Moldova. For 39 percent, support with identification and job matching is the most preferred form of assistance to secure employment. Formal employment services, like ANOFM, remain underutilized.

Employer Reluctance

While the legal framework is not the primary barrier, administrative challenges can still slow down labour market integration. Some employers are reluctant to hire refugees due to assumed legal complexities or limited awareness of candidates' skills and qualifications.

Although language proficiency is the most frequently cited individual barrier, a broader analysis suggests that structural weaknesses in Moldova's labour market—such as skills mismatches, low wages, and limited job availability—represent the main constraints to employment. Taken together, these systemic factors outweigh specific integration challenges such as language or childcare needs. This indicates that many of the key impediments are structural and affect both refugees and the host population, pointing to the need for longer-term labour market and economic reforms rather than short-term programmatic interventions.

Key Prospects and Opportunities

The Ukrainian refugee population in Moldova presents a significant talent pool that could be leveraged better in the labour market

- **Strong Skills and Experience:** 76 percent of adult refugees have at least vocational or tertiary education, and 81 percent report having previous professional work experience. However, only 34 percent have engaged in paid work since arriving in Moldova.
- **Willingness to Work and Adapt:** Refugees demonstrate strong motivation to become self-reliant, with 22 percent actively looking for work in the four weeks before the survey. Notably, 63 percent expressed interest in a self-employment support programme.
- **Partial Employment Gains:** Despite the challenges, around 29 percent of refugees have engaged in paid work since arriving in Moldova.
- **Supportive Social Networks:** Most employed refugees (around 61 percent) found jobs through friends or acquaintances, highlighting the role of informal networks and community connections in facilitating employment.

Recommendations



Human Capital

- Expand employment-focused Romanian language courses.
- Implement fast-track diploma recognition programmes and organize refugee employment fairs, complemented by increased outreach and strengthened assistance through ANOFM.



Care and Finance

- Expand childcare services, particularly for single mothers.
- Simplify procedures for registering self-employment and/or establishing an individual legal entity and provide micro-grants alongside mentorship to support refugee entrepreneurship.
- Increase access to microfinance services to strengthen refugees' financial participation.



Information and Administrative

- Continue providing legal work permits and actively promote employment opportunities to both refugees and local businesses.

Methodology

Primary Evidence – SERHC 2024

This brief draws on the Socio-Economic Assessment of Refugees and Host Communities, Refugees: National Coverage based on UNHCR Data. The survey uses the household as the unit of analysis, with each respondent providing information on behalf of the entire household. In total, 926 refugee-household interviews and 463 host-household interviews were conducted across Moldova. Households in Transnistria, or areas reachable only via Transnistria, were excluded due to security and logistical reasons.

Supplementary Evidence – Micro-Narratives and Key Expert Interviews.

The analysis also incorporates 1,200 micro-narratives, including narrative interviews and written testimonies, from both refugees and host-community members. These accounts illustrate how barriers identified in the SERHC manifest in daily life. To complement perspectives from policy and service providers, interviews with public sector and business representatives were also conducted.





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Acknowledgements

The SERHC provides statistically representative evidence, while the micro-narratives offer contextual insights that help explain why certain barriers, such as language proficiency or childcare gaps, translate into limited labour market participation and social integration.

The analysis in this brief was developed through a partnership between UNHCR and Date Inteligente SRL (iData) in Moldova.

This brief was produced with technical assistance and financial support from the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, a collaboration between the World Bank and UNHCR.



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