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. Of those who stay, 85% are female, elderly persons and/or children. 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 of measures being implemented by the Government of Moldova, with particular attention to the priority populations. The situation is compounded by the ongoing impact of the war in Ukraine, including the rising costs of living, with fuel prices globally rising way above rates of domestic inflation, and the energy crisis.

In 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. According to findings related to the winter season, the main highlights are:

- Rising living and utility costs are further impacting upon the living conditions of refugees in private accommodation. The majority of refugees living privately and in host communities state that cash assistance is mostly spent on rent and utility bills. The cost of living and basic needs (such as food, clothing, etc.) is on the rise; and the population of concern fears that they will not be able to cover winter-related expenses.
- Moldovan households interviewed are worried as to whether refugees would be able to cover utility costs during winter. Moreover, there were also concerns raised as to community perceptions on the access of refugees to assistance and support, vis-à-vis the support provided for local communities falling below the poverty threshold.
- Concerns have been shared by both refugees and host communities related to disproportional access to assistance and information by those living in rural areas, as opposed to Chisinau and other urban areas. Considering the impact of the winter season on both refugees and host communities, it is key to ensure a coordinated inter-agency approach to respond to winter needs. With regards to the creation of a viable Inter-Agency Winterization Plan in Moldova, through the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), the Inter-Agency Coordination team launched a consultative and collaborative process with RCF partners to develop an inter-agency winterization strategy and action plan that complements and support the winter response implemented by the Government of 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 by all the population groups, requiring an increased preparedness by suppliers. This may 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 since higher numbers of refugees may move from host communities to refugee accommodation centres (RACs) 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 labour market and/or sustainable sources of income also** represent an additional challenge for refugees during the winter season, as the inability to access a stable income source may result in failure to cover 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, the elderly, 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 accommodation 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, possibly triggering further movements to RACs if no timely support is 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 socioeconomic 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 those with three or more children.

Third country nationals
- Third-country nationals are likely to face greater 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 one-time payment to the value of 700 MDL (36.5 USD) 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 compensation for the payment of energy bills as a measure to reduce the impact of rising energy prices. According to the Ministry of Labour 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 metres 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 compensation to socially and economically vulnerable Moldovan families.

Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs): While the number of RACs with residents has been gradually declining over the course of the year, a considerable amount of the 68 RACs with more than 3,000 people staying are still active as of the beginning of August. These centres face challenges in coverage of utility bills amid increasing energy costs. Around 30 RACs are not insulated to effectively conserve heat in the cold season. Additionally, 28 RACs have needs related to repairs to their insulation system, which equally affects the ability to conserve warmth. Apart from 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 repairs, 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 centres for people with disabilities, centres 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 has 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 the 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 the average number of days when the temperatures are below 0°C reaching up to 60; in Ukraine this figure is higher (81-100 days). The coldest month in Moldova is normally January with average temperatures dropping to ~7°C.

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; woollen 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 the preferred modality expressed by the population of 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 systems is limited.

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

Description
• Many newly-occupied dwellings have previously not been subject to thermal upgrades, and would include doors and window improvements such as 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 Centres (RACs) to improve heat retention and winter efficiency, including fixing leaking roofs, sealing gaps and replacing inefficient windows, with the aim of 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 educational 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 a collaborative and complementary manner.

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.

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