QUICK ASSESSMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN MOLDOVA: KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Since March 1st, the Republic of Moldova has been implementing the Government Decision on Temporary Protection (hereinafter "TP Decision") for individuals impacted by the war in Ukraine. Eligible individuals include Ukrainian nationals residing in Ukraine or Moldova before February 24, 2022, stateless persons recognized by Ukrainian authorities prior to February 24, 2022, non-Ukrainian nationals benefitting from international protection granted by the Ukrainian authorities before February 24, 2022, and family members of eligible individuals. To apply for Temporary Protection, refugees must register online, provide basic information about themselves and any family members applying with them, upload their documents, and select a time, date, and location for their in-person appointment at the General Inspectorate for Migration. During the appointment, they will undergo a short interview where their photo and fingerprints are collected, and if eligible they receive a card confirming their status as a beneficiary of Temporary Protection. Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection have the rights: to legally remain and work in the Republic of Moldova, for accommodation, healthcare, education, and social assistance.

MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION

On March 14th, the National Congress of Ukrainians of Moldova (NCUM) and its Partners introduced an online, self-administered survey to monitor the practical implementation of the Temporary Protection Decision in Moldova. The survey aims to determine the intentions of those eligible for Temporary Protection and identify any challenges and obstacles that could restrict access to such status. As of March 20th, the survey has received 513 responses.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS:

- Gender: Female (92%), Male (7%), Prefer not to say (1%)
- Age Cohorts: 18-49 (76%), 50-59 (11%), 60+ (13%)
- Nationality: Ukrainian (99%), Other (1%)

KEY FINDINGS

1. *Ukrainians are generally interested to apply for Temporary Protection:* Most respondents (78%) have applied or expressed interest in applying for Temporary Protection (TP) in Moldova. Very few respondents have reported lacking interest in applying to TP (6%) or not planning to stay in the country (3%).

2. *Practical Barriers Delay or Demotivate Individuals from Applying:* Among respondents not planning to apply (21%), the primary reason is waiting to see how the situation in Ukraine evolves (61%). Additionally, 44% of those not planning to apply to TP cite difficulties obtaining proof of residency for themselves or their children as one of the major reasons for not applying. For those who have not yet applied but plan to (67%), the main issue hindering their application is difficulties obtaining proof of residency (62%), followed by lack of information about TP (22%), deprioritizing the application and/or indecision about applying (18%), and difficulties completing the online form (14%), with several issues overlapping.

3. *Support needs and technical issues hindering respondents, particularly older persons:* Respondents who reported being unable to complete the online form (15%) indicated the following challenges: being in need of support to fill the form (57%), difficulties uploading document images (41%), lack of clarity on completing the online form (28%), and difficulties adding family members (21%). Among respondents aged 60 years or older, a higher percentage reported being unable to complete the online form compared to the overall average (18% vs. 13%). Among these older respondents, 67% needed support to complete the online form, and 56% were uncertain about how to complete it – a notable increase compared to the average.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the key findings of the survey and on reports from NCUM and partners' ongoing monitoring on the field, the following recommendations are proposed to address the identified challenges and obstacles in accessing Temporary Protection:

1. *Increasing accessibility to the TP website on mobile devices:* Improve the accessibility of the TP website and registration form for applicants using mobile devices, as the majority of applicants complete their applications on these devices.
2. *Streamlining Proof of Residency Procedures:* Streamlining the process for obtaining proof of residency by providing clear guidance and support to alleviate the burden on applicants.
3. *Boosting Public Awareness of TP Decision:* Enhance public awareness campaigns about the TP Decision to ensure that eligible individuals have access to accurate and comprehensive information about the application process, including the necessary documents.
4. *Supporting Vulnerable Applicants:* Provide additional support for applicants, particularly those aged 60 years or more, by offering in-person assistance, and video tutorials to guide them through the online application process. In addition, the Government should establish mobile teams to support individuals that may be facing challenges to apply for TP, including older persons and persons with disabilities. Additionally, improve access and referral mechanisms to individual legal counselling to solve complex cases and to overcome the barriers in obtaining TPS.
5. *Enhancing Online Application User Experience:* Improve the user experience of the online application form by addressing technical issues related to uploading document images and adding family members, as well as providing clearer instructions on form completion in Ukrainian. Additionally, fixing the website's drawbacks is required, specifically - fixing bugs and fixing application page loading errors.
6. *Continuous Improvement of TP Application Process:* Regularly review and update the TP application process based on feedback from applicants, implementing improvements to address any emerging challenges and ensure a smooth process for those seeking Temporary Protection in Moldova.

PROOF OF RESIDENCY CONCERNS IN TEMPORARY PROTECTION IMPLEMENTATION

One of the primary challenges identified in the implementation of Temporary Protection (TP) in the Republic of Moldova is the difficulty in obtaining proof of residency. This issue has emerged as a significant barrier for many applicants, both among those who have not yet applied but plan to and those who are not planning to apply.

For potential applicants, 62% indicated difficulties in obtaining proof of residency as a major factor hindering their application process. Among those who are not planning to apply, 44% mentioned this issue as a significant reason for not applying.

The problem with proof of residency is further exacerbated by inconsistent information being shared with potential applicants and since refugees cannot obtain this document by themselves, requiring landowners to do this on their behalf.

In some instances, local authorities have refused to provide proof of residency documents to landowners hosting refugees arguing that issuing such documents is not their responsibility or that they lack knowledge regarding the appropriate documentation to expedite. So far NCUM has mapped complaints on rejections from primarias (Town Councils) when 5 potential applicants didn't manage to receive the proof of residency. In addition, NCUM has received feedback from refugees regarding lack of clarity on the procedure to obtain proof of residency. This lack of clarity is causing a reduction in trust from refugees and other actors in the information being shared, and is contributing to confusion and frustration among those seeking Temporary Protection. If not addressed, this situation may cause lasting damage to the success of the Temporary Protection rollout.

To address the issue of proof of residency, it is essential to streamline the process by providing clear guidance and effective practical support to alleviate the burden on applicants. National and Local authorities, and humanitarian workers should work together to ensure consistent and accurate information is provided to applicants regarding the proof of residency requirements. Regular communication and collaboration between government agencies, local authorities, and organizations involved in the TP implementation can help to resolve these challenges and improve access to temporary protection for those in need.

DIFFICULTIES IN COMPLETING THE ONLINE FORM FOR TEMPORARY PROTECTION

One challenge that emerged from the survey was the difficulty of finalizing the registration due to the fact that some applicants faced challenges completing the online form for Temporary Protection. This issue impacted 10% of respondents, who reported a range of concerns that hindered their ability to successfully navigate the online application process.

Key Difficulties:

1. *Support Needs:* A major portion of respondents who reported challenges completing the online form (57%) mentioned that they require assistance in filling out the online form, highlighting the need for user-friendly instructions and additional support mechanisms.
2. *Uploading Document Images:* 41% of respondents experienced difficulties when uploading images of their documents, which is a crucial step in the application process. Technical issues and unclear guidelines for document uploads are contributing factors to this challenge.
3. *Lack of Clarity on Form Completion:* 28% of respondents found the online form confusing, with insufficient guidance on how to fill it out correctly. This lack of clarity may result in incomplete or incorrect submissions, which could affect an applicant's eligibility for TP.
4. *Adding Family Members:* 21% of respondents encountered difficulties when trying to add family members to their application.

Older Persons Struggling with the Online Form

The survey also highlighted that older individuals face greater difficulties in completing the online form. Among respondents aged 60 years or older, 18% reported being unable to complete the form compared to the overall average of 13%. Of these older respondents, 67% needed support to complete the online form, and 56% were uncertain about how to complete it - both figures are notably higher than the average

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT: ANALYSING RUMORS AND TENSIONS RELATED TO TEMPORARY PROTECTION

Lack of clear information and unofficial recommendations online on Temporary Protection procedures has led to a significant number of rumors circulating among refugees. These rumors have contributed to confusion and anxiety within the refugee community impacting the overall confidence on the Temporary Protection process. Key rumors and misconceptions include:

1. *Temporary Protection vs. Legal Status under Emergency State:* Refugees have expressed confusion about the relationship between Temporary Protection and their legal status under the emergency state. This lack of clarity has led to questions about whether their rights would change if the emergency state were not extended. The joint communication campaign on TP has helped to alleviate this confusion.

2. *Confusion Regarding Legal Stay in Moldova:* There is a lack of understanding about the duration of legal stay in Moldova for refugees under Temporary Protection. This uncertainty has fueled rumors and concerns about potential expulsion from the country or limitations on their stay.

3. *Anxiety Over the Relationship between Temporary Protection and Cash Assistance:* Some refugees have expressed concerns that TP may result in the discontinuation of cash assistance provided by organizations such as UNHCR. While some others have the opposite idea, that only beneficiaries of TP will be receiving assistance. The confusion might undermine the program's overall effectiveness.

4. *Misinformation Linking TP and Humanitarian Assistance:* Recently, a rumor has emerged suggesting that social workers and local authorities are requiring refugees to register for TP to continue receiving assistance, including humanitarian aid. This misinformation not only complicates the TP implementation process but also creates additional pressure on refugees who are already grappling with numerous challenges. As a result of this misinformation, there have been reports of incidents where refugees were denied access to services by public service providers simply because they were not TP beneficiaries. Humanitarian workers in the field have been reporting long waiting lists for humanitarian assistance as a result of refugees' fear regarding the incertancy future rights and protections related with the upcoming TPS.

To address these concerns and rumors, it is essential to improve communication and provide accurate, comprehensive information about Temporary Protection procedures and mechanisms to all the parties involved. Activities should include not only enhanced information dissemination among refugees, but also ensuring public officials and Moldovan citizens are well informed about Temporary Protection, to enable them to provide accurate information and support refugees in their communities. By increasing transparency and promoting better understanding of the process, the government and aid organizations can help alleviate anxiety and confusion within the refugee community.

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