



CASH WORKING GROUP MOLDOVA

Meeting Details	
Date	24 August 2023
Time	10:00 to 11:30
Co-Chair	Yigit Anil Gurer, CBI Officer, UNHCR Svetlana Mirca – Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP)
Reporting	Natalia Postaru, Associate Programme CBI Officer
Email	mdachcbi@unhcr.org
Agenda	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction 2. Presentation on the winterization planning process 3. Open discussion on programmatic details 4. AOB 	
Information collection and relevant links	
Participants:	
Svetlana Mirca – Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP) Oleg Barcari – MoLSP Svetlana Staci – MoLSP Diego Nardi – UNHCR IA Coordination Daniele Pedretti – Help Age Moldova Cristian Slobodeaniuc – WFP Orfan Shahada – ACFSPAIN Ion Gradinari – Helvetas Joanna Jaworska – Impact-Initiatives Natalia Balta – Children’s Foundation Victor Rotaras – Mercy Corps Celine Brixander – UNFPA Jadou Batsilar – ICRC	Viorica Bulat – WVI Celine Brixander – UNFPA Michel Gerges – WVI Svetlana Mirca – Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Artiom Sici – UNICEF Corina Tesu – REACH Mary Kozhomba – NRC Ala Svet – UN Women Ion Gradinari – Helvetas Violetta Prepelita – CRS Ana Cemirtan – Plan International Valentina Harovschi – IFRC



Summary of discussions and agreements/action points

Agenda	Discussion
<p>Overview of Winterization Planning Process</p> <p><i>-IA, UNHCR-</i></p>	<p>UNHCR provided an informative overview of the ongoing winterization planning process.</p> <p>Various assessments have been conducted by the UNHCR to guide winter planning, including the rapid socioeconomic profiling in collaboration with the MoLSP, which includes winter-related indicators. The PDM Assessment of the Cash Programme covered the 5th round of cash distribution during the previous winter period. Additionally, a household survey is currently underway to assess winterization conditions and private accommodations.</p> <p>A community infrastructure assessment is also in progress, with over 30 infrastructures mapped across Moldova through collaboration with local public authorities and local refugee coordination forums. The assessment conducted by ACTED and other INGOs examined the previous winter response, offering insights into the needs for the upcoming heating season. Overall sector winter strategies, including key activities by sector, are expected to be finalized shortly.</p> <p>The ActivityInfo platform will soon open for the submission of winter activities, facilitating an overview of partners' winter assistance plans to identify duplications, gaps, and the potential need for collective fundraising. The full winter document will be published before mid-September.</p> <p>Regarding the winter response, assessments demonstrate that cash remains the preferred modality for winter assistance. The assessment indicates that Moldova's markets are accessible and functional, implying non-cash modalities would be limited to specific target populations facing market access challenges for winter needs.</p> <p>Based on data from the ACTED & UNHCR assessments, overall planning figures for the winter response were calculated. For refugees, approximately 55,000 individuals are estimated to need winter support, primarily focusing on winter cash top-ups. Within this refugee population, around 7,630 refugees may require other forms of assistance due to vulnerabilities such as disabilities, chronic illnesses, elderly care needs, and single parent households with high child ratios.</p> <p>For vulnerable Moldovans, the Refugee Response for Moldova is the only Refugee Response Plan (RRP) in the region that does include affected host community. These are Moldovans vulnerable host/non-host community households affected by the refugee influx and subsequent pressures on local services. Two planning figures have been derived: one for households</p>



	<p>needing shelter interventions based on the ACTED survey's insulation or window repair needs, and another for individuals with vulnerability profiles, with disabilities being the highest identified vulnerability. This totals approximately 44,000 individuals.</p> <p>Around 80% of the total refugee population, approximately 8,700 refugees, are in need of shelter interventions. The combined total of affected host community individuals in need of winter support is approximately 54,000. This focus extends to the 10 rayons hosting the largest refugee populations.</p> <p>In 2022, WFP supported around 54,000 vulnerable families throughout the winter period and beyond. This year, the Ministry and UNHCR are collaboratively developing a similar program targeting vulnerable Moldovan families hosting refugees.</p>
<p>Presentation on the winterization planning process - Cash sector, UNHCR –</p>	<p>The winterization strategy is structured with various sections, primarily driven by sectorial planning assumptions. In 2023, we possess a various of available data, unlike the previous year, providing a solid basis for necessary needs assessments. The UNHCR PDM results and ACTED PDM results from past CWGs align, as do findings from WFP's host community program.</p> <p>Sectorial Planning Assumptions</p> <p><u>UNHCR PDM Results:</u></p> <p>According to PDM findings, markets remain operational and accessible. Cash assistance is highly suitable and effective, with 96% preferring cash aid and 4% favoring a combination of cash and in-kind support. 99% can easily find needed items and services in the market. However, only 9% of refugees can cover over half of their basic needs, with 98% resorting to at least one negative coping strategy. During winter, expenditures on utilities and bills tend to increase compared to other times.</p> <p><u>Market Assessment:</u></p> <p>Both food and non-food items are available in markets, exceeding 95% for food and 82% for non-food items among both refugees and Moldovans. Clothing is available to 84% of refugees but only 51% of Moldovans. Electricity availability is not a significant concern, with gas availability above 80% (92% for refugees, 71% for Moldovans), and firewood available for 32% of refugees and 40% of Moldovans. A similar trend applies to coal (66% for refugees, 14% for Moldovans), based on our rapid socio-economic assessment of a sample size exceeding 500 refugee households.</p>

The presentation showcased the average cost of winter-related items, with many similarities between refugees and Moldovan families. The only huge difference is observed in coal consumption, as refugees rarely purchase coal. Affordability is a challenge for both groups, primarily due to financial constraints (over 90% of both groups).

Sector Priority Response Activities

- Given that markets in Moldova are operational and accessible to most of the population, cash is the preferred method of winter support both for host community and refugees.
- Small-scale in-kind assistance would be valuable, especially for those with limited mobility residing in rural areas. C
- Considering the coverage of our winter support, a countrywide approach is essential, encompassing urban and rural areas as well as formal and informal RACs.

Complementarity with Existing/Planned Government Winter Response

A key aspect of our strategy is its alignment with existing plans and the government's winter response. In 2022, under the guidance of MoLSP, CWG Partners collectively agreed to provide MPCA beneficiaries (refugees) with a top-up of 700 MDL / HH / month, implemented between November and March.

This year, the government is deliberating the operation of Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund. The coverage is aimed to be enhanced with additional eligibility criteria. Compensation modality is considered to be changed (Bill reduction + Cash transfers to vulnerable people).

While the value of cash transfers needs to be coordinated with the government and should remain consistent with the EVRF, partners should plan for the time-being on a monthly transfer of 700 MDL per household from November 2023 to March 2024. This amounts to a total of 3,500 MDL for the entire winter season.

Challenges, risks and constraints

During the meeting was presented some potential challenges, risks and constraints that could be foreseen in the process, as:

- Unpredictability of the evolution of refugee and energy crisis;
- Coverage of Energy Vulnerability Reduction fund;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination challenges (partners non-present in CWG, winter response activities out of agreed implementation period etc.); • Possible limitations in humanitarian capacity, funding, or resource constraints.
<p>Winterization planning 2023 – Governmental National Schemes, MoLSP</p>	<p>During the update session, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MoLSP) presented the Government Winterization amendments for 2023.</p> <p>On 17th August 2023, the Parliament passed amendments in the second reading to two key laws:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law No 241/2022 on the Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund. • Law No 133/2008 on social aid. <p>The primary objective of these changes was to enhance the compensation mechanism and better target the vulnerable population concerning energy bill compensation. Additionally, the goal was to integrate the bill compensation mechanism with the monetary payments under the cold period support.</p> <p>Key Amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two new energy vulnerability categories, namely the maximum energy vulnerability category and primary energy vulnerability category, have been introduced alongside the existing four categories. • In 2023, MoLSP's approach will involve two types of compensation: for energy consumption bills and in-cash compensations via the National Insurance House, categorized by vulnerability. • Regulatory adjustments will be implemented to ensure fairness by expanding the criteria used for calculating vulnerability. Current distinctions between adults and children, persons with disabilities, and urban vs. rural areas will be enhanced to improve the system's equity. <p>The amendments aim to consolidate the two fundamental instruments designed to support people during the cold period: <u>Assistance for the Cold Period of the Year (APRA)</u> and <u>energy bill compensation (Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund)</u>. In the prior cold period, approximately 170,000 families received both payments by submitting separate applications through different information systems.</p>



	<p>Another concern highlighted over the past two years is the limited impact of the bill compensation scheme on rural residents without access to heating energy sources. Those qualifying for APRA were eligible for governmental support, leaving vulnerable citizens who didn't meet APRA criteria without compensation. The MoLSP intends to address this by introducing the in-cash modality.</p> <p>To enhance the precision of vulnerability determination, MoLSP plans to extend the list of criteria in 2023, considering factors such as age, residency in urban or rural areas, and disabilities.</p> <p>The MoLSP will amend the regulatory provisions on determining the vulnerability degree. Will be extended the list of criteria when establishing the vulnerability degree. In 2023 will be made the difference between adults and children, rural and urban areas, or persons with disabilities.</p> <p>In 2023 MoLSP will provide 2 types of compensations: for energy consumption bills, and in cash compensations through the National Insurance House depending on the established category of vulnerability. So, it will be one unique mechanism. Around 70% of the families benefited of those compensations. The persons from rural areas faced issues (reduced impact in rural areas), and they did not receive any support, and were not eligible for APRA. For such cases MoLSP wants to introduce the in-cash modality.</p> <p>Depending on the household's circumstances it will receive either compensation in the bill or a cash payment from the Energy Vulnerability Fund.</p> <p>The criteria currently utilized for granting APRA will be incorporated into Government Decisions that implement the Energy Vulnerability Fund Law.</p> <p>Though MoLSP is unable to provide an exact count of Ukrainian refugees benefiting from financial support in 2022-2023, those refugees applied through the online system and were assigned vulnerability categories.</p>
<p>Next Actions</p>	<p>In the ongoing winter planning process, the subsequent phase following the determination of sector priorities involves a comprehensive data collection exercise among partners. This process will be facilitated through the utilization of ActivityInfo. Through this platform, partners will submit their planned winter activities, outlining estimated figures, targets, preferred locations, and related details. Once this program-specific information is collated, bilateral and joint discussions will transpire</p>



	<p>to prioritize activities, identify potential areas of duplication, and foster coordination. This structured approach will facilitate the coordination of the winter response plan in collaboration with cash partners.</p> <p>The importance of complementarity and alignment with the government response is essential. Following on from the results of the post-distribution monitoring (PDM) conducted during the last winter period, some refugees have accessed the energy vulnerability fund, highlighting potential ways of collaboration. Exploring pathways to support government initiatives while addressing unmet needs within the refugee population is essential.</p> <p>In order to anticipate and prepare for possible challenges, risks and constraints in the process, UNHCR is in the process of developing a comprehensive assessment. This assessment will serve as the basis for the development of a robust sectoral winter strategy, ensuring a proactive approach to addressing potential challenges.</p>
AOB	<p><u>Transnistrian region</u></p> <p>UNHCR focus this week is centered around the Transnistrian region. UNHCR are collecting information and had a meeting with some local organizations operating in Transnistria a few weeks ago where we initiated a gathering.</p> <p>UNHCR recently convened a meeting with local organizations operating in Transnistria, with the intention of initiating a comprehensive information-gathering process. Both IOM and UNHCR are in the midst of consultations with these local organizations on the ground. The aim is to gain deeper insights into their expectations and anticipations for the upcoming heating season.</p> <p>In the upcoming week, we have plans to invite organizations actively engaged in supporting or implementing programs in Transnistria for a meeting. The objective of this gathering is to validate the identified needs and to gain a clear understanding of the planned initiatives in order to facilitate effective coordination.</p>