

PROTECTION BRIEF #4

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

August 2024



Operational Context & Analysis

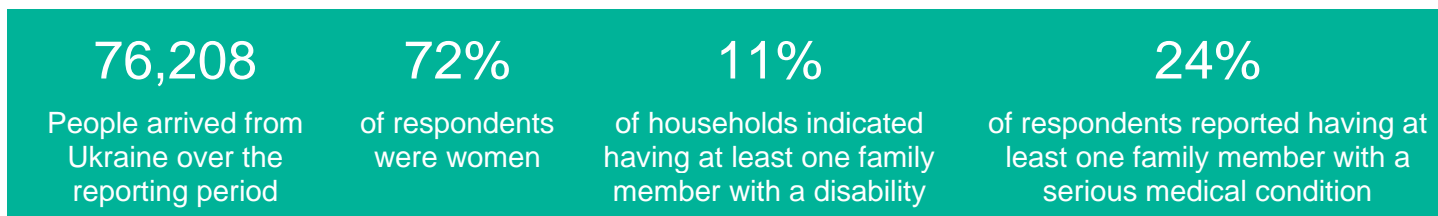
As of 30 June 2024, nearly 1,118,000 refugees and third-country nationals (TCN) had arrived in the Republic of Moldova¹ from Ukraine since 24 February 2022, the highest per capita number of Ukrainian arrivals in Europe. While most continued westward to the EU, some 122,600 Ukrainian refugees and 9,800 third-country nationals had chosen to remain in Moldova, of whom 59% were female, 44% were children, and an estimated 18% were older persons.

In responding to the emergency, Moldova has displayed remarkable generosity and unity, rallying authorities at every level to address the pressing needs of those seeking refuge from the war in neighboring Ukraine. The government’s response has been supported by civil society, host communities, international NGOs, the private sector, committed volunteers, and UN agencies, to ensure access to protection and services for those forcibly displaced.

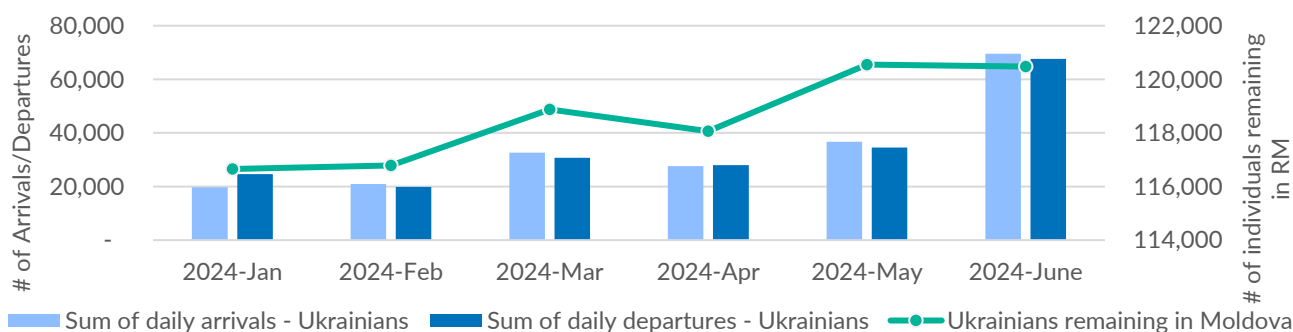
UNHCR has been actively engaged in monitoring, documenting, and analysing the profiles, needs, and intentions of refugees, to enhance and promote evidence-based protection interventions throughout the country. Since May 2022, it has been conducting protection profiling and monitoring activities, including at accommodation sites, centres for humanitarian aid distribution, Community Service Centres (CSC), and other locations.²

This report encompasses the outcomes of 1,801 interviews, comprising 4,389 household members, conducted between 1 April and 30 June 2024. Reference is also made to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant interviews (KIIs) conducted by UNHCR and its partners over the same period.³

Key Trends & Figures



Cumulative Arrivals & Departures (1 April – 30 June 2024)⁴



Arrival figures include arrivals of Ukrainians from all border crossing points (land and air)

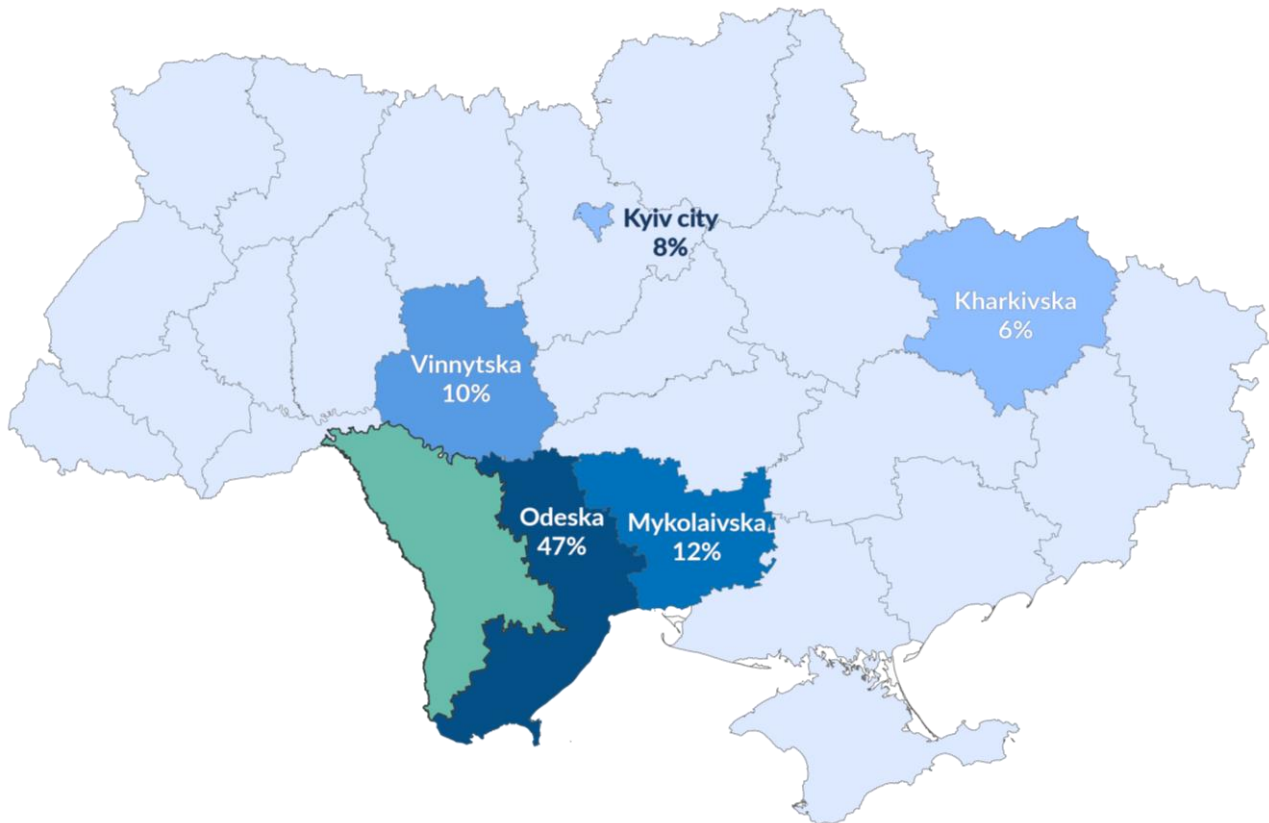
¹ Henceforth referred to as “Moldova.”

² UNHCR partners are also conducting border monitoring activities at border crossing points and transit hubs using a separate monitoring tool.

³ During the period from April to June, the protection team conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Ukrainian refugees across various locations in Moldova, including Ungheni, Donduseni, and Stefan Voda. These interviews targeted different age groups and people with vulnerabilities, such as single parents, persons with special needs (PWSN), and older persons.

⁴ Republic of Moldova: Daily population trends. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/248?sv=0&geo=680>

Profiles & Displacement Patterns



The most common household profile of those surveyed was similar to the previous reporting period, which was single adults with dependants (29%), with an average head of household age of 48 years old.⁵ This data continues to mirror the overall demographic pattern of refugees in Moldova, where 72% of surveyed households comprise women and children, which was somewhat less than the previous reporting period (84%). Although the relatively low number of adult men continues to be generally attributed to their participation in the Ukrainian armed forces, there was a slight increase in the number of men aged 18-59 who were surveyed in the current reporting period (12% to 16%).

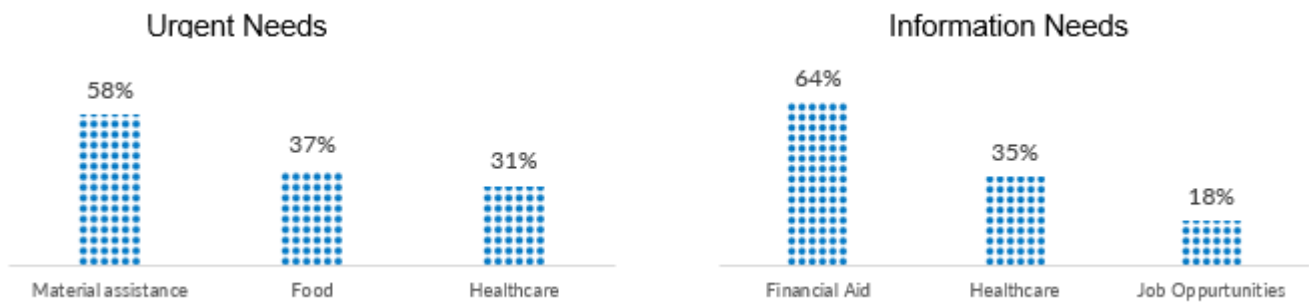
More than two-thirds of respondents (68%) stated that they still had immediate family members in Ukraine, 61% of whom reported that they have faced challenges reuniting in Moldova. Out of those who reported difficulties reuniting with family members, 88% stated that the current martial law in Ukraine, including the inability of men to leave the country unless exempt from conscription, was the main factor in preventing reunification. Since departing from Ukraine, changes to family composition continue to be infrequent, reported by only 7% of respondents. Among these respondents, 41% reported a birth in the family, 37% reported a death, and 10% reported a divorce, which were all in line with the previous reporting period. Of those who reported changes in their family composition, only 8% faced challenges in registering a vital event and obtaining corresponding documents in the host country due to long wait times and/or unawareness of procedures.

Among the 1,801 surveyed households, 4% reported having children separated from both parents, marking no change from the previous reporting period. The most commonly surveyed age cohort was individuals aged 35-59. Individuals aged 60 and above constituted 24% of the surveyed population. Households reporting family members with specific needs, including disabilities or serious medical conditions, remained the same as the previous reporting period (35%).⁶

⁵ Other household profiles included 1+ older persons with or without dependants (24%), 2+ adults with dependants (19%), single adults (15%) and 2+ adults (13%)

⁶ Top difficulties reported were walking (60%), seeing (34%), and self-care (32%).

The overwhelming majority of respondents (94%) indicated that they have urgent needs, a slight increase from the previous round. Material assistance continues to be the most urgent need cited among surveyed households (58%) but was reported less frequently than in the previous reporting period (74%). Food (37%), healthcare (31%), and employment remained as additional urgent needs. Notably, for surveyed households that arrived in Moldova within the last three months, legal advice was identified as the second highest priority need (34%), compared to 15% for the overall surveyed population. Similarly, information regarding legal status was the second highest information need for new arrivals (42%), significantly higher than the 21% for the overall surveyed population.



Accommodation types varied amongst the 1,801 households surveyed. Those hosted by relatives decreased to 36% from 43% in the previous round, while those hosted by non-family members increased to 22% from 17%. Respondents who indicated that they were renting private apartments or homes remained steady at 32%, and those residing in collective accommodations remained unchanged at 7%. Among those renting apartments, only around half (56%) stated that they had formal rental contracts with the owner, a decrease from the previous round (70%). For those respondents who did not have a rental contract, around 40% stated that this was due to the landlord's refusal. Among those without a rental contract, more than half (62%) cited plans to leave their current accommodations within the next three months to rent another place.

Notably, fewer respondents in this round (56%) reported no intended limit on their length of stay in their current accommodation, as compared to the previous round (70%). The main reasons for leaving current accommodations were evenly split between those asked to leave and those planning to rent elsewhere (26%), while 22% cited unaffordability of their current rent. For those asked to leave, this was significantly higher among respondents hosted by non-family members (75%). Accommodation was also cited as the third highest priority need for households arriving in the last three months (26%).

Of the 1,801 households surveyed, 17% had arrived in Moldova for the first time during the reporting period. This is significantly higher than the previous two rounds, which reported 5% and 4%, respectively. Similar to the previous reporting periods, respondents largely originated from Odeska (47%), Vinnystkya (13%), and Mykolaivska (11%) oblasts.⁷ Somewhat less than half of respondents (45%) confirmed that they had visited Ukraine at least once since their initial departure, 72% of whom stated that they had returned to their previous place of residence. The average duration of stay for the majority of those who returned to Ukraine was less than two weeks (as indicated by 78% of respondents who had returned to Ukraine), with the primary purposes of return being to visit relatives (32%), check on property (26%), and check on the overall situation in the area (22%). Those who returned home to obtain documents decreased slightly from the previous round (16% to 11%).⁸ These results are largely unchanged from the previous period. Positively, respondents who returned home continued to report that they did not encounter any difficulties returning to Ukraine or re-entering Moldova (99%).

⁷ Other regions of origin were evenly split between Donetsk, Kharkivska, Khersonska, Dnipropetrovska, and Kyiv city.

⁸ For those returning to Ukraine to obtain documents, 84% went to retrieve identity documents.

Protection risks

Legal Status

The rate of issuance of TP identity documents continued to rise during the reporting period at a pace of about 1,000 individuals a week. According to statistics provided by the General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM),⁹ as of 1 July, 64,085 persons had pre-registered for temporary protection, of whom 52,159 had been issued temporary protection documents.¹⁰ Data from the profiling and monitoring survey showed that 91% of respondents had applied for TP as of the end of June, a slight increase from the previous reporting period (89%).

In June 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) proposed revisions to Law No. 270/2011, Law on Asylum. The proposed revisions largely codify aspects of the TP regime set out in Government Decision 21/2023 on Temporary Protection, including with regards to rights (e.g., employment, accommodation, health care, education, and, for families with children and unaccompanied minors, social assistance). Importantly, the proposed revisions would eliminate the two-year limit on TP under the current law, allowing for it to be renewed on a yearly basis, with no maximum period in place established.

Analysis from FGDs and KIs conducted during the reporting period continues to indicate that TP has improved the lives of refugees by providing essential support and access to services. Participants confirmed that TP had positively influenced their lives, providing access to medical services, as well as financial support from UN agencies. However, some refugees stated that they faced challenges obtaining TP or asylum in Moldova as they held dual citizenship (Ukrainian and Moldova), despite having resided in Ukraine for years.

In addition to TP, according to IGM statistics, as of the end of June 2024, some 10,000 Ukrainians who arrived in Moldova after 24 February 2022 had obtained another form of legal status in the country, including residence permits (~7000), confirmation of Moldovan nationality (2,473), and legal status through the asylum system (asylum-seeker or person granted refugee status or humanitarian protection) (1,407). Taken together, this means that about 52,265 Ukrainians and family members had obtained a secure legal status in Moldova by the end of June 2024. This constitutes about 61% of the estimated 122,600 Ukrainians currently in the country, bearing in mind that Ukrainians can generally remain in Moldova for 90 days without another form of legal status. As of mid-June 2024, some 23,700 Ukrainians had been in the country for fewer than 90 days, some of whom may have already obtained a more secure legal status.

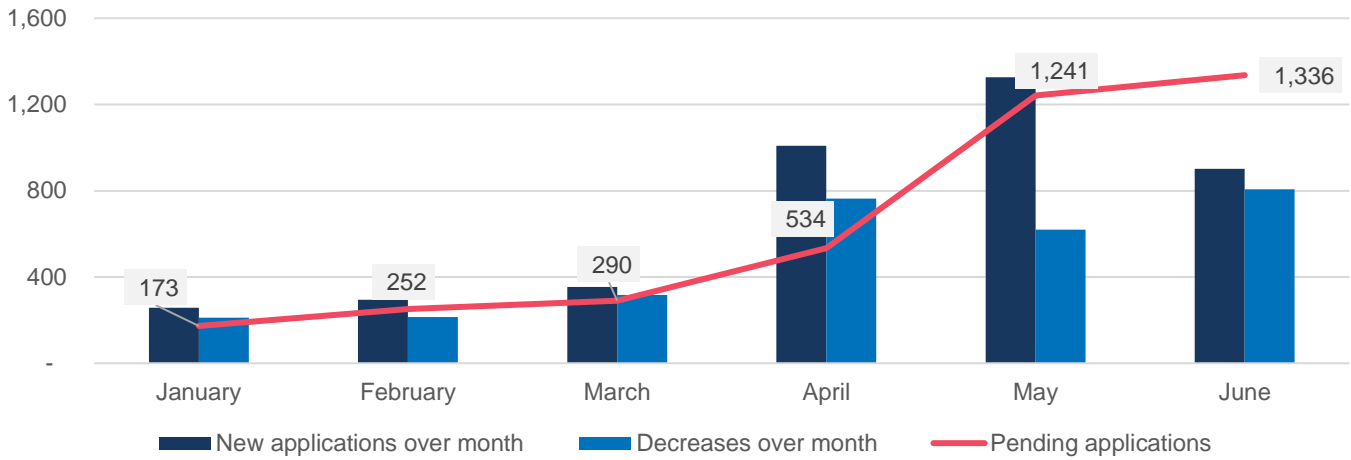
On 16 April 2024, the President of Ukraine signed a new Law on Military Service, Conscription, and Military Registration, which took effect on 17 May. Following the adoption of the law, there was a notable rise in asylum applications in Moldova, particularly among Ukrainian men of conscription age who crossed the border irregularly from Ukraine. According to border monitoring conducted by UNHCR's partner the Law Centre of Advocates (LCA/CDA), the number of asylum claims submitted at Palanca (both BCP and neighboring Green border) doubled over the reporting period. Meanwhile, at the Otaci BCP, asylum claims tripled since the end of March 2024. While UNHCR is not aware of Ukrainian men facing difficulties lodging asylum claims if they cross the border unlawfully, there continue to be challenges lodging asylum claims at the BCPs themselves due to the presence of State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (SBGSU) authorities either at jointly controlled BCPs (Palanca) or at the Ukrainian BCPs across the border.

UNHCR border monitoring statistics match asylum statistics issued by IGM. Per IGM, as of the end of June 2024, 4,143 asylum claims had been submitted by Ukrainian nationals in the first half of the year, as compared to 3,708 claims in all of 2023. Many of these claims were later closed as applicants moved further west. Not surprisingly, this rise in asylum claims has resulted in a growing backlog of claims as well. According to IGM statistics, the total number of Ukrainian asylum claims pending administrative review increased from 290 as of the end of March 2024 to 1,336 as of the end of June, a more than four-fold increase in 12 weeks. This is in addition to about 350 non-Ukrainian asylum claims that were also pending review.

⁹ Government statistics on TP beneficiaries, as well as on Ukrainian nationals with other forms of legal status, can be found <https://igm.gov.md/comunicate-de-presale/bpage/2/>

¹⁰ The previous reporting period ended on 31 March 2024, at which time 51,556 persons had pre-enrolled for TP, and 42,263 had been issued TP documents.

Application for Asylum January – June 2024



Healthcare

58%

Of respondents aged 60 and above indicated healthcare as an urgent need

31%

Of respondents indicated healthcare as an information need

24%

Of respondents with at least one family member with a serious medical condition

Healthcare continues to be reported as an urgent need and information need among one-third (31%) of protection monitoring respondents. For those aged 60 and above, the need was almost double (58%), while the need for information related to healthcare increased to 49%. The number of households indicating having at least one family member with a serious medical condition remained unchanged from the previous reporting period (24%). Of the 44% of respondents who had visited Ukraine at least once since their initial departure, 10% indicated that the main purpose of the visit was to access healthcare, slightly less than the previous reporting period (14%).

Challenges in accessing healthcare services were consistently mentioned during KIIs and FGDs. Main issues included high medication costs (despite expanded access to compensated medications for TP beneficiaries as of March 2024), inadequate secondary healthcare service, language barriers, and limited availability of healthcare facilities, leading to additional transportation costs. A lack of specialized physicians in many locations, in particular cardiologists and neurologists, was reported as aggravating the situation, with refugees often traveling to neighboring Ukraine or larger urban hubs within Moldova for specialized examinations and treatments. These challenges result in delays in seeking medical attention and hinder access to essential healthcare services.

"I was deeply moved when my husband was seriously ill at the local hospital, and I wanted to express my gratitude by offering money to the doctor. However, I was surprised when the doctor kindly refused, explaining that such gestures are not customary here in Moldova. I appreciated their professionalism and the high level of medical care provided to my husband, which was covered entirely by our Temporary Protection status." - FGD participant in Ungheni

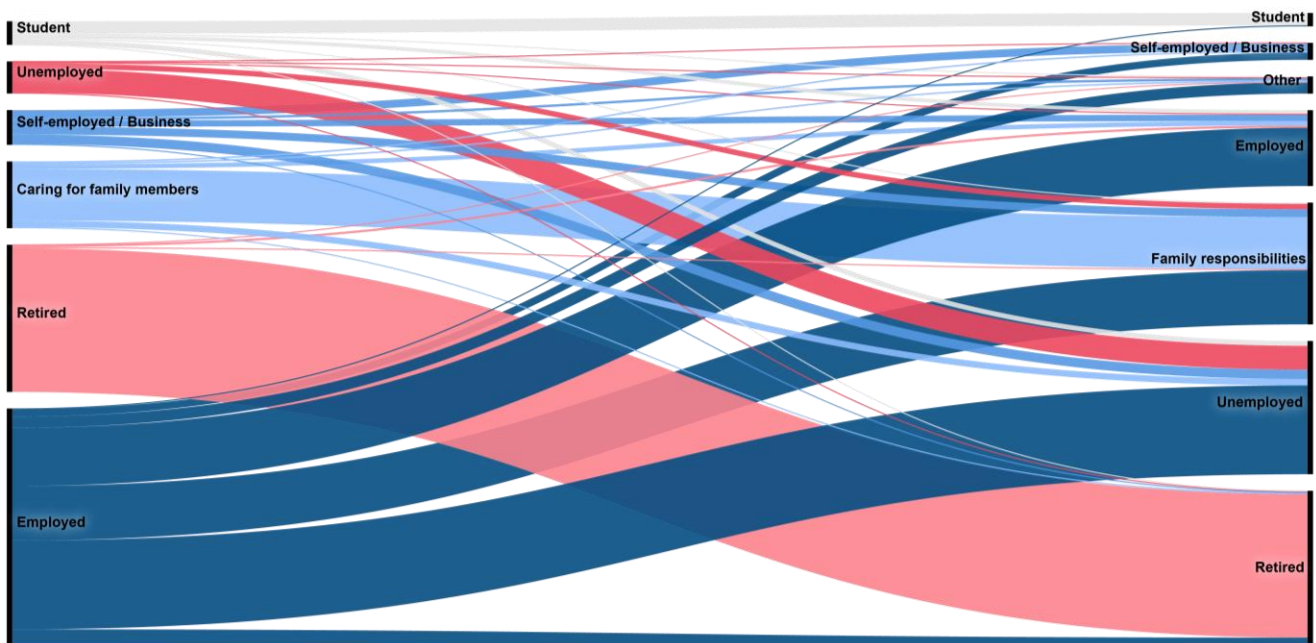
Despite these challenges, some refugees reported positive experiences with compassionate and respectful medical professionals. Despite their traumatic experiences, participants stated that they generally felt supported and understood by the medical professionals who treated them.

Progress has been made since the last reporting period in the provision of information to both refugees and healthcare providers on healthcare services available to TP beneficiaries. In April, IOM, in coordination with WHO, hired and trained 10 Ukrainian health mediators across Moldova, including the Transnistrian region. These mediators have raised awareness about health services available to TP holders and have strengthened registration with family doctors, a prerequisite to accessing many health services.

Employment & Livelihoods Support

Survey results continue to show that the Ukrainian refugee population in Moldova is well-educated overall, with 53% of respondents having completed higher education, including university. Similar to the last reporting period, just under half of those surveyed (44%) had been employed or self-employed before leaving Ukraine, although this number was lower than the previous reporting period (57%). Despite their backgrounds, only 14% of respondents were employed in Moldova or working remotely from Moldova at the time, a decrease from the previous round (20%).

Changes in Primary Activities Before Leaving Ukraine to Present



Statistics from the National Employment Agency (NEA) of Moldova continue to show low employment rates for Ukrainian refugees in the country. As of 1 June 2024, some 1,438 Ukrainian refugees were formally employed in Moldova, with contracts registered with the NEA, representing a small increase from the previous reporting period (1,320). This figure, however, does not include those working informally or remotely, or those working formally but whose contracts had not been registered with the NEA by their employer. Out of the 14% of respondents who indicated being employed, around one-third (30%) stated that they did not have a formal contract with their employer, representing an increase from the previous reporting period (23%). As previously reported, relatively low employment rates do not mean that individuals are not trying to find work. The main reasons cited by those who described themselves as “unemployed” were limited job prospects (28%) and plans to leave Moldova (19%).

Findings from the FGDs and KIIs conducted over the reporting period shed additional light on some of the challenges that refugees face. Language barriers, unrecognized Ukrainian diplomas, and unfavorable working conditions were obstacles cited by all participants. Refugees continued to report a heavy reliance on humanitarian aid, with vocational courses often deemed insufficient due to the lack of necessary resources and practical experience. Participants from both FGDs and KIIs indicated that their main sources of income included informal employment, humanitarian assistance, and support from family and community networks. Many

refugees also depended on money transfers from family members abroad or savings from previous employment in Ukraine to maintain financial stability. Younger refugees often engaged in remote work, while older individuals limited their spending to save money. High commuting costs to larger cities for work and the lack of local customers for small businesses were additional significant challenges.

Many refugees, as noted in both FGDs and KIs, engaged in entrepreneurial ventures, such as starting small businesses or freelance jobs, to generate income. However, FGD participants specifically noted the difficulty in starting businesses due to the lack of customers in small towns. Very few participants reported having official employment, with most relying on aid and informal work. In contrast, KIs noted that some refugees had managed to find remote work or start entrepreneurial ventures to sustain themselves.

CALLS TO ACTION

Ensure access to a secure legal status: The steady rise in TP applications and the positive impact on refugees' access to essential services and aid is encouraging. However, continued discussions for a post-TP legal regime is essential, requiring proactive engagement with relevant stakeholders to ensure access to a more secure legal status for Ukrainian nationals over the medium to long term. It is also crucial to strengthen the asylum system to accommodate the rising number of applications, including access to information and legal assistance, as well as to ensure the fair and efficient adjudication of claims.

Continue to strengthen access to healthcare: Despite positive developments in 2024 in the scope of available medical services for TP beneficiaries, healthcare remains a critical need for refugees. Refugees continue to face obstacles in accessing services, including lack of information, language issues, and continued limitations on certain services. IOM and WHO's initiative to train Ukrainian health mediators is a positive step, facilitating access to services for many. Continued efforts are needed to address these healthcare challenges and ensure that all refugees receive the necessary medical care and support.

Improve access to livelihoods and employment opportunities: Survey findings indicate that significant employment challenges remain among refugees, including language barriers, unrecognized Ukrainian diplomas, and unfavorable working conditions. Comprehensive language training programs to improve communication skills should be prioritized. Initiatives should also be undertaken to enhance job placement opportunities, support self-employment ventures, and recognize Ukrainian qualifications. Expanding vocational training with practical components will also help improve job readiness.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the extensive involvement and support of UNHCR's partners in this Protection Monitoring Brief, in particular Law Center of Advocates (CDA), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), REACH, and Charity Center for Refugees (CCR). We are also grateful for the support of local authorities, civil society, international organizations and our donors. Most importantly, UNHCR would like to acknowledge the resilience and strength of refugees from Ukraine, who continue to share with us their challenges, fears, and hopes.

For more information:

Sean Sager, Protection Officer, Email: sager@unhcr.org;

Yurii Arnautov, Information Management Officer, Email: arnautov@unhcr.org