

PROTECTION BRIEF #5

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

November 2024



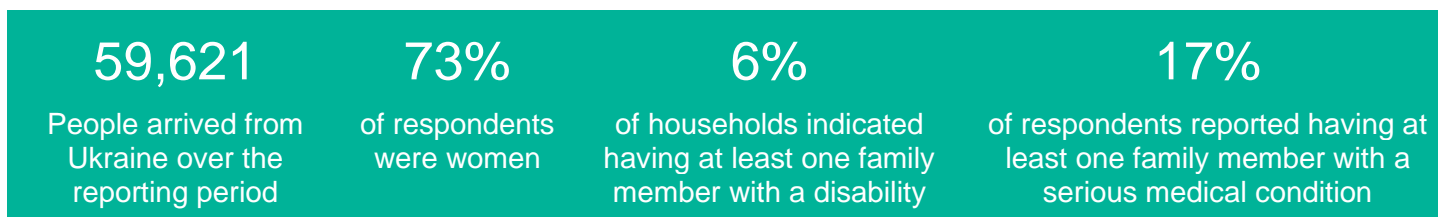
Operational Context & Analysis

As of 30 September 2024, nearly 1,184,500 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 123,730 Ukrainian refugees and 10,475 third-country nationals had chosen to remain in Moldova, of whom 58% were female, 43% were children, and an estimated 23%² were older persons.

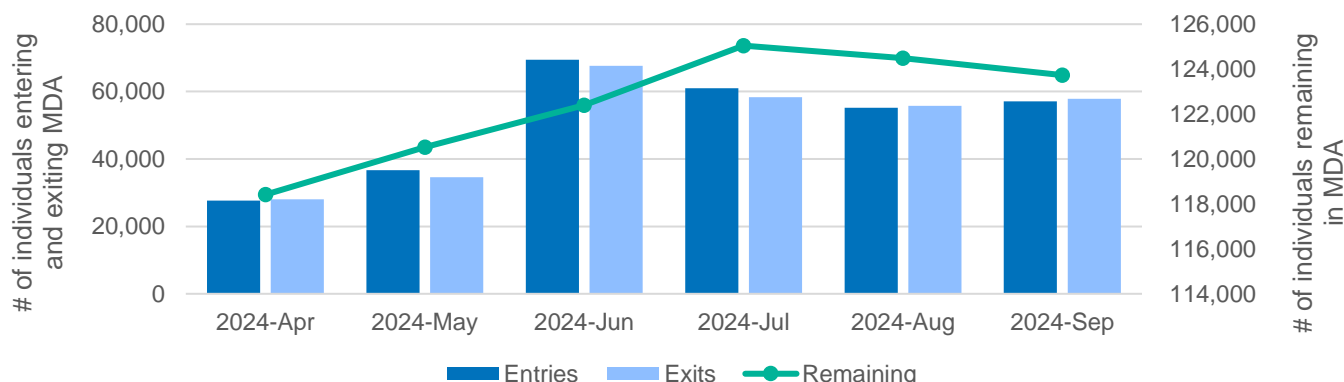
UNHCR has been actively engaged in monitoring, documenting, and analysing the profiles, needs, and intentions of refugees, to enhance and promote evidence-based protection interventions throughout the country. Since May 2022, it has been conducting protection profiling and monitoring activities, including at accommodation sites, centres for humanitarian aid distribution, Community Service Centres (CSC), and other locations.³

This report encompasses the outcomes of 1,387 interviews, comprising 3,175 household members, conducted between 1 July and 30 September 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,⁴ as well as additional findings from the 2024 Socioeconomic Inclusion Survey (SEIS).⁵

Key Trends & Figures



Cumulative Arrivals & Departures (1 July – 30 September 2024)⁶



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

¹ Henceforth referred to as "Moldova."

² According to 2024 Socio-Economic Insights Survey (SEIS)

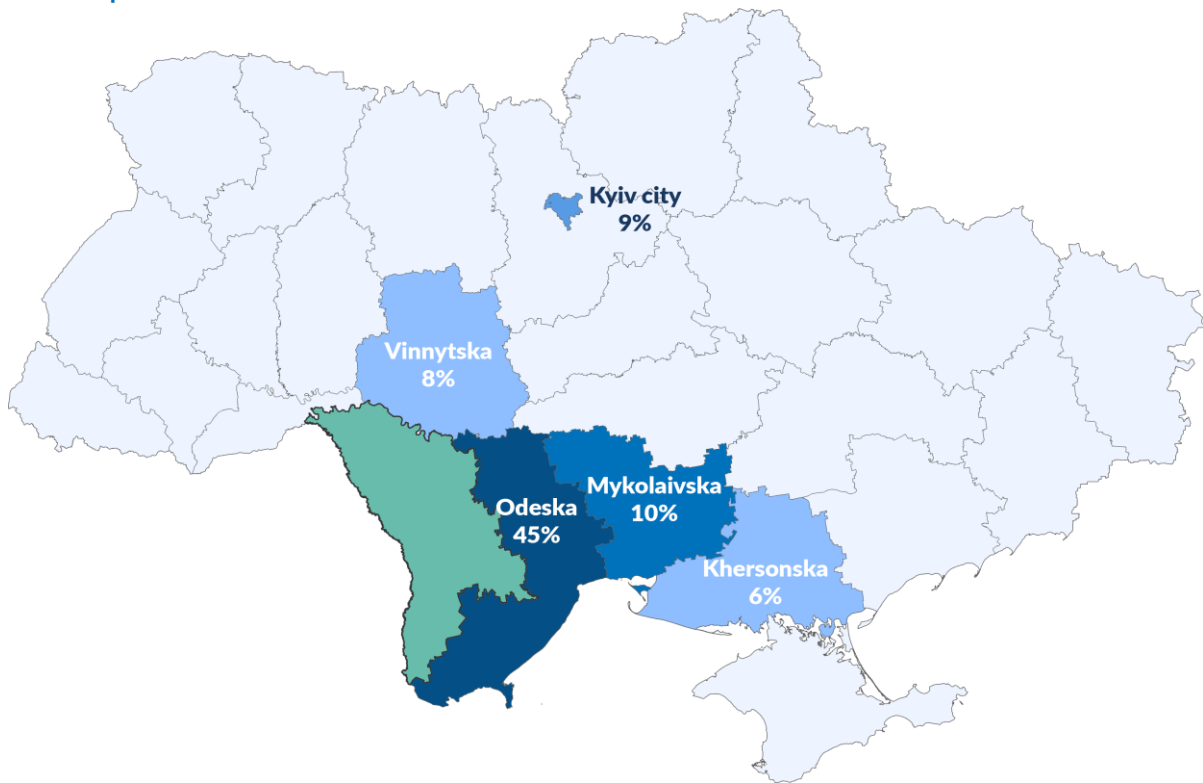
³ UNHCR partners are also conducting border monitoring activities at border crossing points and transit hubs using a separate monitoring tool.

⁴ During the period from July to September, UNHCR's partners conducted five (5) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with Ukrainian refugees across various locations in Moldova, including Balti, Ocnita, and Ungheni. One additional Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with eight (8) refugees in Sefvan Voda.

⁵ Formerly known as the Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA). Data collection for the SEIS was carried out between 3 June and 12 July 2024..

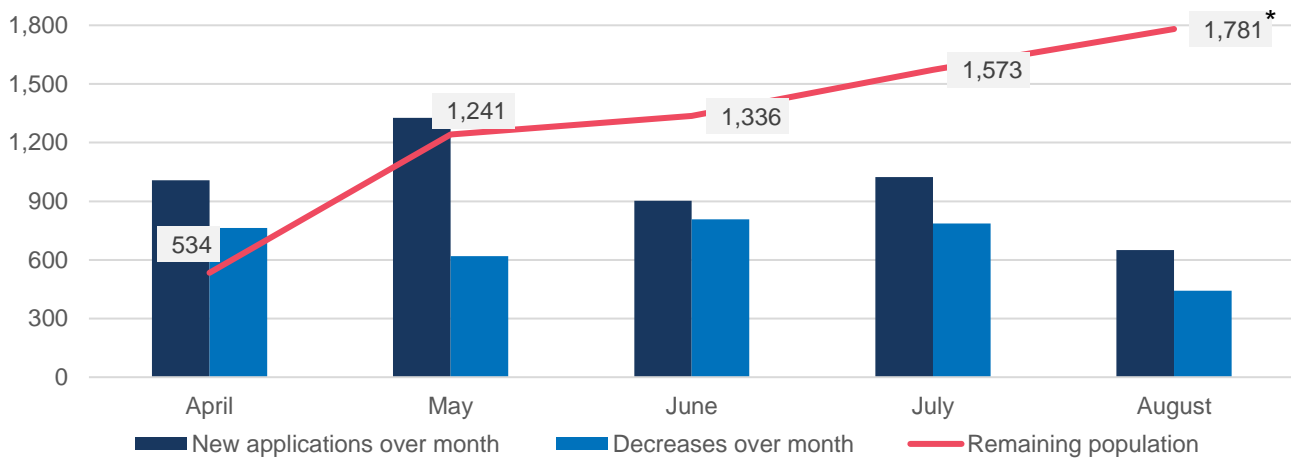
⁶ Republic of Moldova: Monthly population trends. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/248?sv=0&geo=680>

Profiles & Displacement Patterns



The most common **household profile** of those surveyed was similar to the previous two reporting periods, which was single adults with dependants (29%), with an average head of household age of 49 years old.⁷ More than two-thirds of respondents (71%) stated that they still had immediate family members in Ukraine, 58% of whom reported that they faced challenges reuniting in Moldova. Out of those who reported difficulties reuniting, 93% stated that the current martial law in Ukraine, including the inability of men to leave the country unless exempt from conscription, was the main obstacle. Although the relatively low number of adult men entering Moldova at border crossing points continues to be generally attributed to their participation in or eligibility for 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 (16% to 17%).

Applications for Asylum



* Note: In September only the number of individuals with **pending asylum applications is available – 1,609**. The monthly increases and decreases data is not yet available.

⁷ Other household profiles included 1+ older persons with or without dependents (25%), 2+ adults with dependents (18%), single adults (16%) and 2+ adults (12%).

UNHCR has continued to observe a steady number of **asylum applications** in Moldova, particularly among **Ukrainian men of conscription age** crossing the border irregularly from Ukraine, following the adoption of the Law on Military Service, Conscription, and Military Registration, which took effect in Ukraine on 17 May 2024. 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) decreased only slightly over the reporting period, while at Otaci (both BCP and neighboring Green border), asylum claims increased by 10%. While UNHCR is not aware of Ukrainian men facing difficulties lodging asylum claims if they cross the border irregularly, there continue to be challenges doing so at the BCPs 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.

Among the 1,387 surveyed households, 3% 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 25% of the surveyed population. Notably, the number of households reporting **family members with specific needs**, including disabilities or serious medical conditions, decreased from 35% to 23% over the reporting period.⁸ A similar decrease was seen for respondents aged 60 and above (down from 49% to 31%).

Similar to the previous reporting periods, respondents largely originated from Odeska (45%) and Mykolaiivska (10%) oblasts.⁹ Just under half of the respondents (43%) confirmed that they had **visited Ukraine** at least once since their initial departure, 76% 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, with the

When asked why Moldova was chosen as a place of refuge: "Because of the language – there are no language barriers. We understand each other, and we do not have conflicts. Moldova was the first to welcome us".

- FGD participant in Stefan Voda

primary purposes being to visit relatives (31%), check on the situation (29%), check on property (21%), and obtain documents (10%). These results are largely unchanged from the previous period. Participants from the FGDs which took place over the reporting period stated that their key reasons for choosing Moldova included proximity to family members living in Ukraine and the absence of language barriers, which facilitated smoother integration into the local community.

Evidence from surveyed households shows that 93% of respondents had applied for TP as of the end of September. The rate of issuance of TP identity documents continued to rise during the reporting period but has slowed slightly in the last quarter. According to statistics provided by the General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM),¹⁰ as of 30 September, 75,450 persons had pre-registered for temporary protection, of whom 60,209 had been issued temporary protection documents.

Protection risks

Increased Needs

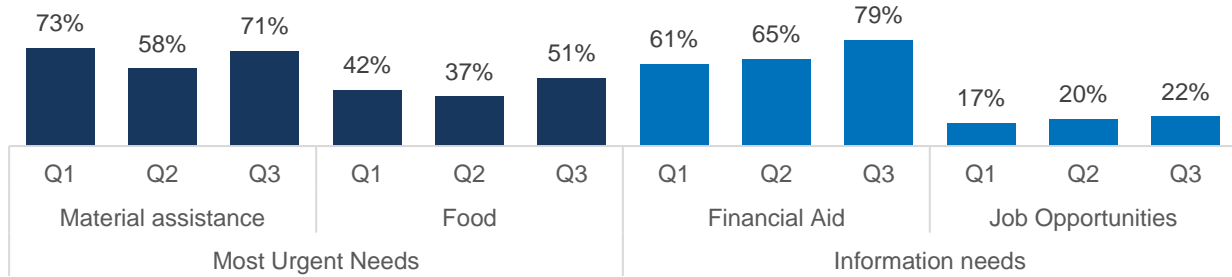
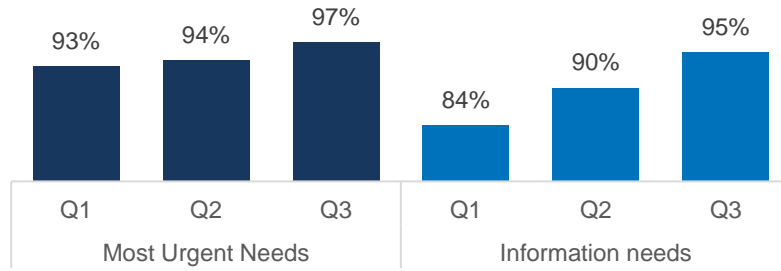
Notably, almost all respondents (97%) stated that they had **urgent needs**, which is the highest number since UNHCR implemented its protection monitoring activities (94% in Q2 and 93% in Q1). For individuals aged 60 or older (60+), this increased to 99%. Material assistance continued to be the most urgent need cited (72%) but was reported more frequently than in the previous reporting period (58%). For vulnerable individuals, including 60+ individuals and single adults with dependents, these needs were even greater (82% and 74% respectively).

⁸ Top difficulties reported were walking (73%), seeing (39%), self-care (20%), and hearing (20%).

⁹ Other regions of origin were evenly split between Kyivska, Vinnytska, Kharkivska, Khersonska, and Dnipropetrovska.

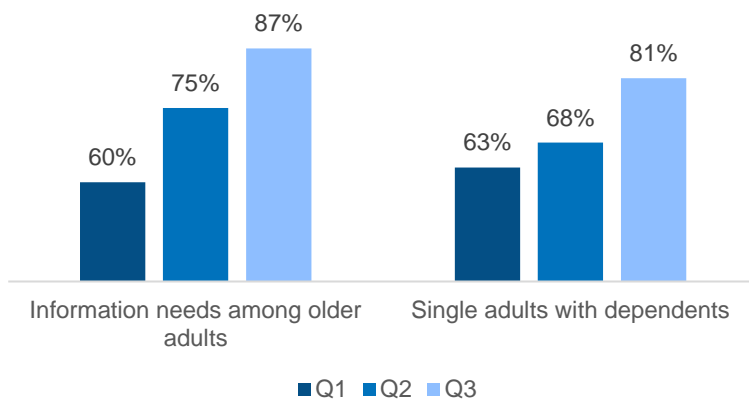
¹⁰ Government statistics on TP beneficiaries, as well as on Ukrainian nationals with other forms of legal status, can be found <https://igm.gov.md/comunicate-de-preses/bpage/2/>

Other urgent needs similarly increased, with food needs increasing from 37% to 51% and healthcare needs from 31% to 37%.



Respondents reporting Urgent needs and Information needs and most prominent urgent needs and information needs in Q1, Q2, Q3

In terms of **information needs**, financial assistance remained the top priority for those surveyed, increasing from 65% in the previous period to 79% in the current one. Notably, protection monitoring data showed a steady rise in information needs among older adults, increasing from 60% in Q1 to 75% in Q2, and reaching 87% in Q3. Similarly, single adults with dependents saw an increase from 63% in Q1 to 68% in Q2, and then to 81% in Q3.



The need for more information was also reported amongst FGD participants, Many participants reported limited access to information regarding available social services and support. They felt inadequately informed about the assistance offered by the Moldovan government and humanitarian organizations, leading to uncertainty about how to access necessary help. Several also mentioned that insufficient guidance from social workers created confusion and hindered their ability to use these services effectively.

Evidence of increased vulnerability corresponds to reductions in assistance to refugees in Moldova in certain areas. Notably, due to more limited resources, UNHCR revised the eligibility criteria for its Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) programme so as to ensure that the most vulnerable refugees continue to receive support. Under the revised methodology, a range of factors were considered in determining vulnerability, including income, expenses, living conditions, and specific needs. As a result of this exercise, some refugees, those found to be less vulnerable than others, faced a loss of financial support, a point raised by refugees and partners in FGDs and KIIs. Other dynamics were also in play during this period. The government’s consolidation strategy for Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) continued, with some refugees needing to find private accommodation due to the closure of the RACs where they were residing. While rental support was available to many, easing the transition, it was generally only available for six (6) months. Finally, some international NGOs that were providing support to refugees in Moldova have since left, further reducing humanitarian support.

Healthcare

66%

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

34%

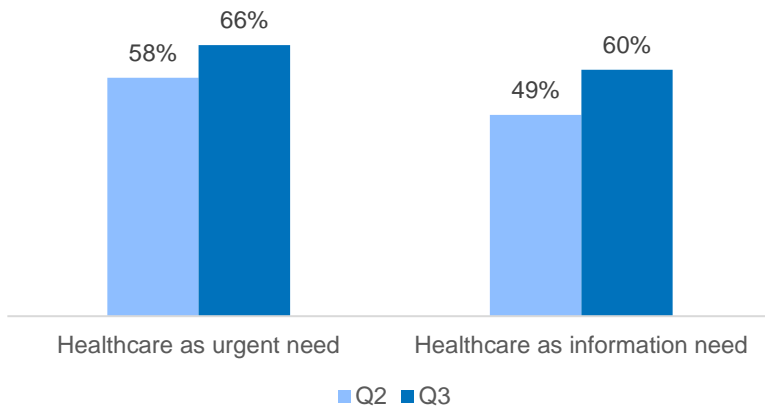
Of respondents indicated healthcare as an information need

17%

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 (37%) of protection monitoring respondents. For households with one or more older persons with or without dependents, healthcare as an urgent reported need was almost double (66%) that of the general refugee population. This is also confirmed by the findings from SEIS – 60% reported medicines and 48% reported healthcare services as a priority need.¹¹ At the same time, the need for information related to healthcare increased from 49% to 60%.

Urgent & Information Needs of Older Refugees



60% reported medicines and 48% reported healthcare services as a priority need.¹¹ At the same time, the need for information related to healthcare increased from 49% to 60%. The number of households in general indicating having at least one family member with a serious medical condition decreased slightly from the previous reporting period (24% to 17%). Of the 43% of respondents who had visited Ukraine at least once since their initial departure, 9% indicated that the main purpose of the visit was to access healthcare, similar to the previous reporting period (10%).

Findings from the SEIS shed some additional light on the challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees in accessing healthcare. Findings indicated that roughly half of the households surveyed had at least one family member with a chronic illness, including diabetes, hypertension, or asthma. However, 67% of households surveyed overall reported needing access to health services in the 30 days prior to data collection, 14% of whom stated that they could not access the services needed. Although individuals with TP status can access certain health services in Moldova for free, some services remain uncovered. Financial barriers were the most commonly self-reported reason for not being able to access care. Regarding mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), SEIS data indicates that around one in every five individuals experienced MHPSS issues in the four (4) weeks prior to data collection. Positively, out of the 35% who tried to access MHPSS services, almost all (94%) received some type of service.¹²



Challenges in accessing healthcare services were consistently mentioned during KIs and FGDs, with many pointing out perceived inadequacies in Moldova's healthcare system, particularly the lack of qualified medical

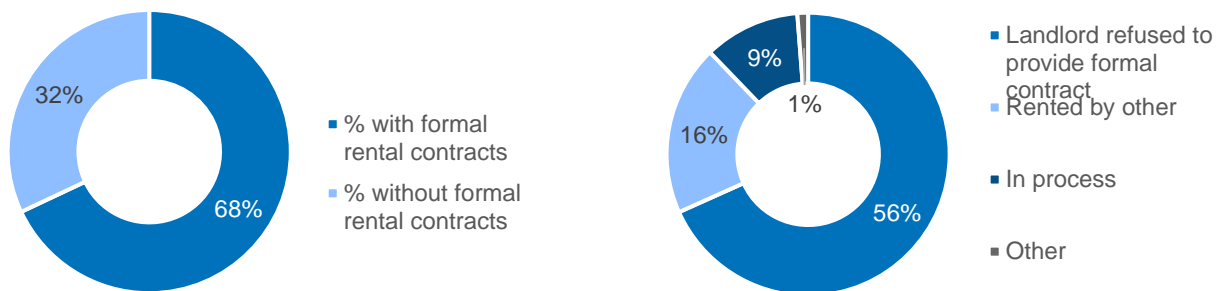
¹¹ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111606>

¹² Including psychotherapy/counseling (58%), informal support from a friend, family member or community member (28%), psychiatry/medication management (9%), and spiritual support (8%).

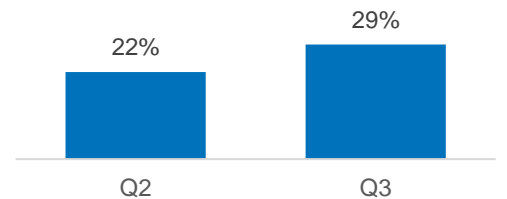
professionals. This led some refugees to return to Ukraine for treatment, especially for chronic or severe conditions. Participants dealing with health challenges, such as cancer patients, also found navigating the healthcare system in Moldova difficult and expressed frustration with the lack of support and information available. Despite the challenges, some participants shared positive experiences, particularly in Chisinau, where free medical care was available for children. This aspect of healthcare was seen as a relief by those able to access it.

Accommodation

Accommodation types varied amongst the 1,387 households surveyed. Those hosted by relatives increased slightly from 35% to 41% in the previous round, while those hosted by non-family members decreased to 13% from 22%. Respondents who indicated that they were renting private apartments or homes remained steady at 39%, while those residing in collective accommodations decreased from 7% to 4%. Accommodation was also cited as the third highest priority need for households arriving in the last three months (24%).



Among those renting apartments, more than half (68%) reported having formal rental contracts with their landlords, an increase from the previous round (56%). For respondents without a rental contract, about half (56%) indicated that the landlord had refused to provide one. This lack of formal agreements was also highlighted by FGD participants, who noted that it increased their vulnerability, leaving them with greater uncertainty and less protection against eviction or unfair treatment by landlords. Notably, of those planning to leave their current accommodations within the next three months to rent elsewhere, about one-third (29%) cited their inability to afford rent as the primary reason. This reflects an increase from previous reporting periods (22%).



Respondents who stated they can no longer afford their rent

Data from SEIS showed that only a quarter of the surveyed population were not paying for their accommodations, while 41% were fully covering their expenses (rent, utilities, etc.). Among households able to pay their rent, 76% had paid on time in the three months prior to data collection, while 19% experienced financial distress.¹³ A common issue raised by FGD participants was the financial burden of paying rent, especially after financial assistance from UNHCR was discontinued. Despite these challenges, most participants reported that they had not heard of anyone being forcibly evicted due to unpaid rent. However, the rising cost of living and the inability to meet rent payments remain ongoing concerns for many.

¹³ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111606>

CALLS TO ACTION

Strengthen support for vulnerable populations: As humanitarian assistance gradually decreases in Moldova, the needs of refugees can be expected to grow, especially among those unable to find employment. Financial assistance will continue to be needed for the most vulnerable refugees, complemented by increased access to accurate and timely information, greater employment opportunities, and strengthened community outreach. Expanded access to government social assistance programmes should also remain a priority as part of ongoing inclusion efforts.

Strengthen access to adequate accommodation: While accommodation needs have remained steady, challenges persist, especially for refugees renting privately and those residing in Refugee Accommodation Centres (RAC) that are closing. Many continue to lack formal rental agreements, increasing their vulnerability to eviction and mistreatment by landlords. Financial barriers are also significant, with one-third of renters planning to leave their current accommodations due to rising costs. Continued efforts are necessary to expand financial assistance, improve tenant protections, and ensure that refugees have access to safe, secure, and affordable housing options.

Continue to strengthen access to healthcare: While progress has been made, healthcare remains a pressing need for refugees. Significant barriers persist, including financial challenges and difficulties navigating the healthcare system. Older adults and those with chronic conditions are particularly vulnerable. Despite available services for TP beneficiaries, many still face difficulties in accessing care. Efforts to expand healthcare access and ensure the availability of information are essential to address these gaps.

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