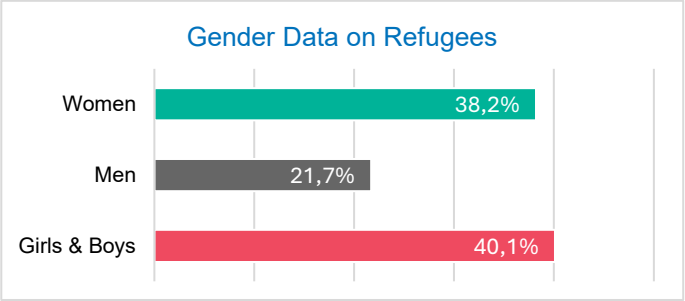
OPERATIONAL UPDATE
MAY 2026

Distribution of non-food items in Rîbnița: an older person receives blankets and a solar lamp as part of humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR to support refugees and vulnerable members of the host community. ©UNHCR/Alberto Favero

KEY FIGURES

141,058 Ukrainian refugees are in Moldova.



51,621 Ukrainian refugees granted Temporary Protection.

6,483 citizens of Ukraine granted residence permits, either permanent or temporary.

~6,022 refugees received cash assistance.

~8,000 refugees received legal assistance.

~5,900 individuals accessed information through the UNHCR-supported helpline.

~660 refugees supported with specialized GBV and Child Protection services.

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

As of May 2026, 141,058 refugees from Ukraine are in the Republic of Moldova. Refugees remaining in collective accommodation and benefitting from cash assistance programmes are among the most vulnerable and continue to face significant barriers to self-reliance, particularly amid declining humanitarian funding and the limited capacity of national systems to absorb additional needs.

In line with its strategic priorities, UNHCR will continue to reduce the number of beneficiaries receiving Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance. While the original planning scenario envisaged a sharp reduction to around 4,000 individuals by July 2026, recent post-exclusion monitoring indicates that many refugee households are struggling to cope with reduced assistance, facing immediate material deprivation and increased financial insecurity. In addition, a growing number of requests submitted through the reconsideration mechanism, alongside emerging community tensions, point to heightened protection risks.

To balance these protection concerns with the objective of supporting a gradual transition to national systems, UNHCR will adopt a gradual reduction approach, guided by strengthened verification processes, household visits, and updated vulnerability assessments. UNHCR aims to reach approximately **5,300 MPCA recipients** by November 2026, ahead of the winter period.

HIGHLIGHTS

Transitioning from Temporary Protection

As discussions intensify at both national and EU levels regarding Temporary Protection (TP) arrangements beyond March 2027, UNHCR published the report *"Transitioning from Temporary Protection: Projected Stay, Legal Pathways, and Policy Options for Refugees from Ukraine."* The report highlights that, although many refugees express a desire to return to Ukraine when conditions permit, a significant proportion are likely to remain in host countries for several years due to ongoing insecurity, widespread destruction of housing and infrastructure, continued occupation of territories, and limited livelihood opportunities in areas of origin. Planning for legal stay and socio-economic inclusion is therefore becoming an increasingly important complement to return planning.

These findings are particularly relevant for Moldova, which continues to host a relatively high proportion of vulnerable refugee households, including older people, single caregivers, persons with disabilities, and refugees from frontline or occupied regions of Ukraine. While Moldova already offers several legal pathways for longer-term stay, including residence permits based on employment, study and family reunification, protection monitoring and refugee consultations indicate that many refugees continue to face administrative, financial, documentation and information-related barriers in accessing them. Facilitating early and voluntary transitions for refugees who meet eligibility criteria, while providing clear information and legal support, could help reduce administrative pressure on national systems and support refugee self-reliance and long-term inclusion.

Against the backdrop of continued uncertainty regarding the post-2027 protection framework, the report warns against a potential “cliff-edge” scenario resulting from the abrupt expiration of Temporary Protection. Such an outcome could create legal uncertainty, disrupt access to rights and services, and increase protection risks for refugees who are unable to return safely or secure alternative legal status. In this context, UNHCR advocates for gradual and informed transition arrangements that ensure continuity of legal stay beyond March 2027. The report calls for inclusive and scalable legal pathways that extend beyond employment-based residence permits, strengthened access to information and legal counselling, and protection-sensitive stay arrangements, with asylum remaining a critical pathway for vulnerable refugees and those unable to return safely. Finally, socio-economic inclusion should be viewed not only as a humanitarian objective but also as a strategic investment in Moldova’s social and economic development.

Protection

- UNHCR’s partner Casa Marioarei completed the Girl Shine programme in Chișinău and Fălești (northern Moldova), reaching 75 adolescent girls and their caregivers, including refugee families from Ukraine. The programme strengthened girls’ self-confidence, resilience, decision-making skills, and social connectedness while improving communication within families. By strengthening protective factors and social support networks, the initiative contributed to GBV prevention and the well-being of participants.
- On 15 May, AVE Copiii marked the International Day of Family by organizing activities in three locations across central Moldova, engaging 274 children and 65 adults, including refugees and host community members. These events aimed to strengthen family relationships, promote positive parenting, and foster social cohesion. In addition, on 27 May, the Charity Centre for Refugees, in collaboration with Taras Shevchenko Gymnasium in Chișinău, organized an end-of-school-year and International Children’s Day celebration with over 200 children, including refugee children from Ukraine.
- On the Left Bank of the Nistru, UNHCR delivered non-food items (NFIs) to support refugees and vulnerable host community members. The shipment included 6,250 blankets and 3,750 solar lamps, which were distributed through a UNHCR partner across several locations. Distribution

began on 11 May in Dubăsari and continued in other communities on the Left Bank, improving access to essential assistance for beneficiaries in the region.

Community empowerment

- UNHCR expanded its Refugee Council network through the establishment of a new Refugee Council in Soroca, becoming the sixth council operating in Moldova. Bringing together refugee representatives, local activists, and community initiatives, the council strengthens refugee participation in local decision-making and supports community-led solutions to protection and inclusion challenges.
- As part of the ongoing transition towards more localized refugee coordination mechanisms and the gradual phase-out of the Refugee Response Plan, discussions have begun on strengthening the role of Refugee Councils in leading ad hoc coordination at the local level. In this context, on 14 May, UNHCR convened a Local Refugee Coordination Forum in Ungheni, bringing together 15 representatives of local authorities, public service providers, Refugee Councils, and international organizations. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss future coordination arrangements in the district and identify ways to sustain refugee inclusion and engagement through locally led structures.
- UNHCR inaugurated three Peaceful Coexistence Projects aimed at improving public infrastructure and strengthening social cohesion between refugees and host communities. Improvements at a children's hospital benefiting 40 children, including 14 refugees, included upgrades to learning, sanitation, and recreational facilities. UNHCR also rehabilitated facilities at a local lyceum attended by over 520 students, including 33 refugee children, and improved recreational infrastructure at a crèche serving more than 400 children, including 18 refugee toddlers. These interventions contributed to safer, more inclusive, and child-friendly environments for both refugee and host community children.
- In partnership with the Law Centre of Advocates, UNHCR launched the 2026 Sergio Vieira de Mello Academic Chair (SVMAC) grants programme, awarding six grants to universities and academic institutions across Moldova. The selected research projects address legal, economic, gender, social, educational, entrepreneurship and healthcare dimensions of forced displacement, contributing to informed policy engagement and stronger refugee inclusion in national systems. These research topics are of high relevance to UNHCR Moldova, as they explore key issues affecting refugees and host communities, providing valuable insights and data to inform programming, advocacy, and long-term solutions planning.

DONORS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Australia | Belgium | Denmark | European Union | Finland | Germany | Ireland | Italy | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | Private Sector Partners

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

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