

High-level Roundtable Refugee Inclusion in Moldova: Operationalizing the Temporary Protection Regime and Strengthening Prospects for Socio-economic Inclusion and Economic Growth

24 November 2022, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

Summary of discussions

Overview

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organized a high-level roundtable in Chisinau on 24 November 2022 in support of the Government of the Republic of Moldova. It aimed at facilitating a whole-of-society approach for the inclusion of refugees in Moldova through operationalizing the temporary protection regime and strengthening prospects for socio-economic inclusion and economic growth. The Republic of Moldova's Minister of Labor and Social Protection, H.E. Mr. Marcel Spatari, and UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs, participated in this strategic exchange, along with both national and local authorities, embassies, including ambassadors, the UN Resident coordinator, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the refugee community. International financial institutions, including the World Bank (WB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the International Finance Cooperation (IFC), as well as bilateral development actors, in particular the GIZ and JICA, also participated. Discussions were moderated by UNHCR's Director for the Division of Resilience and Solutions, Sajjad Malik. A total of 50 persons participated in this event.

This summary of discussions will be presented at UNHCR's High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges, to be held in Geneva on 7-8 December 2022, to highlight ways in which development cooperation can be strengthened to advance protection and inclusion, especially the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and affected communities.

Moldova Context

Moldova faces unique challenges in responding to the large-scale influx of refugees from Ukraine in recent months; it has received more arrivals *per capita* than any other country worldwide: for every 3 Moldovan citizen, one person from Ukraine arrived. The scale of arrival has placed unprecedented stress on local services and the national social protection system in a context of a worsening energy crisis, value chain disruptions, inflation and reduced remittances, and continued economic dislocation resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Unlike other refugee hosting states in the region, Moldova is not part of the European Union and does not benefit from the same regional response and internal solidarity mechanisms enjoyed by member states. The sustained support and collaboration of a range of development actors is therefore crucial.

The efforts of the Moldovan Government and society for hosting and protecting currently more than 96,913 refugees, out of a total of 706,906 refugees who have entered as of 29 November have been tremendous and the solidarity remarkable, especially given the far-reaching consequences of the war in Ukraine on the inter-related crises affecting Moldova. The rapid government reaction through the emergency regime which granted refugees access to the territory, basic services, including shelter and health, the right to work and freedom of movement, as well as the draft law on temporary protection, are fundamental steps towards effective inclusion is exemplary. However, for inclusion to materialize, the continued and increased support of the international community to Moldova for rapidly activating and operationalizing the temporary protection regime. Furthermore, the capacitation and further strengthening of national systems and services is needed

As the socio-economic effects of the war are strongly felt across the country at the beginning of this winter, both Moldovans and refugees are facing increasing hardships and require further support. In addition to addressing the present and future humanitarian needs, development interventions to ensure a 'humanitarian-development-peace nexus' approach are thus key.

To allow a targeted and comprehensive transition towards resilience-based programming and longer-term sustainable development solutions, with more investment to create opportunities and ensure that no one is left behind, the high-level roundtable has been set up.

Based on the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees, it called upon a whole-of-society approach to reduce the burden on Moldova as host society, further strengthen solidarity and promote sustainable support to refugees and affected host communities.

Key Outcomes

1. Moldova as an example of the GCR in practice

- 1.1. The international community lauded the exemplary solidarity shown to refugees by the people and Government of the Republic of Moldova at both national and local levels. Many speakers also emphasized the remarkable burden- and responsibility-sharing by the international community.
- 1.2. All roundtable speakers, including authorities, development actors, donors, UN agencies, refugee leaders and NGOs pledged to strengthen refugee inclusion.
- 1.3. The Government authorities, diplomatic missions' representatives, UN agencies, the civil society, international financial institutions, as well as development actors agreed to join efforts in consolidating a coordinated refugee response and finding sustainable solutions to benefit both refugees and Moldovans alike for inclusive, long-term socio-economic development.
- 1.4. Strong interest by participants of the roundtable in establishing a joint exchange mechanism on the nexus and refugee inclusion in follow-up of the discussions.
- 1.5. As the needs of the refugees are shifting, the strong voice of the refugees was expressed to give them the opportunity to contribute to the socio- economic development of the country

2. Operationalization of the temporary protection regime

- 2.1. The Government of Moldova committed to activate the temporary protection regime in a short term and reassured its continued support to refugees from Ukraine ("small country, big heart"). The Government called for continued support to enable refugees' access to registration, documentation, rights and services, including health and education – the significant costs of which cannot be assumed by Moldova alone.
- 2.2. According to the Government, the draft Government decision will activate temporary protection to around 100,000 beneficiaries for one year with the possibility of extension for a maximum of one more year. This regime will allow access to key services and the right to have a secure legal status in Moldova.
- 2.3. Temporary protection promotes social cohesion by supporting refugees' ability to contribute to host communities.
- 2.4. Temporary protection is the best tool that can be implemented now to change perception for refugees themselves, the private sector, local services and development actors and thus enable socio-economic inclusion.

- 2.5. Recognition of the need to measure the success of the TP regime and to put into place the necessary indicators. Need to cost services under temporary protection for enabling support by the international community.
- 2.6. Focus to be put on reaching the most vulnerable people with targeted assistance and support, ensuing that no one is left behind.
- 2.7. Coordinated information campaign to raise awareness among all relevant actors on refugees' rights and access to services under the TP regime is critical to enable effective inclusion.

3. Strengthening Prospects for Socio-economic Inclusion and Economic Growth

- 3.1. The Government committed to further strengthening the resilience of its systems and services for the benefit of all, which requires sustained support from the international community, due to the multiple crises the country is facing.
- 3.2. Solidarity and fairness were repeatedly touted as key principles for achieving a holistic approach to supporting refugees and host communities alike.
- 3.3. UNHCR reiterated support for a holistic approach and stressed the importance of linking the humanitarian response to development cooperation and inclusion, by working with development actors, engaging more with the private sector, scholars, civil society that can support directly or indirectly. Focus on a comprehensive transition towards resilience-based, innovative, long-term development solutions are needed, with more investment creating opportunities for sustainable development ensuring no one is left behind.
- 3.4. The Government emphasized the importance of collaborating closely with the local public authorities in order to ensure targeted approaches, facilitate access to services, and strengthen social cohesion. Social needs are increasing among Moldovans as well, prompting outward migration that leaves the most vulnerable remaining.
- 3.5. The Government committed to work on amending national legislation to allow more flexibility in absorbing funds and implementing new social protection programmes.
- 3.6. The Government stressed that the ongoing efforts for digitalization of data management systems for registration, assistance, monitoring and evaluation require further support, particularly focusing on training and increasing the staff
- 3.7. UNCHR, the World Bank, and UNDP committed to expand the evidence base for informing inclusion by conducting a socio-economic assessment on refugees and host communities.
- 3.8. A consensus was achieved on the need for well-functioning and inclusive platforms and mechanisms to enable a whole-of-society approach in strengthening national systems and services. Joint WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA, IOM, FCDO and MLSP project to strengthen social protection system as good example.
- 3.9. The international community reiterated the need for UN Agencies to work collectively to support the Government of Moldova in cooperating with local civil society as localization is crucial for sustaining inclusion efforts over the long term. It called for strengthening the local and regional platforms supporting Moldova by including more organizations.
- 3.10. International financial institutions reassured their support to the sustainable development of the country and committed to support infrastructure, energy, agriculture, healthcare and private sector engagement. IFC will conduct a market study on financial inclusion to assess the financial and non-financial needs of Ukrainians. It has also developed digital data corridors among international financial institutions to help refugees verify credit histories.
- 3.11. Joint efforts are required to incentivize private sector engagement for economic and financial inclusion of refugees and affected host communities.
- 3.12. Various interventions highlighted specific barriers to inclusion, including access to information, education, childcare, employment, housing, and health services, in addition to the language

barrier. The Government added that these barriers exist for some Moldovans as well as refugees from Ukraine.

- 3.13. The International Labor Organization mentioned the launch of their labor market overview., which includes support measures focused on inclusion of refugees.
- 3.14. The National Congress of Ukrainians in Moldova, a local refugee-led organization, mentioned the need to sharpen the identification and targeting of the most vulnerable refugees and host community members for particular assistance.
- 3.15. The Congress of Local Public Authorities addressed the need to include refugees in national development plans to offer more solutions for inclusion and offered its expertise to support the Government and the international community in this process.

Annex

Press release - UNHCR hosts roundtable discussion on refugee inclusion and economic growth



Chisinau, Moldova, 25 November 2022: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency hosted a roundtable discussion yesterday on refugee inclusion and economic growth. “Moldova has set an example for the world in fulfilling the vision of the Global Compact on Refugees,” said Gillian Triggs, UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection. “The roundtable explored how to ensure refugee inclusion and economic growth along with both humanitarian and development actors.”

The roundtable comprises discussion on two aspects of stabilizing development support to refugees and host communities alike. The first session focused on operationalizing a temporary protection regime for refugees from Ukraine. Minister of Labour and Social Protection Marcel Spatari explained: „Under the provisions of the Commission for Emergency Situations, some temporary facilities and rights have been granted to refugees from Ukraine in our country. In a context where the conflict is growing in Ukraine, we must be prepared with the necessary instruments to safely manage the flow of refugees and provide them with adequate forms of social protection, including in the long term, in order to facilitate social inclusion.”

This emphasis on inclusion was echoed by many participants. Jana Costachi, State Secretary in the Ministry of Internal Affairs highlighted the need for “a holistic approach, because it is not only about people and the help given to them, but also about securing a person in need.” She also drew attention to pressures on institutional resources and attention at a time when the Government is facing multiple challenges at once.

The second session discussed how different actors around the table could collaborate to promote inclusive economic growth. “A focus on a comprehensive transition towards resilience-based, long-term development solutions is needed, with more investment creating opportunities for sustainable development ensuring no one is left behind,” noted United Nations Resident Coordinator Simon Springett. “UN Moldova support to the Government will continue to focus on strengthening and supporting national systems to build resilience against future shocks and crisis, and to enhance social protection schemes benefiting both vulnerable refugees and Moldovans, families and children, while promoting social cohesion.”



Participants represented different sectors of society: all levels of government, local authorities, civil society, refugees, state partners, development actors, financial institutions and international organizations. Sajjad Malik, Director for UNHCR’s Division of Resilience and Solutions, underscored that “a whole-of-society approach is essential to allow refugees to contribute to their host communities.”

Ganna Sokur, a refugee from Ukraine who represented NGO initiative *Moldova for Peace*, presented her own example of arriving a master’s degree and a desire to actively contribute to her community. She added: “There are many favorable bases for refugee inclusion here, such as similarity of mentality, culture, and language. Targeted help, for those refugees that need particular support, is important to maximize these prospects.”

The Republic of Moldova has received nearly 698,000 arrivals from Ukraine and currently hosts over 96,600 refugees from Ukraine. A substantial number of those who remain in Moldova are women, children and elderly refugees.



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