

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

REPORT ON THE FIELD VISIT TO THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Chişinău, 9-10 March 2023



Prepared by the OSCE PA International Secretariat

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSIONS

I. Introduction

From 9 to 10 March 2023, a 7-member delegation¹ of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration consisting headed by OSCE PA Vice-President and Migration Committee Chair Rt. Hon. Mark Pritchard (MP, United Kingdom) travelled to Chişinău with the objective to learn more about how, one year on, the Republic of Moldova is dealing with the influx of people fleeing the war in neighbouring Ukraine.



The visit aimed to bring greater recognition to the significant efforts made by the Republic of Moldova to welcome over 100,000 refugees from Ukraine and ensure the safe transit of a further 700,000 persons, to identify examples of ‘best practice’ as well as highlight areas where further action is needed.

The delegation was hosted by the Delegation of the Republic of Moldova to the OSCE PA headed by Ms. Veronica

Roşca and the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova.

The OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration was established in 2016 with the aim to identify good practices with respect to migration management. It has carried out numerous field visits and developed targeted recommendations with the aim to promote comprehensive, effective and humane migration management in the OSCE area with special regard for migrants and refugees in vulnerable categories, in particular unaccompanied minors.²

¹ The following Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration took part in the visit: Chair Mark Pritchard (MP, United Kingdom), Committee Vice-Chairs Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (MP, Cyprus) and Gudrun Kugler (MP, Austria) as well as Committee Members Daniela De Ridder (MP, Germany), Mehmet Sait Kirazoglu (MP, Türkiye) and David Stögmüller (MP, Austria).

² For more on the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, please see: <https://www.oscepa.org/en/activities/ad-hoc-committees-and-working-groups/migration>.

II. Background: The 2022 Ukraine Refugee Crisis and the Republic of Moldova

Moldova is the neighbouring country to Ukraine that has received the largest number of refugees from Ukraine in relation to its population size (about 100,000 for a nation of 2.6 million inhabitants). Moldova is not a traditional destination country for refugees: prior to 24 February 2022, there were only about 400 asylum seekers in Moldova.³ Moldova has largely functioned as a transit country. At the time of the Committee's visit in March 2023, about **700,500 Ukrainian refugees** had arrived in Moldova since 24 February 2022, 90 per cent of whom were Ukrainian citizens. Of these, a little over **100,000** remained in Moldova.⁴ The vast majority continue on towards Romania and other EU countries. Early efforts therefore focused on helping people on the move. Plans were later adjusted to support the longer-term integration of those who decided to stay, including granting them legal status.

Over 60 per cent of the refugees staying in Moldova are female (including minors); children represent 27 per cent of all refugees. The highest number of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova were recorded in the capital, Chişinău; however, other districts notably those close to border crossings with Ukrainian are also hosting significant numbers of refugees.⁵

Moldova has the smallest economy in Europe – yet, according to UNHCR, it has set an example for the world in welcoming refugees.⁶ Key achievements in the refugee response include the timely implementation of cash assistance programmes for both refugees and hosting families, enhancing the legal framework related to the protection regime and legal stay arrangements for Ukrainian refugees, and the reinforcing of national social protection systems to respond to future shocks, as well as to promote improved responses to situations of gender-based violence and for the protection of refugees who are particularly vulnerable.

The Moldovan authorities established a total of 133 Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) across the country, of which 67 remained active at the end of 2022, operating at 70 per cent capacity (2,767 places occupied).⁷ As in most other countries, the large majority of refugees in Moldova (90 per cent) are hosted by families, who receive cash assistance.

The EU has also increased its funding for humanitarian programmes targeted at Ukrainian refugees hosted in Moldova. In February 2022, Moldova activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to support people fleeing Ukraine, allocating €13 million in humanitarian assistance, providing for food, water, healthcare and shelter.

³ SG/Inf(2022)33, Report of the fact-finding mission to the Republic of Moldova, Leyla Kayacik, 16 September 2022, p. 5.

⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680a818de>.

⁵ As of 12 June 2023, a total of 842,930 arrivals had been recorded from Ukraine and 102,996 Ukrainian refugees remained in Moldova. Nearly half (46 per cent) of those remaining are children. See: UNHCR, Operational Data Portal – Ukraine Refugee Situation, Daily Population Trends – The Republic of Moldova, at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/dataviz/248?sv=54&geo=10784>, accessed 12 June 2023.

⁶ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94102>.

⁷ UNHCR, *Ukraine Situation: Recalibration - Regional Refugee Response Plan (March - December 2022)*, 3 October 2022, p. 6, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/95965>.

⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/report/moldova/moldova-refugee-accommodation-centre-rac-weekly-needs-monitoring-update-27122022-enro>.

The efforts made by the Moldovan authorities to support refugees have been commended by UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi,⁸ as well as the Special Representative on Migration and Refugees of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Leyla Kayacik.⁹

Temporary Protection

The Republic of Moldova is not an EU member state and was therefore not covered by the EU Temporary Protection Directive.

The Moldovan government declared a state of emergency on 24 February 2022, and authorities established a special entry and exit regime from the country, including special measures for refugee protection. Ukrainian nationals were exempt from visa requirements for stays of up to 90 days, and several derogations from the law on asylum and foreigners were made to allow people fleeing Ukraine to stay on the territory of Moldova without a passport and without seeking asylum for up to 180 days. Ukrainian refugees also had the option to either apply for asylum or to obtain the right to stay in Moldova for a period of six months, allowing access to education, the labour market, primary and emergency healthcare.

On 18 January 2023, Moldova decided to grant temporary protection for displaced persons from Ukraine for a period of one year. The temporary protection scheme became effective on 1 March 2023, providing a more secure legal status for refugees who were granted an identity card free of charge for a period of one year, with the possibility of further extension. It was also expected to enhance socio-economic inclusion through access to employment, accommodation, basic medical assistance, education, and some forms of social assistance.¹⁰

⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2023/1/63cba1ce4/news-comment-unhcrs-grandi-praises-moldovas-role-supporting-ukrainian-refugees.html>.

⁹ SG/Inf(2022)33, Report of the fact-finding mission to the Republic of Moldova, Leyla Kayacik, 16 September 2022, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680a818de>.

¹⁰ UNHCR, Ukraine situation Flash Update #39, 27 January 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/98413>, p. 5.

III. Programme on the ground

1. The Ukraine Refugee Crisis and Moldova: The contribution of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, IGOs and NGOs



The programme of the visit kicked off on 8 March with an in-depth briefing at the OSCE Mission to Moldova by Ambassador Kelly Keiderling and senior staff on how the OSCE is supporting Moldovan authorities within the limits of its mandate.¹¹ Amb. Keiderling thus underlined that any programme dealing with combatting trafficking in human beings, gender based violence or migrants, for example, needs to

engage communities on both sides of the Dniester/Nistru river. She also emphasized that the programmes of the Mission aim to assist both refugees and host communities.

The delegation subsequently had the opportunity to engage with representatives of three major international organizations dealing with Ukrainian refugees in Moldova (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM) and two non-governmental organizations – La Strada Moldova which is based in the capital and works with socially vulnerable categories and works to prevent trafficking in human beings, and Center Resonance which is based on the left bank in the Transdnistria region.

Interlocutors praised the authorities of Moldova for their response to the significant influx of refugees from Ukraine and their efforts to ensure the access of refugees to education, health care and employment. At the same time, they highlighted the constraints due to limited resources which is mainly linked to the fact that Moldova is not a member of the EU. Access to health care (e.g., oncological care and dialysis) and childcare (about 70 per cent of refugees are women with children) were cited as specific concerns.

One of the main challenges highlighted by the interlocutors is how to integrate refugees who have a strong will to return to Ukraine, and to help them view inclusion as a win-win situation. The need for the international community to be united and strategic in its support for Moldova was also emphasized.

The decision to grant temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine starting in March 2023 was viewed as a positive step, although it was noted that significant additional resources would be needed.

A large part of the discussions focussed on access to education and how to make the Moldovan educational system more resilient in the long run if numbers of refugees increase significantly. Out of the estimated 40,000 Ukrainian children in Moldova, only about 2,400 of them were enrolled in schools in Moldova, incl. Transdnistria, in the 2022/23 school year. The three main challenges listed were: (1) limited funding; (2) insufficient data; (3) parents not being on board. Among possible explanations for why parents are not enrolling their children was the fact that Ukraine does not recognize Moldova diplomas; the uncertainty as to how long they

¹¹ See: Mandate of the Mission to Moldova, at: <https://www.osce.org/moldova/41137>.

would stay in Moldova; participation in online education offered by Ukrainian institutions; and language barriers (the official language in Moldova is Moldovan/Romanian). Enrolment had improved slightly as a consequence of Ukrainian authorities encouraging children to enrol in national educational systems. The hiring of Ukrainian teachers could potentially lead to further increased enrolment in the Moldovan educational system. However, according to the UNICEF representative, while the new temporary protection system introduces a formal requirement for enrolment, it is unclear whether this will actually lead to increased enrolment as there is no legal requirement for enrolment.

The need to invest more in the child protection system and to focus on the risks faced by the estimated 1,000 unaccompanied and separated children was also emphasized.

Other issues discussed included access to employment of refugees in Moldova – 70 per cent of whom have higher qualifications – and the potential positive impact of temporary protection which should allow refugees to plan ahead rather than from month to month.

The situation of refugees in Transdnistria was also touched upon. About 70 per cent of refugees in Transdnistria are from the Odessa region in Ukraine and are able to travel back and forth. One positive aspect was that refugees there face minimum bureaucracy when enrolling their children in schools.

2. Overview of the initiatives of Parliament

The Chair of the Committee on National Security, Defense and Public Order of the Parliament of Moldova, Lilian Carp, provided the delegation with an overview of the initiatives of parliament following the start of the influx of refugees from Ukraine. Moldova facilitated the transit of refugees through the country at the border crossing in Palanca (Moldova's easternmost point) with the assistance of Romania which is a main destination country.

It is also hosting 104,000 Ukrainian citizens, of whom 48,000 are children, and 38,000 are women and only about 17,000 men.



Main steps included the declaration of a state of emergency in February 2022, and the opening of 130 placement centres, although the majority of refugees were hosted by families. Legislative amendments were necessary to allow for the provision of financial support to host families.

The discussion addressed the reasons why Moldova was attracting such large numbers of refugees. In addition to being a neighbouring country, enabling refugees to return to Ukraine (refugees in Moldova are mainly from the Odessa region in Southeast Ukraine), it was also pointed out that the absence of linguistic barriers (90 per cent of people in Moldova speak Russian) was another factor. Moldovan authorities had been expecting an increase in arrivals during the winter, but this did not materialise. A new wave of refugees was however expected due to shelling by Russia.

Another issue touched upon was access to education, with Mr. Carp emphasizing that Ukrainian children enjoyed equal access and were also provided meals in primary schools on

the same basis as Moldovan children. One challenge is that Ukrainian children do not want to attend schools in Moldova as they are following online classes taught from Ukraine. Moldovan authorities have tried to facilitate their online attendance by providing computers.

In terms of employment, Ukrainians are mainly employed as nurses and dentists.

Overall, Moldova had done a good job of coping with the flow of refugees despite the economic situation and would continue to do its best, Mr. Carp concluded.

3. Focus on children

The People's Advocate for Children's Rights, Ms. Maia Bănărescu, summarised the activities of her office in support of children from Ukraine, also touching upon the issue of street children.

She commended the decision to introduce temporary protection from 1 March 2023 as this would enable authorities to enhance the protection of children's rights. Challenges included: language barriers and the lack of interpretation services; ensuring the provision of quality education to children in their mother tongue; lack of information on exact number of children in Moldova (authorities only have information on the number of children in Moldovan educational system, and hope to have data on overall number of children after the introduction of temporary protection); and the lack of disaggregated data on children with disabilities, and the geographic distribution of children within the country.



The low level of attendance of Moldovan schools was also addressed, with Ms. Bănărescu noting that parents prefer to send their children to Russian or Ukrainian rather than Romanian language schools. Kindergartens, on the other hand, were popular and there was a need to increase the capacity of pre-school institutions in the capital. Moldovan authorities have certified Ukrainian high school diplomas to enable access to Moldovan universities. According to Ms. Bănărescu, temporary protection entails an obligation for parents to enrol their children in Moldovan schools in order to fulfil their right to education.

Concerns were also raised regarding the safety of children in refugee reception centres, and trafficking risks, especially in facilities not officially approved by the social assistance authorities.

The lack of access to education of Roma children was also raised. Roma prefer to stay together in reception centres, the People's Advocate for Children noted, and do not send their children to school. They cannot attend online classes either as these centres do not have Internet access.

Ms. Bănărescu also mentioned an initiative to draft a law to grant citizenship to children born on Moldovan territory to prevent statelessness.

4. Joint Crisis Management Centre

The Joint Crisis Management Centre (JCMC) was set up as an ad hoc structure following the declaration of the state of emergency in February 2022. Its mission is to take the necessary measures to manage the flow of refugees in a prompt and timely manner, together with other relevant institutions/parties, in order to maintain an adequate level of economic and social stability of the Moldovan state. Headed by Colonel Adrian Efros since 31 March 2022, it consists of representatives from the Ministries of Interior (General Inspectorate for Migration), Education, Health, Labour and Social Protection as well as border police. UNHCR also participates in its work and helped develop a contingency plan.



JCMC Chair Efros shared his assessment of the present refugee situation which was stable as the number of entries were almost the same as the number of exits. The JCMC is working with the assumption that the number of refugees could increase substantially as a consequence of intensification of military action in border regions.

Moldova had furthermore received a total of 13,189 asylum applications during the state of emergency, 89 per cent of which were from Ukrainian citizens. Looking at applications for Temporary Protection (which would be granted for a period of one year until March 2024 with the potential for extension for an additional year), 137 had been received although none had been granted yet. The granting of TP did not preclude the possibility of applying for refugee status or other forms of protection in another country.

- ***Transport and relocation***

The Moldovan government developed partnerships with external partners to facilitate the transport of refugees from the border to other parts of the country as well as abroad via road, rail and air (“green corridor”).

As of 1 March 2023, 2,351 foreigners from Ukraine had been relocated: 40 per cent (983 persons) to Germany followed by Austria (576), Lithuania (249), France (147), Norway (141), Switzerland (68), Spain (57), Ireland (42), The Netherlands (37), Latvia (34), and smaller numbers to Italy, Iceland, Portugal, Lichtenstein and Greece. A total of 1,123 foreigners had benefitted from IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return programme to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation and others.

- ***Food security***

The working group on food security ensures the provision of food to refugees in the reception centres as well as the provision of food and basic necessities to refugees living on their own. A total of 2.9 million meals have been provided by the working group and a further 1.9 million by the World Food Programme (WFP).

- ***Accommodation***

Initially, 106 Reception and Accommodation Centres (RACs) were established, of which 72 centres remain open. While capacity is 6,283, occupancy is at 3,236 (about 50 per cent).

- ***Education***

According to the JCMC, there are 44,751 refugee children in Moldova of whom 1,178 are in the educational system. A large majority (86.5 per cent) are in Russian language schools.

- ***Health care***

Refugees from Ukraine are granted free access to emergency and primary health care in Moldova. Cancer treatment is being provided to 525 persons; 1,330 persons are under dialysis.

- ***Employment and Social inclusion***

About 140 companies have offered to hire refugees and have provided information about 1,958 vacancies. A total of 1,000 refugees have been registered for job support, of whom a majority are based in Chişinău (756). Nearly 73% (729) are women.

- ***Cash assistance***

Nearly 65,000 refugees/30,000 families are enrolled in UNHCR's cash assistance programme throughout the country, with the largest segment of recipients being women aged 18-59 followed by women over 60.

The delegation was also briefed on the financing of measures through emergency funds as well as operational management issues and the participation of external partners such as UNHCR, WFP and NGOs.

5. General Inspectorate for Migration, Ministry of Internal Affairs

At the ensuing briefing by Mr. Mihail Vodă, Director of the General Inspectorate for Migration, Committee members were able to discuss issues related to asylum procedures and expectations from the new temporary protection (TP) regime in greater depth.

Mr. Vodă underlined that the authorities had a good knowledge of the situation in February 2022 but lacked the necessary human and financial resources to respond to the refugee influx, with some staff working up to 72 hours non-stop at the Palanca border crossing.

He also explained that the decision to grant TP took time as it entails financial resources.

The discussion also touched upon non-Ukrainian refugees (Third Country Nationals - TCNs), as well as the decision by Moldovan authorities to stop granting transit visas through Ukraine to the EU due to concerns about illegal migration schemes.

Vodă also pointed out that thanks to new legislation, babies born in Moldova would obtain Moldovan citizenship.

Committee members enquired about specific procedures for Unaccompanied Minors (UAMs) and challenges due to minors travelling with relatives rather than parents. Mr. Vodă emphasized that each case was assessed individually, and that they paid due consideration to family reunification and countering risks of trafficking. Each UAM is assigned a tutelar authority, also for those in the 16-18 age category. The delegation was also informed that, although there had been "signs" (e.g. cases of Roma travelling with many children), there were

no confirmed cases of trafficking in human beings amongst refugees from Ukraine. One potential explanation advanced by Mr. Vodă was the lack of language barriers: Moldovans speak Russian, making it easier for people to contact authorities.

In conclusion, Mr. Vodă underlined the good cooperation between Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities and noted that Moldova had acted as a security safeguard for the EU.

6. Access to employment and social services

In a lively and frank discussion with Minister of Labour and Social Protection Alexei Buzu, Committee members addressed the challenges facing Moldovan authorities as they move from an emergency response to the task of integrating refugees, against the context of weak institutions, and limited human and financial resources. The Ukrainian crisis exposed the weaknesses of the Moldovan system, the Minister noted. He also deplored the low quality of employment services which are not relevant for Moldovan citizens either. He also questioned the reliability of data according to which only 1,000 Ukrainians had found work in Moldova.



The biggest challenge, according to Minister Buzu, is in the field of education. It was vital to ensure that children, who had already missed out on education due to Covid-19 and then the war. They will have to rebuild their country, we therefore owe it to them to provide quality education, he emphasized.

The Minister also highlighted the importance of an inclusive response, noting that more could also be done to integrate not only disabled refugees but Moldovan

citizens with disabilities, as well as Roma. He also stressed that authorities would do whatever necessary including reducing the budget of core programmes to help Ukrainian refugees. The need to maintain the support of the general population was also stressed while noting that authorities did not have funds to carry out polls to assess the level of public support.

The discussion also touched upon more general social issues such as child poverty rates which are as high as 35 per cent in rural areas, noting that these were statistics dating back to 2021. Moldovan authorities are planning on hiring more social workers to work with children in need, as well as Roma. A pilot scheme for unaccompanied minors has also been launched.

While the Minister expressed appreciation for the contribution of the many civil society organizations which have come to Moldova over the past year to help with the refugee crisis, he also stressed the need for more coordination. In conclusion, the Minister underlined the need for development assistance and not just humanitarian help.

7. Access to education

Ms. Adriana Cazacu, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education and Research, focussed on the challenges in ensuring the access of Ukrainian children to education, rooted in the lack of data on their exact numbers and location within the country. There are an estimated 44,000 Ukrainian children in the country of whom about 2,500 are enrolled in general educational

institutions and another 2,000 in kindergartens. It is hoped that temporary protection would give authorities a more precise picture, she noted.

Moldovan authorities are in contact with Ukrainian counterparts concerning the children following online instruction and are following their recommendation to allow them to continue online education and have taken steps to facilitate this. Explanations for why online education was so popular include: language barriers (only 150 out of the 2,500 children are enrolled in Romanian-language schools), differences in the curriculum, and hopes to return to Ukraine (children are from border areas). The State Secretary

underlined the importance of attending local schools in order to socialise, noting that there were also instances of children who follow both online classes and attend local schools in order to mix with other children.

The discussion also touched upon vulnerable categories, such as children with a Roma background and children with special needs. While no cases of the latter have been registered yet amongst the refugees, the Ministry is carrying out a mapping exercise. The State Secretary concluded by noting that Moldova was making progress in the area of inclusive education.

8. The role of local authorities: Chişinău municipality

The delegation received a warm welcome at Chişinău town hall from Mayor Ion Ceban who presented an overview of the measures implemented by his office to welcome refugees,



including the conversion of the MoldExpo Covid-19 centre into a reception centre and the engagement of 800 public servants as well as 600 volunteers. MoldExpo no longer operates as a reception centre.

He also expressed gratitude for assistance received from abroad including from Germany, Spain and Italy. No big influx had been observed in the capital since May 2022 he noted. The mayor also touched upon access to medical care which falls within the area of competence of municipalities. A new housing programme is also planned.

Regarding access to education, the Mayor explained that most children preferred Russian-language to Ukrainian language schools in Moldova as they are from the south of Ukraine.

The discussion touched upon challenges, with Mayor Ceban highlighting how to cover the expenditures of the municipality to deal with the crisis as the main challenge faced.



9. Visit to a reception centre

The delegation visited a small facility on the outskirts of the capital on Doina Street which falls under the competence of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The centre is hosting about 150 persons, mostly mothers and children as well as persons with disabilities.

The residents expressed their appreciation for the efforts by Moldova to welcome them. They also expressed concerns over rumours that the centre would be closed down and its residents dispersed, emphasizing the bonds that had been created and called for the centre to receive official accreditation as a refugee centre.



10. De-brief with the State Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

In the last meeting with the State Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Ms. Jana Costachi, the Committee members shared their impressions from the two days of briefings and discussions and commended the Moldovan authorities for their immense efforts to respond to the mass arrivals of refugees from Ukraine.

The State Secretary stressed the eagerness of Moldova to become an EU Member, and that Moldova's warm welcoming of Ukrainian refugees was its way of showing that Moldova is European. She also highlighted new challenges being faced by Moldova linked to the rise in asylum applications (from 70 last year to over 14,000 in 2023) and insufficient capacity to process requests. Moldova does not have an embassy in many of the countries where the asylum seekers are from. It is also having to deal with potential abuse of the scheme and security concerns. The State Secretary also expressed a wish for greater financial and human resources.

The issue of countering trafficking in human beings amongst refugees was also discussed, with Committee members expressing their surprise that no cases had been identified. The State Secretary expanded on special border procedures for three vulnerable categories: young women, unaccompanied minors and elderly people with disabilities. She indeed concurred that there were no identified cases of trafficking, only suspected cases amongst the Roma community. Ms. Costachi also stressed the need to do more to address risks of trafficking online and informed the delegation that Moldova was in the process of elaborating a national plan to prevent the online recruitment of children.

IV. Post-Visit Update

In response to a follow up request for additional clarifications after completion of the visit, the following information was received from UNICEF:

What is the estimated numbers of Unaccompanied and Separated Children fleeing Ukraine and are there any concerns related to this category?

- UNICEF, in collaboration with UNHCR as well as its partners, has identified a total of 953 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) – 827 separated and 126 unaccompanied.
- UASC are benefiting from protection assistance and referral services, including temporary accommodation, placement in foster families, family tracing and reunification.

What is the procedure for applying for Temporary Protection in Moldova for UASC and could granting of TP prejudice family reunification or the granting of TP in another country?

- It has been confirmed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) that all unaccompanied AND separated children will need to be registered by guardianship authorities.
- If an adult has a power of attorney, this is not giving authorization to represent the children for registration so only the guardianship authority can register separated children under TP. The MLSP and General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM) are however still discussing the process for separated children.
- As for the technical issue that generally each phone number can only be used for one family, it was discussed that they are in the process of developing “user accounts” that would allow certain people, including the Guardianship Authority, to register several unrelated children.
- UNICEF and UNHCR will support social assistants from the Guardianship Authority for the registration of UASC including through trainings/capacity building. Specific awareness information on the TP registration for UASC is also under development.
- TP is not prejudicial to family reunification and family reunification will happen – including in another country – when necessary and in the best interest of the child. If a child is reunified outside Moldova, his status will be updated and he can benefit from TP from another country.

Any concerns regarding trafficking in human beings, esp. amongst UASC?

- Actually UNICEF has identified cases of trafficking among refugees (mainly women and girls – 26 cases), mainly through its partner Center for Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. Indeed, and given the continued volatility of the humanitarian situation in Ukraine and potential additional population movement to and through Moldova, as well as protection risks faced by women and children including trafficking, UNICEF opened a Blue Dot within the Center for Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings to support refugee women and children who are victims or at risks of trafficking but also to prevent trafficking at the

community level. In 2022, 502 women and children at risks received Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and protection assistance.

- Women and girls sex trafficking remain a serious concern, particularly for undocumented or stateless persons and Roma women and girls. Recent reports highlight concerns over new forms of trafficking (mainly online) which are on the rise.
- Risks of multiple forms of gender-based violence (GBV) – including trafficking – increase in refugee settings, with women and girls but also UASC being at significant risk. In this regard, a number of critical risks and concerns have been identified in the Moldova Safety Audit conducted jointly by UNHCR, UNFPA and UNICEF, in coordination with the GBV Sub-Working Group of the refugee response coordination Moldova. Risks of trafficking have been reported whilst fleeing the conflict in Ukraine, at border points, and throughout the route. Concerns related to sexual exploitation in private host accommodation, physical violence, trafficking risks and sexual harassment were raised by refugee women, adolescents and UASC in the Safety Audit.

Are there any issues related to children with special needs amongst Ukrainian refugees?

- Following UNICEF advocacy, we ensured refugee children with disabilities have access to social services. According to the Decision of the Commission for Exceptional Situations No. 54 of December 16, 2022 “By derogation from the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, by the decision of the personal assistance service providers, children with disabilities, refugees from Ukraine, benefit from personal assistance based on the certificate obtained in Ukraine”. However, some obstacles remain for children and adults with disabilities to access humanitarian assistance and services due to physical barriers as well as lack of inclusive information.
- In the area of education, UNICEF is providing assistive technologies for access to learning materials for children with disabilities, as well as teacher training and that will benefit not just refugee children but also Moldovan children with disabilities. Inclusive education services were identified as a major gap in the country before the onset of the Ukraine emergency, hence the work along the humanitarian development nexus will help strengthen inclusive education for all children in Moldova.

V. Observations of the Chair

The Moldovan authorities have made tremendous efforts to welcome over 100,000 persons fleeing the war in Ukraine and to facilitate the safe transit of a further 700,000. They have opened up their homes and helped them access to education, employment, health care and other basic services. This is a great feat for such a small country with limited resources and which is not a member of the European Union. Furthermore, since 1 March 2023, displaced persons from Ukraine have the possibility to apply for Temporary Protection which should give them a greater degree of stability and easier access to jobs and other services.

At the same time, the message conveyed by our interlocutors is clear. Political will needs to be backed up by a significant increase in human and financial resources. The Ukraine refugee crisis has exposed the weaknesses of the Moldovan social system, which is struggling to meet the needs of its own citizens. The country needs not just humanitarian assistance to help it cope with the important task of integrating Ukrainian refugees but also development aid.

Access to education

The field of education was identified as a critical sector in need of further support. The authorities have displayed a great degree of flexibility in the face of the low share of children currently attending local schools, providing them with the necessary support to continue to attend online education provided by Ukrainian institutions. This is also linked to the specific characteristics of most of the refugees who have remained in Moldova: they tend to come from the Odesa region across the border and hope to return to Ukraine as soon as possible.

Authorities are confident that the new Temporary Protection system established in March 2023, which requires beneficiaries to register, will give them a better picture of the number of children in Moldova and their educational needs. At the same time, it is unclear whether attendance of online classes will be considered as meeting the children's right to education and is therefore not expected to lead to a significant increase in enrolment. Still, authorities agree that they need to strengthen the resilience of the educational sector in Moldova and its capacity to absorb up to 40,000 refugee children as an important step in their socialization, mental health, integration, and also to minimize risks of trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

Projects to identify children with special needs, be they refugees from Ukraine or Moldovan, should also be encouraged with a view to further enhancing the inclusiveness of the Moldovan educational system.

Access to employment and social services

Employment rates of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova are very low. According to official data from February 2023, only about 1,000 Ukrainian citizens were employed in Moldova. In our discussions, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection pointed to issues with the official data. He also recognized the need to improve the quality of employment services for all residents, not just refugees, as well as to invest more in education.

Support is also needed to tackle rising child poverty rates, which is as high as 35 per cent in rural areas, and in the area of social work to support children in need.

Unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable categories of refugees

The need to invest more in the child protection system and to focus on the risks faced by unaccompanied and separated children (estimated to number about 1,000) was also stressed.

Addressing the needs of persons with disabilities and the elderly is another area where both refugees from Ukraine and Moldovan citizens stand to benefit from. Our interlocutors noted that some obstacles remain for children and adults with disabilities to access humanitarian assistance and services due to physical barriers as well as lack of inclusive information.

Finally, displaced Roma from Ukraine appear to face particular challenges in accessing accommodation, employment and basic services throughout the region. Due to their marginalization, the risks of trafficking and other forms of exploitation notably in the area of employment, could be even higher for Roma refugees.

Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and GBV amongst Ukrainian refugees

The Committee has noted discrepancies between statistics on the number of identified victims of trafficking amongst the Ukrainian refugee community communicated by authorities and figures shared by UN agencies and non-governmental actors working on the ground. This was the case both in the Czech Republic and also here in Moldova. Moldovan authorities stated that they had not identified any cases, although they suspected there might be some instances of trafficking. UNICEF reported having identified 26 cases— mainly of women and girls, thanks to a local partner organization. UNICEF highlighted concerns of ongoing risks of gender-based violence and sex trafficking cases, in particular for undocumented or stateless persons and Roma women and girls.

These discrepancies point to the need to strengthen referral mechanisms and to further invest in the capacity building of first responders. As the large majority of Ukrainian refugees are hosted privately, the scope for monitoring by authorities is limited. It is therefore essential to also build strong partnerships with non-governmental actors working on the ground.

There were concerns expressed regarding the safety of children in refugee reception centres which had not been officially approved, particularly amongst those with a Roma background.

The need to counter new forms of trafficking (mainly online) was also raised by both governmental and non-governmental interlocutors.

There appears to be a low level of awareness and concern about the risks of labour exploitation, notably in the “hidden economy” such as the agricultural and construction sectors.

Data-driven policies

This brings me to a more general issue of data-driven policies. The lack of reliable data on the numbers of refugees and different sub-categories as well as their geographical distribution within Moldova and special needs was a recurrent theme. This is a challenge shared by all countries receiving large numbers of refugees over a short period of time but especially for a small country such as Moldova unaccustomed to such situations. This undermines efforts to develop effective policies and monitoring systems. It is hoped that the introduction of temporary protection in Moldova and the associated registration requirements will help address some of these gaps. While the participation of the beneficiaries themselves in the design and implementation of policies is critical to success, surveys, too, can provide important insight and represent another area where support is needed.

ANNEX I – Final Programme and Participants

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

Field Visit to the Republic of Moldova (9-10 March 2023)

FINAL PROGRAMME

Thursday, 9 March

09:00-10:30	<u>OSCE Mission to Moldova</u>
09:00-09:30	Meeting with Head of Mission Amb. Kelly KEIDERLING
09:30-10:30	Roundtable with representatives of IGOs and NGOs <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Francesca BONELLI, UNHCR Representative to Moldova• Mr. Ilija TALEV, Deputy Representative, Officer-in-Charge, and Ms. Veronica GOINIC, Child Protection Officer, UNICEF Moldova• Mr. Ghenadie CRETU, IOM• Mr. Alexandru GONCHAR, Director, Center Resonance• Ms. Doina CAZACU, Programme Director, La Strada International Center
10:45-11:30	Meeting with Mr. Lilian CARP, Chair of the Committee on National Security, Defense and Public Order
11:45-12:30	Meeting with Ms. Maia BĂNĂRESCU, People's Advocate for Children's Rights
14:20-15:05	Meeting with Colonel Adrian EFROS, Head of the Joint Crisis Management Centre
15:35-16:20	Meeting with Mr. Mihail VODĂ, Director of the General Inspectorate for Migration, Ministry of Internal Affairs
16:50-17:50	Visit of Reception Centre at 104 Doina Street

Friday, 10 March

08:45-09:30	Meeting with Mr. Alexei BUZU, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova
10:00-10:45	Meeting with Ms. Adriana CAZACU, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova
11:00-11:45	Meeting with Mr. Ion CEBAN, General Mayor of Chişinău
12:00-13:30	Working Lunch hosted by the Delegation of Moldova to the OSCE PA
13:50-14:35	Meeting with Ms. Jana COSTACHI, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Moldova

MEMBERS OF THE OSCE PA DELEGATION

Members of the Committee

1. Vice-President Mark PRITCHARD (MP, United Kingdom), Chair
2. Mr. Kyriakos HADJIYIANNI (MP, Cyprus), Vice-Chair
3. Ms. Gudrun KUGLER (MP, Austria), Vice-Chair
4. Ms. Daniela DE RIDDER (MP, Germany)
5. Mr. Mehmet Sait KIRAZOGLU (MP, Türkiye)
6. Mr. David STÖGMÜLLER (MP, Austria)

Staff

7. Mr. Sherif ABDILI, Programme and Administrative Officer, OSCE PA Vienna Office
8. Ms. Farimah DAFTARY, Senior Advisor, OSCE PA International Secretariat, Copenhagen
9. Ms. Ecem DANIK GÖKÇE, Secretary of the Delegation of Türkiye to the OSCE PA
10. Ms. Diana UNGUREANU, Secretary of the Delegation of Moldova to the OSCE PA

ANNEX II – Statement

Moldova's efforts in hosting and providing safe transit to Ukrainian refugees applauded by OSCE PA migration committee

CHISINAU, 10 March 2023 – Members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration today concluded a two-day field visit to Moldova, where they met ministers, legislators, stakeholders and policy advocates to learn more about the country's significant efforts in hosting more than 100,000 individuals fleeing the war in Ukraine.

The OSCE PA delegation praised Moldova's positive achievements in welcoming refugees and facilitating the safe transit of more than 600,000 people towards Europe, especially in light of the fact that Moldova was not previously a country of destination for refugees. They also highlighted several challenges and identified areas where the Parliamentary Assembly and OSCE participating States can provide assistance. Main topics addressed included vulnerable categories of refugees, such as unaccompanied and separated children, children with special needs, Roma children, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities, as well as measures to counter risks of trafficking in human beings and gender-based violence.

"Moldova deserves a good deal of credit for following many best practices when it comes to hosting refugees," said Ad Hoc Committee on Migration Chair Mark Pritchard (United Kingdom) today. "Not only has the country enabled access to employment, with nearly 1,000 Ukrainian nationals currently employed in Moldova, but its implementation of a new temporary protection scheme for Ukrainian refugees until March 2024 will provide them with a more secure legal status, further enhancing access to accommodation, education, employment, primary health care and social assistance."

Moldova is experiencing ongoing challenges in integrating refugees, as most of them hope to return to Ukraine in the near future, and against the background of insufficient human and financial resources. This is a particular challenge when it comes to the field of education – although Moldovan authorities have also facilitated access to online education provided by Ukrainian institutions; and in the field of employment and social services where improvements would benefit the greater population, not just Ukrainian refugees.

Other participants in the visit to Moldova included Ad Hoc Committee Vice-Chairs Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus) and Gudrun Kugler (Austria), as well as committee members Daniela De Ridder (Germany), Mehmet Sait Kirazoğlu (Türkiye), and David Stögmüller (Austria).

The OSCE parliamentarians emphasized that migration is a priority area for the OSCE PA, and that Moldova's efforts in responding to the Ukrainian refugee crisis will help inform discussion within the Assembly as it develops policy guidelines aimed at enhancing migration governance. They stressed that the Moldovan people and government have shown remarkable solidarity with refugees since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine began over one year ago, despite limited resources and pressing concerns.

The delegation met with Minister of Labour and Social Protection Alexei Buzu, State Secretary of the Ministry of Education Adriana Cazacu, State Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Jana Costachi, representatives of the Bureau of Migration and Asylum, Head of the Crisis Management Center Adrian Efros, Chair of the Parliament's Committee on National Security, Defense and Public Order Lilian Carp, People's Advocate for Children's Rights Maia Bănărescu, Chişinău Mayor Ion Ceban, as well as the Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova,

Ambassador Kelly Keiderling, and Members of Moldova's OSCE PA Delegation. In addition, the OSCE PA members met with representatives of an array of inter-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, including UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, Center Resonance, and La Strada International Center. The delegation also visited a reception centre hosting primarily women and children as well as disabled persons from Ukraine.

This week's visit to Moldova is the second field visit of the committee focusing on the Ukraine refugee situation, following up on the [visit to the Czech Republic last December](#), to highlight the efforts of countries to welcome refugees and to grant them protection efficiently and with dignity. President Margareta Cederfelt (Sweden) also visited Moldova April 2022, together with OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Valiant Richey.

Photos of the visit are [available on Flickr](#).

For more information on the work of the OSCE PA's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, [please click here](#).