

MOLDOVA

Ukrainian refugees

START
NETWORK

acaps

Briefing note
14 March 2022



KEY FIGURES

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

On 24 February 2022, the Russian Government announced a large-scale military operation against Ukraine (BBC 24/02/2022). As at 8 March 2022, the Ukrainian Government had reported attacks in ten regions. The Russian army controlled zones in four regions in the north (Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Sumy), three in the east (Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhia), and two in the south (Kherson and Mykolaiv) (NYT accessed 13/03/2022; NYT 09/03/2022).

As at 12 March 2022, the OHCHR recorded 1,581 civilian casualties, with 579 people killed and 1,002 injured (OCHA 12/03/2022). Although the Russian advance on Ukraine has been slower than expected, according to the Ukrainian Government (AP News 09/03/2022), more than 2,698,280 civilians had left Ukraine as at 13 March 2022 (UNHCR accessed 13/03/2022).

The Moldovan Government has stated that it will keep its borders open and offer refugees humanitarian aid (Al Jazeera 26/02/2022). UNHCR projected that at least 100,000 Ukrainians would arrive in Moldova by July 2022 as a result of the crisis in Ukraine (UNHCR 01/03/2022). As at 10 March 2022, this number had been surpassed, with 104,929 Ukrainians already in Moldova. Although not all refugees plan to stay in Moldova, other estimates suggest that at least 120,000 refugees could be intending to stay by the end of March (Help Age 10/03/2022). The Government has also removed any legal barriers for Ukrainians to work in Moldova (The Globe and Mail 04/03/2022). While the country has not received the highest number of refugees in the region, it has the highest influx in proportion to its total population, with refugees currently at 4% (UNHCR accessed 11/03/2022). In response to the high influx, the country has declared a state of emergency and has indicated that it faces a heavy economic burden, with limited capacities to cope with the rapid increase in refugee numbers (Euronews 07/03/2022; Euractiv 01/03/2022; The Globe and Mail 01/03/2022).

The Moldovan population, its Government, and humanitarian organisations have mobilised to help refugees. Given the large number of displaced people, there remains a need for food, shelter, and NFIs (IWPR 26/02/2022; The Globe and Mail 04/03/2022).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

Ukrainian authorities are on alert for a potential Russian attack on Odessa (France 24 11/03/2022; El País 09/03/2022; Al Jazeera 09/03/2022). Odessa is less than 60km away from one of the four crossing points between Moldova and Ukraine. Although it takes 24 hours to reach Odessa from Moldova, an attack on the former could quickly increase the number of displaced people moving towards the latter (UNHCR 01/03/2022).

The EU estimates that the Russian attack could cause four million Ukrainians to try to leave the country (The Guardian 02/03/2022). Russia has already claimed control over Kherson. It may seek to continue its military escalation into other southern Ukraine regions because of the area's connection to Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and Transnistria, a separatist region in Moldova where Russia has over 2,000 troops (Al Jazeera 02/03/2022; CSIS 13/01/2022). A Russian military escalation across Ukraine's southern regions could rapidly increase the number of refugees in Moldova, given that it is the closest country to several of the regions that could come under attack (TRT World 18/02/2022).

Moldova is a transit country for many Ukrainian refugees, which is why, since 24 February 2022, 300,000 Ukrainian refugees (including the 104,000 still in the country) have passed through Moldova. They arrive in Moldova, stay for a few days, then transit to other countries. By 10 March 2022, the Moldovan and Romanian Governments were discussing an initiative for people arriving in Moldova to be transferred by the Moldovan Government to the Romanian border (IOM and UNHCR 10/03/2022). This initiative could encourage more Ukrainians to use Moldova as a transit zone, which would increase temporary accommodation needs.

AS AT 10 MARCH

+100,000

UKRAINIAN
REFUGEES
ARE ALREADY
IN MOLDOVA

300,000

UKRAINIAN
REFUGEES HAVE
TRANSITED THROUGH
MOLDOVA

89%

OF UKRAINIAN
REFUGEES IN MOLDOVA
ARE WOMEN AND
CHILDREN.

28%

OF UKRAINIAN
REFUGEES IN MOLDOVA
REPORTED NEEDING
URGENT MEDICATION



HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

As at 9 March 2022, refugee centres established by Moldova were accessible to humanitarian workers. There were no major restrictions.

There are concerns about Moldova's security in case violence escalates in Transnistria, but there remain no indications of escalation so far (Euronews 07/03/2022; Balkan Insight 25/02/2022; The Week 07/03/2022; New Eastern Europe 21/02/2022).

SECTORAL NEEDS

Shelter and NFIs

All refugees passing through Moldova need temporary shelter, whether they wish to remain in the country or transit to elsewhere (RFE/RL 28/02/2022 and 07/03/2022). As at 6 March 2022, the Moldovan Government had established 74 temporary shelters; 5,000 individuals (or 82% of their capacity) currently stay in these shelters. The remaining refugees are in hotels or other forms of paid temporary accommodation. The sites bordering Ukraine report the greatest needs, as people do not have sufficient transportation options to move to sites in the rest of the country. Shelters also report limited access to water and sanitation facilities (UNHCR 07/03/2022).

The Moldovan Government has already appealed for international assistance, anticipating that the high number of refugees may deplete available food, drinking water, and NFIs (Euronews 07/03/2022; EC 28/02/2022; G4 Media 02/03/2022). The Moldovan Government has also appealed to its own population for beds, quilts, blankets, clothes, and hygiene items, as it claims it does not have the capacity to care for the refugees (Stiri pe surse 02/03/2022).

So far, at least half of Ukrainian refugee arrivals intend to only temporarily stay in Moldova, so temporary shelters are still sufficient to accommodate them (RFE/RL 28/02/2022; UNHCR 07/03/2022). On the other hand, if, as the UNHCR anticipates, a minimum of 100,000 Ukrainians seek Moldova as a final destination, reception capacity may struggle (UNHCR 01/03/2022).

Protection

89% of refugees in Moldova are women and children, partly because of the mass enlistment of men ages 18–60 in the Ukrainian military (UNHCR 07/03/2022; Vox 02/03/2022). This proportion creates the risk of increased gender-based violence and special protection needs for pregnant refugee women, particularly those giving birth soon (UNFPA accessed 13/03/2022). During mass displacement, the risk of sexual violence and exploitation considerably increases (UNFPA 13/11/2020; IRC 07/03/2022; Council of Europe 07/03/2022). Some organisations have warned of the possibility of sexual violence being used as a weapon of war, which would require countries receiving refugees to provide mental healthcare for abused women during flight (The Workers Rights 27/02/2022). There are also reports of unaccompanied children crossing from Ukraine (Vox 03/03/2022; HotNews 01/03/2022). Unaccompanied children are more likely to be victims of violence and sexual and labour exploitation. They often have limited access to healthcare and education as well (FRA 09/12/2021).

Health and WASH

Around 28% of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova have reported needing urgent medication for pre-existing medical conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular problems, and muscle pain. 19% of refugees have reported needing urgent medical assistance (Help Age 10/03/2022). Moldova has reported not having enough medical staff in the country to cope with the wave of refugees (ITV 11/03/2022). 25% of refugees have reported not having access to hygiene items, such as soap, shampoo, and toothbrushes (Help Age 10/03/2022). Overcrowding in shelters can spread diseases and further strain the health system (UNHCR 07/03/2022).



AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Inflation and gas and electricity supply

Ukraine and Russia are Moldova's largest sources of food, with 40% of its food coming from Ukraine (RFE/RL 28/02/2022; bne IntelliNews 01/03/2022). With the onset of war between the two, the inflation rate in Moldova has risen to 16%, and the country's central bank expects it to rise further to 20% (SeeNews 10/02/2022; bne IntelliNews 16/02/2022). The annual inflation rate of Moldova in 2021 was 2.77%. It has been increasing since tensions between Ukraine and Russia started intensifying again in October 2021 (Macrotrends accessed 11/03/2022; Trading Economics accessed 11/03/2022). The Moldovan Government has since announced a ban on grain and sugar exports, as well as further restrictions on commodity prices (Government of Moldova 27/02/2022). Much of Moldova's gas and energy also comes from Russia then passes through Ukrainian infrastructure. If war causes serious damage to the infrastructure, Moldova may experience serious electricity and heating supply issues, which would likely increase their prices (bne IntelliNews 01/03/2022).

Timely healthcare, food, and shelter for the wave of Ukrainian refugees are costing Moldova approximately USD 1 million per day (ITV 11/03/2022). For a country with an economy that has been unstable for the past few years, this amount is unsustainable in the long term. As a result, the foreign minister has mentioned that Moldova is close to reaching a 'breaking point' in its ability to cope with the crisis (Time 10/03/2022; Euractiv 06/03/2022; ECRE 11/03/2022).

The increased cost of living for the Moldovan population will likely result in reduced access to basic goods for refugees. 50% of Ukrainian refugees say they either do not have enough money for their journey or are unsure if they do (Help Age 10/03/2022). The instability of the Moldovan economy is also reducing the state's capacity to cope with the crisis, which has also become dependent to some extent on international assistance.

Transnistria tensions

Transnistria is a region in Moldova that is in the middle of a secessionist process. Although internationally recognised as part of Moldova, it is de facto administered by a pro-Russian faction. As a result, around 2,000 Russian troops and 20,000 tons of Russian army ammunition are stationed in the region, which shares a border with Ukraine (DW 15/02/2022). Given that the Russian army may soon be very close to the Moldovan border, there are fears about the potential use of Russian troops in Transnistria to attack Ukraine (DW 24/01/2022; NYT 08/03/2022). The Belarusian Government has also suggested that Russia could eventually attack Moldova if the war escalates into southern Ukraine (New Eastern Europe 21/02/2022; NDTV 02/03/2022). As at 7 March 2022, the foreign minister mentioned that there were no suspicious movements in Transnistria (The Week 07/03/2022).