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## **EXPERIENCE OF REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN SUPPORTING CHILDREN REFUGEES THROUGH SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC MEASURES**

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### **Introduction**

Since the existence of humanity, forced by a number of factors like war, famine, natural disasters or other calamities, people moved from one place to another seeking refuge. Refugees are people that flee a territory where they were persecuted in some way to another territory where they seek protection. The war in Ukraine has determined a refugee movement. The latest data of the operational portal of UNCHR (The UN Refugee Agency) on Ukraine refugee situation shows that there are over 5.1 million refugees from Ukraine, from which near 55.9% of all refugees or 2.9 million went to Poland, followed by Romania with 15.0% or over 769 thousands people, Russian Federation with 11.3% or more than 578 thousands persons, Hungary with 9.3% or near 481 thousands, Republic of Moldova with 8.4% or over 430 thousands, Slovakia with 6.8% or more than 349 thousands and Belarus with 0.5% or near 24 thousands refugees [6]. But, if we compare the number of refugees relatively to the number of the population of receiving country, Moldova is first with 164 refugees per 1000 persons of its own population, followed by Poland with 76 to 1000, Slovakia with 64 to 1000, Hungary with 49 to 1000 and Romania with 40 to 1000, others have under 5 to 1000. Thus, Moldova has the biggest pressure to offer support to the refugees, not only because of high number of refugees relatively to its population, but also because Moldova has the lowest GDP per capita from the countries receiving refugees from Ukraine.

### **Experience of Republic of Moldova in supporting children refugees from Ukraine**

According to the Border Police of Republic of Moldova [1] the data on the number of citizens entering and leaving the territory of the Republic of Moldova on the MD-UA segment in the period 24.02.2022, 00.00 - 13.04.2022, 06:00, 415901 persons citizens of other countries entered the MD-UA segment, from which 91.3% or 379638 people were Ukrainian citizens. In the same period 312690 citizens left the

territory of the Republic of Moldova, from which 89.9% were Ukrainian citizens. From people who entered Moldova in this period in the MD-UA segment only a fourth remained on the territory of the Republic of Moldova - 23.3% or 96748 citizens, from which 96.1% or 92993 people were Ukrainian citizens and the rest 3.9% or 3755 - citizens of other countries. Here should be mentioned that from those that entered the MD-UA segment, 1 from 4 Ukrainian citizens (24.5%) remained on the territory of the Republic of Moldova while in the case of refugees from other countries the ratio is 1 from 10 (10.4%). A great share of citizens that entered the MD-UA segment and remained on the territory of the Republic of Moldova are minors – practically 1 from 2 (50.1%) or 48505 children, from 96748 foreign citizens (Ukrainian and other nationalities who entered the MD-UA segment). Between 24.02.2022, 04:00 - 13.04.2022, 06:00, the Office for Migration and Asylum received 6277 asylum applications. The data show that Moldova has hosted a major number of refugee children that are in need of support. In order to offer such support many social actors have focused on various directions of assistance.

Moldovan legislation has been suffering additions and changes to facilitate the support of refugees from Ukraine [5]. Ministry of Education and Research adopted an order on the enrollment in general educational institutions of the Republic of Moldova of children from refugee families in Ukraine and an instruction on their enrollment and also an order regarding the enrollment in the academic year 2021-2022 for study mobility of refugee students from Ukraine. According to the adopted instruction, refugee children can attend educational institutions without the obligation of schooling and with registration in a temporary register, also unaccompanied children are represented by the guardianship authority and the institutionalization in the preschool educational institutions of the children from the refugee families from Ukraine can be admitted depending on the budgetary financial sources allocated for 2022 year and will have priority the requests for cases where the parent or the legal representative of the child is employed in work activity. Children from refugee families in Ukraine temporarily residing in the territory of the Moldova that didn't apply for asylum, upon request, may participate in such educational activities without the obligation of schooling such as: attending classes as an audience; extracurricular activities within the general educational institutions and within the circles set up at the level of the regional extracurricular educational institutions, psycho-pedagogical assistance and counseling activities; non-formal activities for adolescents.

The Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova had ensured the enrollment of refugee children in educational institutions [3]. The latest data of the Ministry of Education and Research of Moldova show that on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1858 applications were submitted for the enrollment in the educational process of children from refugee families in Ukraine, from which 578 applications for enrollment in early educational institutions and 1280 applications for enrollment in primary, secondary and high school education. From these applications, 1810 children were integrated in the general educational institutions, from which 1246 in schools and 564 in kindergartens. 647 children attend primary school, 546 are enrolled in middle school and 53 in high school, in 228 educational institutions in the country. Thus, out of the total number of students enrolled in general educational institutions, 125 are studying in Romanian and

1121 are taking lessons in Russian. 564 children attend 250 preschool institutions. Refugee students, citizens of Ukraine, will be able to study in higher educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova, free of charge, within the limits of institutional budgets, based on an individual contract lasting until the end of the academic year 2021-2022.

A provision of Moldovan Government refers to the redistribution of an amount of 329236.0 thousand MDL (circa 17863 thousand USD) from the budget of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development from the Road Development program to the budget of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP) to the Social Protection program of some citizens, like Ukrainian refugees, including children.

The Government of Republic of Moldova in cooperation with the Agency of Electronic Government, German Agency for International Cooperation, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Maib bank (biggest bank from Moldova) have implemented a digital platform, a website aggregator of information of support to refugees from Ukraine that is offered in Moldova - <https://dopomoga.gov.md> (from Ukrainian „допомога” - help) [2]. A series of hotlines were created for refugees on issues of migration, asylum, border policy, legal support and other needs. The website offers information from official sources, information about medical help, for animals, psychological support, paid services, help groups, alimentation, financial services, transport, autohelp, education, resources in Romania, housing, clothes and shoes, work, telecommunications, other services, offer to help and also information for children. The support offers for children are mostly for education, recreation and food. The Dopomoga website also offers information about the educational process of refugee children from Ukraine, including the available places in educational institutions. It shows how to access online learning platforms like Osvita and Anticrisis Lab 2022 (ACLab). A Viber chat group was created where families with little children can connect and get free baby food kits for children under 3 years old named NadiyaPAK (short from Package of Hope – „Пакет Надії” (in Ukrainian)). Also, a Facebook group was created to help Ukrainian refugees in Moldova that distributes children's mixes in Chisinau (even lactose-free ones). Some businesses/organizations gave free or reduced price offers to refugee children, like: offering free toys for refugee children; organization of a free day of rock-climbing training for children from Ukraine on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022; free developmental classes for speech therapy; activities in a Christian kids' club; free school classes for children 4-14 years old; free workshops, mini-library, board games in a center for children and teenagers; free activities for children in IT Park Tekwill.

Ukrainian refugee children can get free tickets from the quota of 20% which besides other vulnerable children are included under the category of children of asylum seekers, refugees recognized in the Republic of Moldova, beneficiaries of humanitarian protection and persons who have been granted stateless status.

Another measure to support Ukrainian families is an initiative of a group of volunteers and aid workers organized by Moldova for Peace (a working group of volunteers set up under the auspices of the Government of the Republic of Moldova) on the website [www.dopomoha.md](http://www.dopomoha.md). It is a free person-to-person support platform

created and facilitated by Moldova for Peace volunteers. Those who can provide products, accommodation, transport or services are connected by the "Moldova for Peace" team with refugees who need help, especially small families. At present, more than 51705 refugees asked for help. Through this platform the refugee can get an assistance ticket, obtained after completing a form (also available for those who can offer support) asking the number of refugees of the group (men, women, children, animals), availability of a transport means, type of help needed (food, goods, accommodation, psychologic counseling, medical help, consular and legal services transport, Express Volunteers and Other help), the region of Moldova and a short explanation of the needs of help. Speaking about the efficiency of the platform at present 81.7% of the requests of help were managed to be answered. More than 60% of requests come through the platform and near 40% - through the phone contact. As a result, more than 17000 refugees were helped only in last 30 days. The biggest need of the refugees is food, so food kits account for circa 75% of all help requests. Last 30 days from 7837 food kit requests 79.2% or 6204 were solved cases.

Ukrainian refugees can get a monthly allowance of 2200 MDL (119 USD), renewable for those staying in Moldova. Eligible for such an allowance are the following household types: household with one or more dependents; single-parent household; child-run household (under 18); household with an unaccompanied or separated child; household run by an elderly person (over 60 years old); household with one or more people with special needs, including: person with a disability; pregnant woman; person with a serious medical condition; woman in danger; person in need of legal and physical protection; LGBTI. Moldovan households that host at least 2 refugees are entitled to a one-time paid allowance of 3500 MDL (190 USD).

Non-governmental organizations also participated in offering support to refugee children. A good example for this is a collaboration with NGOs and the National Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse in which they created Trimka set – a mascot plush toy with a therapeutic effect, the name of which comes from Ukrainian "підтримка" – support, along with the coloring book "Smile with Trimka!". Through this set, it's provided emotional support to children and shown them an attitude of care, respect. It's used to create a story for children where the character wants to reach to all children in refugee centers in Moldova and to take to their place their toys left at home, in the houses from which they had to flee. 3 teams of PIDTRIMKA Mobile Service provided first aid and social assistance for adults and children in refugee centers through offering interactive psychological activities, including games with the plush toy Trimka.

Economic agents work together to support refugees. A resort complex in Costesti village from Ialoveni district offers free accommodation and food for 130 people from Ukraine. The charity brought together in a common goal several economic agents, but also people who donated food, hygiene, clothes and toys for children to the refugees.

Technology startups in the Republic of Moldova have also come up with their own solutions to help refugees: a mobile application and online peer to peer matching platform of free help provided for refugees; personalized meditations to reduce anxiety; a digital platform that helps refugees find accommodation; a map with points of interest for refugees; a donation campaign for refugees from Ukraine.

National Agency for Social Assistance (ANAS) of the MLSP [4] has approved 102 refugee placement centers throughout Moldova, with total capacity of 9245 places, of which at 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022 were occupied 4270, thus having an occupancy rate of 46%. They were registered with educational institutions (19 centers with a capacity of 1867 places with an occupancy rate of 52%), state-owned enterprises (4 centers /1150 places/21% occupancy rate), non-commercial organizations (10 centers /713 places /79%), mayoralities (2 centers/50 places/0%), regional directorates of social assistance (49 centers/3299 places/54%), municipal directorates of social assistance (16 centers/2046 places/29%), institutions subordinated to MLSP (2 centers/120 places /95%).

For the centers set up by the local public authority, a special funding line is open. 21.3 million MDL (1.16 million USD) was allocated. If the center is created by public institutions, state-owned enterprises or non-profit organizations, the financing is done by direct contract with the MLSP. There are some applicable expenditure ceilings: bed accessories: 750 MDL (40.7 USD) / accommodation, food: 50 MDL (2.7 USD) for food or 70 MDL (3.8 USD) for catering / day / refugee, hygienic packages: 250 MDL (13.6 USD) / refugee, diapers: 70 MDL (3.8 USD) / day / child, estimated average cost: 130 MDL (7.1 USD) / day / refugee.

Republic of Moldova has received humanitarian aid to support refugees between February 27<sup>th</sup> and March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022 in the amount of 147 lots with a mass of 1088 tons and the total declared value of 103 million MDL (5.6 million USD), most of which (after the mass of the lots) came from Germany (331 tons), it was followed by Romania (143 tons), Italy (105 tons), and countries like: Switzerland, France, Netherlands, Greece, Turkey, Israel, United Kingdom, Belgium, Austria. Public authorities received 36 or 24% of the lots, their mass being 247 tons (23% of the total mass of lots), with the declared value of 62 million MDL (3.4 million USD) (60% of the declared value of all received lots). A share of 76% or 111 lots with a mass of 841 tons and a declared value of 41 million MDL (2.2 million USD) were received by other organizations: NGOs (70 lots with a mass of 465 tons and a declared value of 13 million MDL) (0.7 million USD)), religious communities (34 lots with a mass of 321 tons and a declared value of 4 million MDL (0.2 million USD)), international organizations (6 lots with a mass of 55 tons and a declared value of 16 million MDL (0.9 million USD)), embassies (1 lot weighing 0 tons (i.e. less than 1 ton) and declared value of 9 million MDL (0.5 million USD)). Also, at 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022 Moldova received 9 lots (with a mass of 21.4 tons) from individuals from abroad (Italy, Spain, Germany, Romania).

At 17<sup>th</sup> March 2022 the following humanitarian aid was distributed by the MLSP (in units): heaters (60 received/100% distributed), tea (400 received / 61% distributed), canned food (3268 received / 5% distributed), grocery products (604 received / 42% distributed), pastry products (9978 received / 12% distributed), oil (535 received / 7% distributed), water (2662 received / 26% distributed), lamps (250 received / 0% distributed), masks (54000 received / 6% distributed), blankets and sleeping sets (16755 received/ 20% distributed), hygienic products (5987 received / 27% distributed), mattresses (330 received / 62% distributed), diapers (199 received / 6% distributed), towels (2000 received / 0% distributed), ecological toilets (20 received / 0% distributed).

## **Conclusions**

Moldova is at the forefront of receiving refugees from Ukraine. It has shown an exemplary mobilization of resources by Moldovan Government, NGOs, international organizations, businesses, individuals to help the refugees. The support came in: enrolling children in educational institutions; offering access to: activities for children for free or for a reduced price, online support platforms, kits for food or other products that cover the basic needs; offering psychosocial support, placement in centers for refugees, giving monetary support and other means of help. All these being said, though, an issue with the support measures is that they are short-lived and, in many cases, not systemic, but fragmentary.

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