MAYORS for ECONOMIC GROWTH

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Moldova
Rapid Assessment of Members of the M4EG network

Considering the ongoing war in neighboring Ukraine and the increasing number of refugees arriving to transit or stay in Moldova (Chart 1), the EU and UNDP M4EG project team undertook a rapid light assessment of M4EG signatories in order to make a radiography of their level of readiness for emergency response and recovery.

A **Rapid Assessment Tool was developed and sent to 45 Local Authorities, of which 30 replied**, during 15 April to 13 May, 2022. Most of the respondents are from the Centre region (12), followed by the North region (7), ATU Gagauzia (6) and South (5 replies).

ASSESSMENT TOOL SENT TO 45 LOCAL AUTHORITIES

30 RESPONDED

About the respondents

The Local Authorities that responded differ in terms of number of population and level of administrative unit. 19 of them are villages and communes, seven are townships and four municipalities. Their number of inhabitants across them 1200 – Telita village to 97 000 residents for Balti.

The responses contain quantitative and qualitative data, received at the time of filling in the questionnaires. **It is worth noting that in the meantime some of the raised issues have been addressed, while new ones are likely to emerge**.

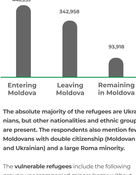
The most spoken language in the administration as first language is Romanian – for 24 LAs, Russian for three and Gagauz for two localities. Russian is the most spoken as second language – in 22 LAs. Localities with a higher number of ethnical minority also speak their language as third language within the public administration. It is also important to note that Civa and Palanca are border localities with custom points with Ukraine and they received the highest number of refugees in transit.

Regarding the access to road and railway infrastructure, 13 localities have a railway station or are in the immediate vicinity to one; nine localities are located or are in the immediate vicinity to a road of international importance and 25 localities are located or are in the immediate vicinity to a road of national importance.

All Local Authorities that responded hosted refugees since the beginning of the crisis. Most of them are **still facing growing pressure in providing basic needs** to the Ukrainian people fleeing the conflict. **In sum, the host communities (part of this assessment) accommodated 1,316 families. The highest number of refugees are females – 1,584 (78%) compared to 443 male (22%). There are 1426 children and 232 elderly. Most of the children are in the age category 6-11, 708 in total.**

Chart 1

Number of people entering and leaving the RoM from Ukraine in the period 24 February - 03 May



The absolute majority of the refugees are Ukrainians, but other nationalities and ethnic groups are present. The respondents also mentioned few Moldovans with double citizenship (Moldovan and Ukrainian) and a large Roma minority.

The **vulnerable refugees** include the following groups: unaccompanied minors (some without identity cards), people with chronical illnesses, elderly and unaccompanied women, people with various degrees of disability (from light to severe), people with mental health conditions, people after surgery and people diagnosed with cancer; and ethnic groups, such as Roma community.

The vulnerable groups identified by the Local Authorities include the following: elderly living alone, people with various degrees of disability (from light to severe; or people with vision impairments); families living below the poverty line, families under social assistance monitoring, bedridden patients, families with three or more children, mono-parental families, single-parent families headed by women, etc.

It is important to note that during the high arrival of refugees, the Local Authorities assessed that many vulnerable families may have been deprived of social support (due to lack of necessary additional resources).

Chart 2

Number of respondents with access to:

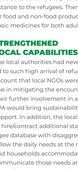


Chart 3

Population and refugees number by region

Main findings of the assessment

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The localities that have social canteens and community centres found it easier to provide hot meals to the refugees and to local vulnerable groups. Other improvised spaces for such services were the industrial parks, schools, restaurants and businesses offering catering services.

MAIN NEEDS

Although the response of the local authorities and local communities was immediate and useful, most of the essential products are over. Therefore, procurement and delivery of essential equipment and supplies for local emergency services is needed to improve preparedness, but also to continue to provide the needed assistance to the refugees. There is a high need for food and non-food products, as well as some basic medicines for both adults and children.

STRENGTHENED LOCAL CAPABILITIES

The local authorities had never before responded to such high arrival of refugees. Taking into account that local NGOs were the most responsive in mitigating the encountered challenges, their further involvement in a partnership with LPA would bring sustainability of the action and support. In addition, the local authorities need to hire/contract additional staff to manage a refugee database with disaggregated data, to follow the daily needs at the refugee centres and households accommodating refugees, to communicate those needs and to provide an immediate response to them. This should be done by seeking additional funds, liaising with partners and mobilizing volunteers, financial support and humanitarian aid from various partners (public, private, international organizations). Support to LPAs is also necessary in learning how to have efficient communication to host communities and refugees, combating misinformation and disinformation and strengthening the local autonomy to rapidly address challenges and crisis management.

LABOUR FORCE

Even though some of the respondents are larger localities, with a more developed economy and presence of the business sector, just few refugees managed to find a paid job in the hosting localities. An economic integration support, by facilitating the employment of refugees that decide to remain in the country for an extended amount of time is much needed. The sectors in which the majorities consider that a quick entering in the labour market is possible are in the services, agriculture and education sectors. Still many jobs can be filled in due to out migration (of Moldovan nationals). A skill and interest matching of refugees with local employment opportunities should be done.

PUBLIC ORDER

None of the respondent mentioned challenges in maintaining public order. All LAs are in direct contact with the police, Firemen, Social Assistance Department, Local NGOs and development partners to maintain social cohesion and dialogue with both residents and refugees.

Chart 4

% of localities with access to public services

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

24 out of 30 respondents spoke about the good quality of water provided through the centralised water system. Some of them need additional infrastructure works to improve the water quality, such as replacing the pipes, filter system at the pipeline delivery source, construction of small-scale filter system in the localities that cannot currently provide good drinking water, medium-scale filtration system mounted on the artesian well, and construction of small waste water treatment plants for social and education institutions.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The refugees benefitted from the assistance provided by the local NGOs, social assistance department of the District Council, local medical centres and other organisations active in the respondent localities. Some localities can offer spaces (e.g. Telita village has a media centre) for online classes. However, taking into account that children of refugees are Russian and Ukrainian speakers, they cannot attend Romanian-speaking classes. Teaching materials in Russian and/or Ukrainian and Russian/Ukrainian speaking teachers are needed to integrate children in local educational institutions. There is need to improve the school infrastructure/rehabilitation and to engage the youth/teenagers in social activities or create spaces for interaction.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

All the interviews pointed to the importance of maintaining an active dialogue with the local community. The main tools used to engage citizens in the local development process are the following:

- **Communication:** direct dialogue, meetings in various neighbourhood, thematic meetings, public consultations, working/initiative groups, ambassadors for each neighbourhood to connect the LA to citizens, door to door, etc.
- **Identifying needs:** online surveys and questionnaires, comments/chat of social networks; focus groups, etc.
- **Providing information:** informative panels, social networks, web pages.

SHELTERS

Most of the improvised shelters for medium and long term need to be repaired or restored and equipped accordingly.

Conclusions and recommendations for M4EG support to LAs in their refugee response

30 local authorities replied to the rapid assessment undertaken within M4EG Initiative. All of them have been hosting refugees since 24 February, no matter their size and population number. All of them have good access to road infrastructure, 25 of them being located close to national roads and 13 to railway stations.

The host communities accommodated 1,316 families. The vast majority are women (1,584) and children (1,426, especially the age group 6-11) and despite the mobilization of the local communities, the authorities are facing growing pressure in providing basic needs of the Ukrainian people fleeing across the border. Some of the refugees represent vulnerable groups, with various illnesses, disabilities, and health conditions for which special medical assistance is needed.

The shelters for refugee housing need to be adapted and equipped accordingly, especially for refugees staying for medium to longer periods. Some of the rooms/halls require repairing and provision of adequate living conditions.

Even though all the respondents provide basic public services, some of them need rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure, improvement of the capped water system, extending the service for other regions etc. Small investments can be made for households or shelters hosting refugees that lack sanitation system. This could entail building septic tanks or small pre-water treatments before discharging the wastewaters directly into the soil. Financial means would be important in the localities / areas lacking drinking water for building a filtration system for better water quality.

The local authorities need support to ensure adequate integration for refugees (with a strong intersectionality and gender lens to take into account the heterogeneous realities) and overall well-being by providing access to social services (education, medical assistance) and help their economic integration. Refugees require support to enter the local labour market, while the existing SMEs and public sector have existing vacancies due to the ongoing trend of depopulation.

Refugee children have either enrolled in kindergartens / schools or are taking online classes. For both types of learning, the local authorities need to provide access to education, supply the number of teachers / educators, provide teaching materials in Russian languages, and where needed, provide more space and furniture for the growing number of pupils.

Several local authorities would strongly benefit from dedicated resources or personnel, e.g., in the form of a dedicated unit (in some cases even several units) to adequately respond to refugees needs. This can be done in partnership with active local NGOs, businesses, religious communities, etc. Their capacities should be strengthened in order to address the refugee crisis and boost resilience for future crises. These will help to respond to various socio-economic issues, efficient communication with residents, refugees, and combat misinformation and disinformation related to challenges and crisis management.

To conclude, interventions are need for: **(i)** local authorities, to strengthen their capacities in providing emergency response and equip themselves for a possible longer crisis; **(ii)** local public infrastructure, for a better access to qualitative and efficient public services, and; **(iii)** refugees and local authorities, for a better mid-term social and economic integration.

A set of proposed interventions will be designed, in line with the above and the exiting M4EG Concept Note for Refugee Response in Moldova.

1,316 FAMILIES ACCOMMODATED BY THE HOST COMMUNITIES

The first refugees arrived in the Cărpineni commune on the night of February 25-26. For 5 days, 247 refugees passed through the centers in Cărpineni and were accommodated for 1-2 nights, after which most of them left for the EU. From March 25th to May 22nd, 2942 refugees have been housed in temporary shelters: received primary care, humanitarian aid in the form of hot meals (food), clothing when needed, and medicine. Some of the key challenges faced by the town hall of Cărpineni commune is the lack of transportation units to ensure logistics between the three temporary refugee placement centers and other locations of interest to the refugees (hospital, market, post office). Another challenge is to provide food for 312 refugees at a time. We also struggle with the payment of energy resources (which is putting the Mayor's office in debt). Right now, the biggest challenge is to provide children with the means necessary to continue their education process. Our main focus is preparing and equipping a separate space for preschool activities (kindergarten) and adequate spaces for educational activities for school-age children. Children are our future and must offer them everything they need.

Ion Cărpineanu

Mayor of the Cărpineni Commune (10463 citizens)

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