

Moldova: Rapid Needs Assessment of Older Refugees – 10 March 2022

Context

An estimated 230,000 refugees have crossed the border from Ukraine to Moldova, with 120,000 of these planning to remain in the country.

As much of the border with Ukraine is part of Transnistria (an area of Moldova with links to Russia) most refugees are entering through the southern tip of Moldova close to the Ukrainian port city of Odessa. Despite the amazing support provided by Moldovan volunteers and the government, people and resources are being stretched to their limit.

Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe with a population of only 2.6 million, making it the country with the most refugees per-capita. Ensuring adequate assistance is provided to all Ukrainian refugees arriving in the country is vital, including those at greater risk such as older people and those with disabilities. However, given the levels of poverty in Moldova, consideration should also be given to their needs when considering any interventions in the country.

Methodology

To provide a snapshot of the current needs, 105 older people (aged 50+) were interviewed by HelpAge International using a short multi-sectoral needs assessment between 4 and 6 March. 60% of these interviews were conducted at the border (Palanca, Costești, Tudora) and 40% at refugee centres in Chisinau. A convenience sampling approach was used in identifying older people. The small sample and approach used limits the representativeness and disaggregation of this data. Therefore, unless further assessments, encompassing age disaggregated data, are conducted by other actors, this will be the first of several on-going larger assessments that HelpAge will conduct. Also, older refugees may also not yet have a clear picture of their longer terms needs. As the crisis evolves their responses may change, as will their needs.

Movement

- Most older refugees interviewed have **arrived in Moldova from neighbouring areas in Ukraine**, with the highest number arriving from Odessa. However, some have travelled further from cities such as Kyiv and Dnipro in what are likely to have been very difficult and traumatizing journeys, complicated by mobility issues that many older people face.
- **56%** of older refugees reported that they are not planning to stay in Moldova for more than three months and aim to move onto another country. Supporting them in their on-going journey is therefore likely to be needed, especially for older people travelling alone (including accessing buses and even support with VISA processes). Only **17%** plan to stay longer with family and friends within the country.
- **27%** of older people reported that they did not know if they are going to stay in Moldova. This highlights the chaos and uncertainty many refugees face. Currently around 98 temporary shelters / refugee centres have been established where many of the most at-risk older refugees have gone. However, many other refugees are currently staying in hotels or rented accommodation where prices may be increasing as supply reduces. Others are being temporarily housed by Moldovans for free. Therefore, accommodation options need to be found both temporarily and, in some cases, longer-term.
- **62%** of older people reported that they are travelling with children. As most men under 60 have remained in Ukraine, and in many cases have been conscripted into the army, older people will likely play an increasingly crucial role in providing care to children. For those staying in Moldova this can include support in enrolling children in their care at local schools.
- **10%** of those interviewed are travelling alone. This group faces particular risks, and their support needs may be higher. Where possible, helping them reunite with family and friends will be important, as well as ensuring they can access mobile phones and sim cards.



Cash and Food

- **36%** of older people reported they did not have access to sufficient money while **14%** were unsure if they have sufficient money. For some, access to cash is currently being affected by withdrawal limits at Moldovan ATMs, which can range from 500 to 1,000 Euros per day. Those arriving often have limited cash and have left behind their assets and sources of income.
- Most older people reported they did not need food. However, this supply is rapidly running out. Furthermore, often those being housed for free by Moldovans, and who were not surveyed, are not being provided for by the government or humanitarian actors. As the crisis continues, resources within the country will rapidly diminish so it is important that urgent assistance from outside the country is provided to help fund the provision of cash assistance or food. When food assistance is provided it should meet the specific dietary requirements of older people.



Medication

- **28%** of older people need urgent medication, including for diabetes, blood pressure and pain relief. This is a concerning finding, especially as over a third of older people are having issues accessing sufficient money. This was higher for those in the refugee centres than at the border. The risk of missed medication puts them at serious risk. Support is needed to ensure refugees can access medicine, including informing them about available medical support.
- **19%** of older people also reported that they need urgent medical assistance, often attributed to their lack of access to medicine. This need for urgent medical assistance may also increase if violence escalates close to the border, and if older people who are less mobile or people with more serious health needs start to arrive in subsequent waves. Furthermore, as many of the older refugees are likely to be unvaccinated and at a significantly higher risk of COVID-19, it is important to ensure they have the opportunity to be vaccinated and receive PPE to reduce their risk of catching the virus.



Hygiene items and water

- **25%** reported that they do not have access to sufficient hygiene supplies such as soap, shampoo, and toothbrushes. It is important that this is provided to this group to reduce the spread of disease which can occur as refugees gather in crowded spaces.
- Most older people currently reported that they have access to sufficient water. This situation should however be closely monitored as refugee numbers may begin to stretch the country's resources as the crisis becomes protracted. UNCHR also highlighted that several refugee centres need infrastructure upgrades, including improving their water and sanitation facilities.



Non-food items

- **31%** of older people reported that they need clothes. The top three most mentioned items of clothing needed were shoes (**21%**) followed by socks (**13%**) and underwear (**10%**). This was also higher for those who have recently arrived in refugee centres, compared to those at the border. Access to adequate warm clothing and good shoes remains important due to the often cold conditions in Moldova and the fact that many refugees are spending a significant amount of time on the move.



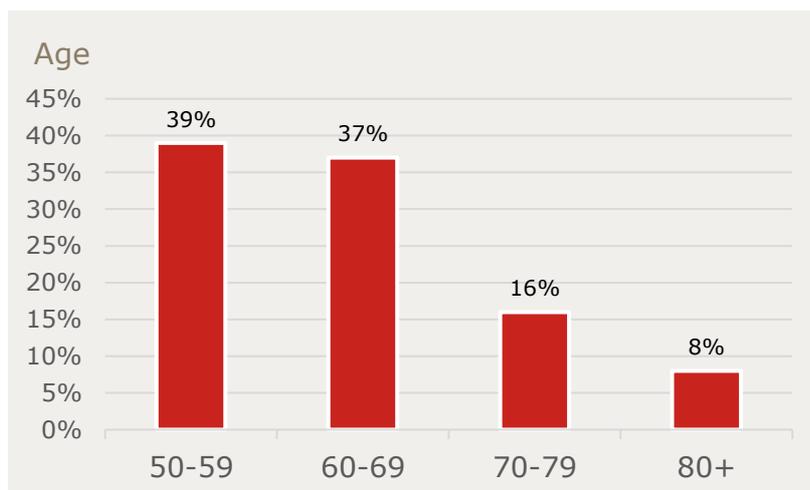
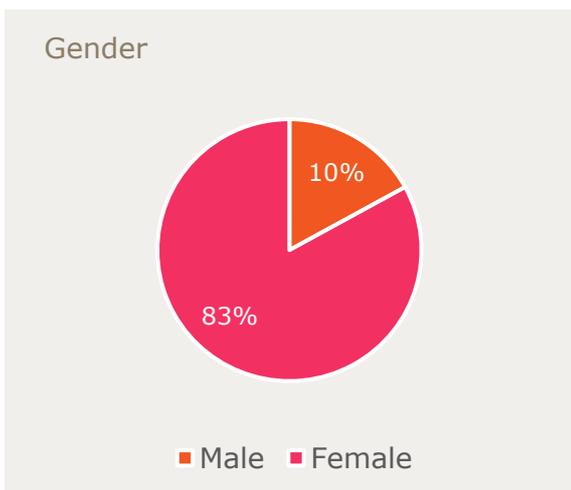
- Most older people reported that they did not need items like blankets, mattresses, and pillows. This may reflect that many of the recently arrived are either trying to transit through the country and/or are unsure where to go and have yet to realise what items they will need. In addition, some of these items may have already been provided. However, UNCHR is reporting that, especially in the triage centres at the border, equipment such as sleeping bags are needed as they struggle to handle the size and speed of refugees arriving in the country.

Disability

- Only **22%** of older people interviewed had a disability. This is surprisingly low and may reflect that many of those with a disability have found it harder to flee their homes. Agencies should be prepared in coming weeks for older people arriving who need assistive aids such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, and incontinence pads, which may have been left behind, lost, or broken along the journey.
- An assessment conducted by HelpAge in Ukraine between 1 and 2 March in the Donbass region, found that nearly all older people interviewed, most with disabilities, wanted to remain in their current homes rather than be evacuated.



Demographics of those interviewed



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