

Estimating the total number of refugees from Ukraine in Moldova

October 2024 | Refugee Population Profiling (RPOP) Assessment, Republic of Moldova

Key Messages

- **As of May/June 2024, with medium-low reliability, an estimated 32,188 refugees from Ukraine were living in Moldova.** This figure is based on a conservative approach that likely underestimates refugees without legal status or those not receiving humanitarian aid.
- 32 out of 103 key informants (KIs) observed underrepresentation in their settlements. **56% of them identified Ukrainian men of conscription age as the group most frequently underrepresented in official refugee databases.**
- **The most commonly reported reason for overrepresentation in official databases was that some refugees registered in Moldova were actually residing in Ukraine,** according to 14 of 30 KIs who reported overrepresentation.
- Frequent refugee movement between Ukraine and Moldova, within Moldova, and from Moldova to other countries complicates accurate monitoring, especially in border and high-transit settlements. **This underscores the need for stronger verification mechanisms and regular updates of databases.**
- **There is a notable lack of reliable data sources on the actual number of refugees from Ukraine living in Chişinău city and the surrounding settlements** although roughly half of the refugee population in Moldova are estimated to be residing there.

Context & Rationale

Since the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, there has been no exact count of the total population of refugees from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova. **According to the Border Police, 123,729 refugees from Ukraine are recorded to be in Moldova as of 29 September 2024.**¹ To facilitate the regularisation of refugees in Moldova, Ukrainian nationals and eligible third-country nationals (TCNs) have been able to apply for Temporary Protection (TP) in Moldova since March 2023 which grants them the right to stay until 1 March 2025.² **As of 30 September 2024, 60,209 refugees have received TP status, while another 11,971 have other types of legal status,³ accumulating to 72,180 refugees.**⁴ Since 2022, UNHCR and IOM provided monthly multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) to refugees from Ukraine.⁵ **37,808 refugees were registered in April 2024, prior to the implementation of the new eligibility criteria.**⁶ Although these three figures come from official and trusted sources, they are based on different data collection methods each with its own limitations, resulting

in significantly varying estimates of the total refugee population. Consequently, humanitarian actors have been using competing figures and lack a single, reliable data source for effective planning and resource allocation to activities targeting refugees. Against this backdrop, the draft Refugee Response Plan for 2025-2026 has identified 100,500 refugees as the target population for 2025.

The Refugee Population Profiling (RPOP) assessment aimed to **identify the limitations in coverage in existing refugee databases**, understand the reasons behind these gaps, and how this has led to the existence of conflicting figures. Additionally, this assessment aimed to **generate more accurate and up-to-date estimates of the refugee population in Moldova** at a settlement level, following a transparent methodology. This information intends to bring an evidence-based perspective to inform planning and resource allocation for the humanitarian response - notably in the context of the Refugee Response Plan (RRP) which outlines specific activities and targets for refugee assistance for 2025-2026 - but **should be viewed within the wider context of other information sources mentioned above.**



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Key Definitions

Refugees: Persons or groups of persons who have been displaced from Ukraine following the escalation of hostilities on 24 February 2022, including third-country nationals.

Underrepresented refugees: Refugees living in the settlement but who are not registered in that settlement in any existing official databases.

Overrepresented refugees: Refugees registered in an official database in the settlement but who are not living in that particular settlement.

Settlement: Non-officially recognised term used by REACH representing the level 2 territorial-administrative unit to enable more granular data at a level below that of raions (level 1). In practice, settlements can be classified as villages (*sate*), communes (*comune*), cities (*oraşe*), or municipalities (*municipii*), and these terms are often used interchangeably.

Methodology

The methodology comprised three phases: database triangulation, key informant interviews (KIIs), and derivation of estimates based on data in the first two phases. In Phase 1, databases from official sources covering refugees from Ukraine in Moldova were gathered, including TP beneficiaries, MPCA beneficiaries, REACH's Area Monitoring (AM) assessment, Refugee Accommodation Centre (RAC) Monitoring, and beneficiaries of accommodation-related assistance programmes.⁷ Databases with expected minimal duplication were consolidated into four master databases and triangulated to identify settlements in Moldova with the largest discrepancies. **57 settlements were identified and sampled as having an information gap regarding the actual number of refugees.** In Phase 2, KIIs were conducted in these settlements to address this information gap.



103 Key Informant Interviews

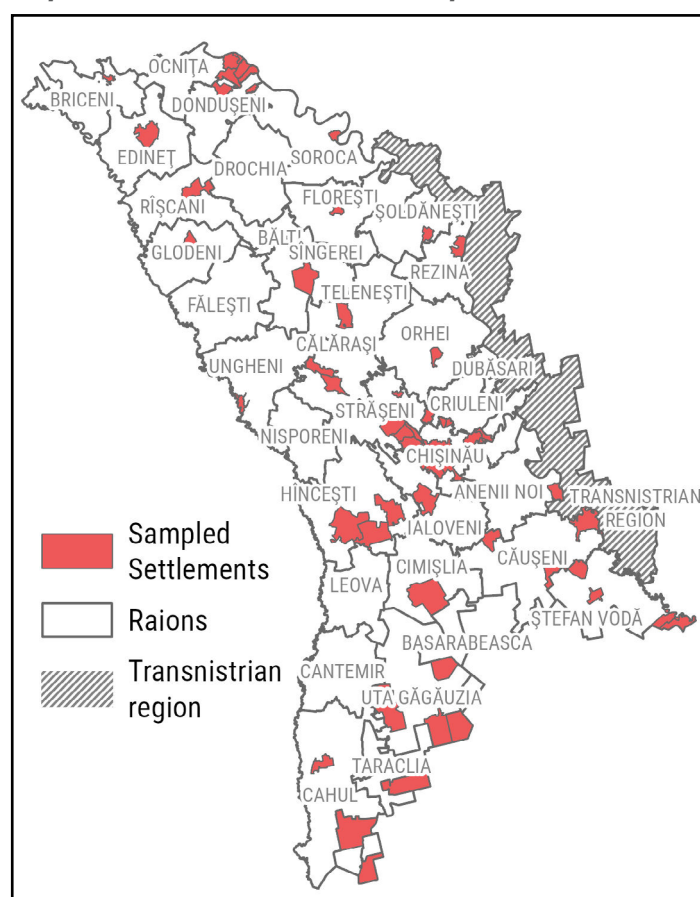


20 May – 10 June 2024
Data collection

KIIs were asked about the total number of refugees living in the settlement, the presence of underrepresented or overrepresented groups of refugees in official databases, and refugee movement patterns. **Based on the responses of KIIs and on comparing the number they provided with those of the master databases, trends were identified in the sampled settlements.** Additional consultations were conducted with some partner organisations to fill the remaining information gaps identified after data collection and confirm the trends. In Phase 3, estimates of the number of refugees in the sampled settlements were derived by aggregating numbers provided by KIIs based on their reliability and oversight of the refugee population in the settlement. The identified trends were then extrapolated to other settlements in Moldova by grouping settlements with similar characteristics and the most dominant trend expected to influence the number of refugees registered

in databases. Final estimates for unsampled settlements were then derived by selecting the most reliable master database and making adjustments if there was an expected under- or overrepresentation of refugees. For more detailed information regarding the methodology, see [the Methodology Note](#).

Map 1: Location of settlements sampled for KIIs.



Limitations

Coverage and reliability of estimates are limited by databases used: The RPoP estimates should be interpreted as a conservative approach to estimating the number of refugees in Moldova at a specific time. Although data was gathered from a diverse range of sources for both the



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triangulation of databases and KIIs, the majority were providing data on beneficiaries of social assistance services or humanitarian programmes for refugees. Based on responses of the KIIs and additional consultations, adjustments were made either to the number provided by KIIs or the database number used for the estimate to account for refugees not covered in these services and programmes. However, it is unclear the actual extent to which such refugees are accounted for in the estimates.

The following groups of refugees are expected to more likely be omitted in the estimates due to lack of data on them: refugees without TP status and who are not beneficiaries of local social services or humanitarian programmes, including refugees who want to remain anonymous; refugees that are uncertain regarding their length of stay in Moldova; refugees that do not intend to stay over six months in Moldova; refugees that are not eligible for TP and humanitarian programmes; refugees that are regularly travelling abroad; and refugees who don't want humanitarian assistance.

Additionally, in large settlements where adjustments were made to account for the expected overrepresentation of refugees registered there but who live in other settlements, the refugees were not reallocated elsewhere due to lacking information on where they live and how many they are. There was also a lack of reliable data sources on refugees in Chişinău and the Transnistrian region, which limited the reliability of the estimates in these regions. The findings are not representative and only indicative.

Only a snapshot in time: The estimates are only a snapshot in time, specifically that of the situation in May to June 2024 when data collection for the KIIs was conducted.⁸ Through the extrapolation process, estimates of certain unsampled settlements were based on databases updated in different periods, but this is accounted for in the reliability levels assigned to the estimate. However, over time the estimates will be less reliable in reflecting the current number of refugees.

Quality of the KIIs affects accuracy: KIIs were observed to have differing levels of oversight of the refugees in their settlement, which may have affected the accuracy of estimates, especially in larger settlements where KI oversight tended to be limited.

Extrapolation inaccuracies: Due to the extrapolation process, the complexity of movement dynamics in each settlement could not be captured in the unsampled settlements and inaccuracies may have resulted.

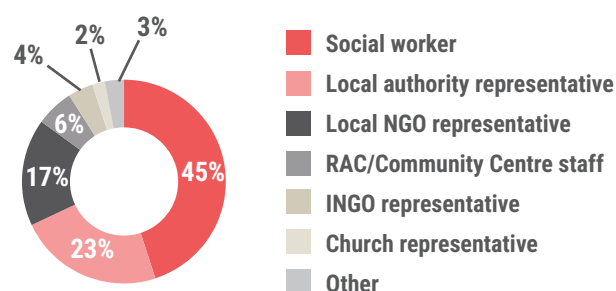
Overview of Key Informants

Most KIIs were social workers or representatives of local authorities, while others were NGO representatives, RAC/Community Centre staff, and church representatives.

85% of KIIs had an internal database, and of these, 92% had a verification/update mechanism for their database. Among those with a verification mechanism, phone-based verification was the most reported method (68%), followed

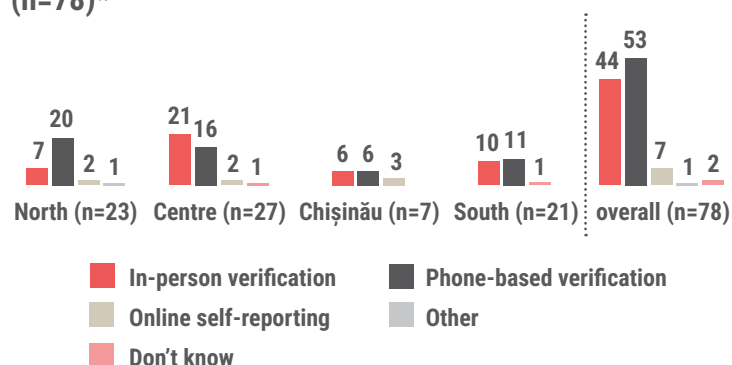
by in-person verification (56%), and a few used online self-reporting (9%). Many KIIs reported using a combination of these methods.

Type of key informants (n=103)



KIIs in rural settlements appear to have more reliable data on refugees living in their settlements compared to those in urban settlements based on responses to questions about the reliability of their database. Similarly, KIIs in the Centre region appear to have more reliable data than KIIs in other regions.

Database verification mechanism of KIIs with internal databases with a verification mechanism, by region (n=78)*



Underrepresented Refugees

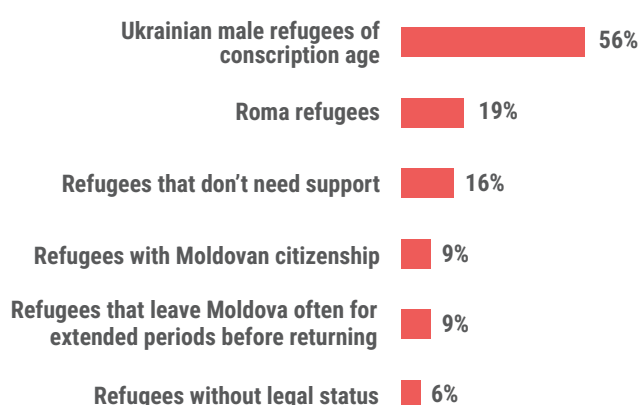
Findings from the KIIs showed that certain groups of refugees tend to be underrepresented in official databases on refugees. **The presence of underrepresented refugees was reported most in the North** (16 out of 34 KIIs), followed by Chişinău (5 out of 13 KIIs), the South (7 out of 27 KIIs), and the Centre (4 out of 29 KIIs).

Among KIIs who reported underrepresentation in official databases in their settlement, **56% identified Ukrainian male refugees of conscription age as underrepresented.** Of the 18 KIIs that reported this, nine were in the North, six in the South, two were in Chişinău and one in the Centre. Based on reports of KIIs and additional consultations, there has been an influx of this group of refugees in Moldova over the last few months prior to data collection. This is likely due to the lowering of the conscription age of men into the Ukrainian military from 27 to 25 in April 2024.⁹

The most frequently reported reason for this group's underrepresentation is the desire to maintain anonymity. Several KIIs also indicated that members of this

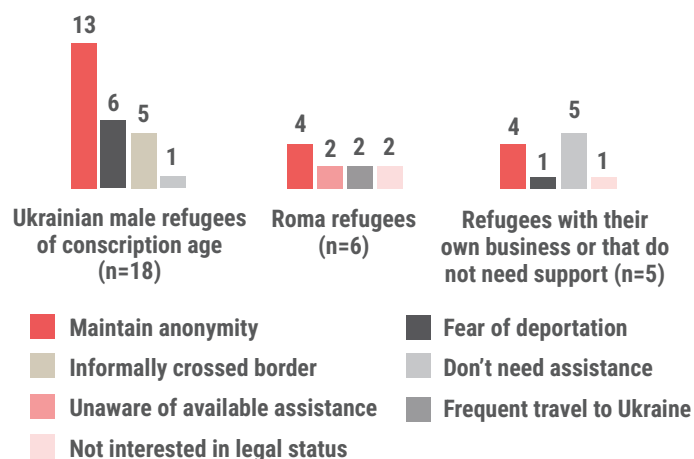
group have informally crossed the border into Moldova (5 KIs) and fear deportation (6 KIs). As a result, though an increase in their presence in the country has been observed by KIs and partner organisations, it is particularly difficult to monitor their actual numbers and locate them to provide assistance. Members of this group often use Moldova as a transit country according to KIs. The same was mentioned in consultations, including reports of Ukrainian men of conscription age applying for asylum upon arrival in Moldova. This is done reportedly so that they can stay legally in the country while making arrangements to move to a third country.

Groups of refugees underrepresented in official databases in each settlement, according to KIs that mentioned the presence of underrepresented refugees (n=32)*



Other mentioned underrepresented groups were Roma refugees (19%), refugees that have their own business or don't need any support (16%), refugees that leave Moldova often for an extended period before returning (9%), refugees with Moldovan citizenship (9%), and refugees without legal status (6%). KIs indicated that Roma refugees are underrepresented due to a desire to maintain anonymity, a lack of awareness about available assistance, frequent travel to Ukraine, or a disinterest in obtaining legal status in Moldova.

Reasons why the top 3 reported groups of refugees are underrepresented in official databases in each settlement, overall (n=32)*



Similarly, KIs noted that refugees with their own businesses or who do not require support are often underrepresented because they do not seek assistance, wish to remain anonymous, and some fear deportation or are uninterested in legal status.

Overrepresented Refugees

The presence of refugees overrepresented in official databases was reported most in the North (14 out of 34 KIs), followed by the South (11 out of 27 KIs), Chişinău (2 out of 13 KIs), and the Centre (3 out of 29 KIs). Among those who reported this in their settlement, the highest reported group of overrepresented refugees were those living in Ukraine but registered in Moldova (47%), followed by refugees with dual Ukrainian and Moldovan passports (40%), refugees living in another settlement in Moldova than the one they are registered in (27%), refugees that had transited through the settlement but remain in the database (23%), refugees that went back temporarily to Ukraine (20%), and refugees attempting permanent return to Ukraine (10%).

Top 6 reasons why refugees are overrepresented in official databases, according to KIs that mentioned the presence of overrepresented refugees (n=30)*



Movement Patterns

Most KIs reported refugees moving in (76%) and moving out (69%) of their settlement in the three months before data collection, indicating a **high mobility of refugees throughout the country**.

Of those that reported refugees moving in, **family (48%) was the highest reported reason for refugees to move into the settlement**, followed by community integration (26%), access to aid (18%), cost of living (15%), education (13%), transit (11%), employment opportunities (11%), housing (10%) and healthcare services (5%).

Of those that reported refugees moving out, **returning to Ukraine (70%) was by far the most reported reason**, followed by family (19%), employment opportunities (17%), transit (15%), housing (13%), cost of living (4%), healthcare services (4%), education (2%), community integration (2%) and access to aid (2%).



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Main Identified Trends in Sampled Settlements

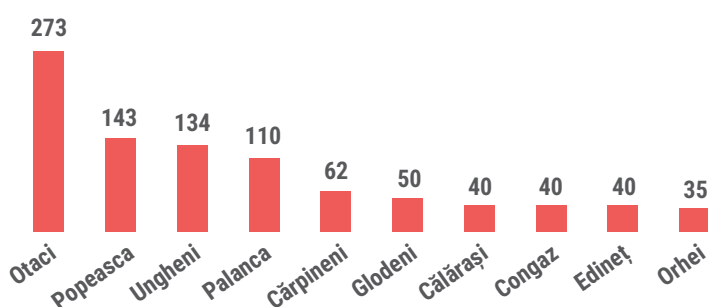
Based on the findings from the database triangulation, KIIs and additional consultations, several trends were identified in the movement patterns of refugees and their impact on existing databases monitoring the number of refugees in Moldova. Below is a summarised version of the full list of trends that are discussed in detail in [the Methodology Note](#).

CONNECTIVITY & PROXIMITY TO THE BORDER Connectivity to border crossings and proximity to the national border were observed to be linked to the inflation of TP and MPCA databases. This inflation was particularly high in settlements close to and connected to the border crossing at Otaci. KIIs in Otaci, Vălcineţ and Calaraşovca mentioned the existence of overrepresented refugees who were registered in Moldova although they were living in Ukraine. Other locations where this group was mentioned by KIIs were also close to the border – Palanca (r. Ştefan Vodă), Tudora, Copceac (UTA Găgăuzia), Vulcăneşti, Cahul, Briceni (r. Briceni) and Lipcani. Based on reports in the KIIs and consultations, it was suggested that this overrepresented group might be crossing the border to access cash assistance in Moldova.

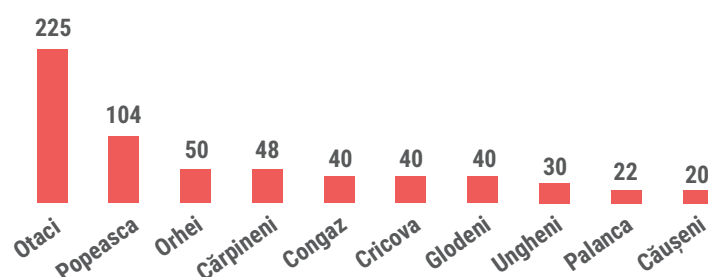
Inflation in TP and MPCA was also observed in settlements close to the administrative line with the Transnistrian region, namely Rezina and Varniţa, likely due to refugees living in the Transnistrian region registering their addresses as the nearest settlements in the right bank of the Dniester.

HIGH TRANSIT Certain settlements were identified as areas with high levels of transit of refugees. The graphs below show the top ten settlements by the approximate number of refugees that moved in and out of the settlement in the three months before data collection, based on the highest number provided by KIIs in each settlement. Otaci ranks the highest for both refugees moving in and out. This is followed by Popeasca in the South, where a RAC is present. Several other settlements appear in both graphs, namely Ungheni, Palanca (r. Ştefan Vodă), Cărpineni, Glodeni, Congaz and Orhei, suggesting high levels of transit in these settlements. Due to the constant flux in the number of refugees, less frequently updated databases, such as TP and AM, are likely to be outdated in these settlements.

Top 10 settlements by approx. no. of refugees that arrived in the settlement in the 3 months prior to data collection based on the highest no. provided by KIIs



Top 10 settlements by approx. no. of refugees that moved out of the settlement in the 3 months prior to data collection based on the highest no. provided by KIIs



PRESENCE OF MPCA ENROLMENT CENTRE The presence of an MPCA enrolment centre in the settlement was observed to be linked to the high inflation of TP and MPCA databases. These settlements include Chişinău, Orhei, Ungheni, Căuşeni, Donduşeni, Cahul, Bălţi and Comrat. Several KIIs reported cases of refugees registering their addresses there although they may live in other settlements. This is especially the case for such settlements that are also in proximity or have a high level of connectivity to border crossings, such as Căuşeni and Donduşeni, as there may be cases of people living on the Ukrainian side of the border travelling there to enrol for MPCA though they do not live in Moldova. Due to lacking an address in Moldova, these overrepresented groups may be registering their addresses where they enrol for MPCA.

RAIONAL CAPITALS Inflation in TP and MPCA databases was also observed in raional capitals – the administrative capital of each raion in Moldova. Based on reports of KIIs, some refugees that live in smaller settlements surrounding raional capitals may be registering their addresses there, rather than in the villages where they live. This leads to a countertrend of underrepresentation of these refugees in the settlements surrounding raional capitals.

PROXIMITY TO CHIŞINĂU For settlements in proximity – within 30 minutes-drive – to Chişinău city, a trend of underrepresentation was observed due to refugees registering their addresses in the city and going directly to the capital to access aid and services. Based on reports in a consultation, refugees in the suburbs of Chişinău tend to be more vulnerable than those in the city, as they are long-term cash-for-host beneficiaries that have been staying with the same host families for several years and likely cannot afford to move to the city.

Remaining Information Gaps

Information gaps remain after the RPoP assessment, especially in Chişinău city and the Transnistrian region, due to a general lack of reliable data sources that could inform the estimates in these areas.

CHIŞINĂU CITY Due to the large size of the capital, geographically and in terms of its share of the country's population, difficulties were faced in finding suitable KIIs

that had sufficient oversight of the total population of refugees in the city. A lack of incentive for refugees to register with their local social assistance department in the city made it such that social workers were less reliable here than in smaller settlements. The knowledge of humanitarian organisations tends to be limited to their beneficiaries. Based on insights provided in consultations and the joint analysis workshop, **a combination of underrepresentation and overrepresentation is expected in the databases for this city**. Underrepresented groups would mainly consist of refugees who do not want assistance and who can support themselves. Overrepresented groups likely consist of a combination of refugees living in other settlements in Moldova, and refugees living in Ukraine who come to Moldova to access cash assistance.

TRANSNISTRIAN REGION Due to limited access and operations of UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations in the region, there is also a lack of data sources monitoring the number of refugees in Transnistria. TP and MPCA were the only data sources used for this assessment to estimate the number of refugees in this region. The total number at a regional level between the databases is very similar, but TP is more spread out at a settlement level, while MPCA beneficiaries are more clustered around the bigger cities, suggesting that the TP data is more accurate at a settlement level. **In consultations, it was reported that refugees in this region are potentially more vulnerable and choose to live there due to the lower cost of living, as well as due to having existing relations that live there.** It is also likely that refugees in this region are frequently visiting the right bank of the Dniester to access services they do not have access to in Transnistria. This may incentivise refugees in the Transnistrian region to register for TP in Moldova to access these benefits and services.

Refugee Population Estimates

Estimates for most of the settlements in which KIIs were conducted were based on the aggregation of numbers provided by KIIs (those that were determined to be reliable and had sufficient oversight). Estimates for all other settlements in Moldova were derived by extrapolating the trends identified above, grouping them into extrapolation types based on characteristics similar to those of the sampled settlements. The map (see next page) and table below show the RPoP estimates resulting from this process.

RAION-LEVEL ESTIMATES

Raion	RPoP Estimates	Reliability ¹⁰
Anenii Noi	381	Medium High
Bălţi	827	Medium Low
Basarabasca	241	Medium High
Briceni	130	Medium High
Cahul	379	Medium
Călăraşi	161	High
Cantemir	77	High

Raion	RPoP Estimates	Reliability ¹⁰
Căuşeni	323	High
Chişinău	17314	Low
Cimişlia	146	Medium High
Criuleni	327	High
Donduşeni	439	Medium
Drochia	143	Medium High
Dubăsari	29	High
Edineţ	337	Medium
Făleşti	145	Medium High
Floreşti	151	High
Glodeni	242	Medium High
Hînceşti	277	High
Ialoveni	215	High
Leova	46	High
Nisporeni	111	Medium High
Ocnîţa	492	Medium High
Orhei	339	Medium High
Rezina	124	Medium
Rîşcani	106	High
Singerei	158	High
Şoldăneşti	46	Medium High
Soroca	197	Medium High
Ştefan Vodă	695	Medium High
Străşeni	226	High
Taraclia	343	Medium High
Teleneşti	164	High
Ungheni	187	Medium High
UTA Găgăuzia	1659	Medium
<i>Bender</i>	797	Medium
<i>Camenca</i>	93	Medium
<i>Dubăsari (Transnistria)</i>	163	Medium
<i>Grigoriopol</i>	156	Medium
<i>Rîbniţa</i>	800	Medium
<i>Slobozia</i>	1063	Medium
<i>Tiraspol</i>	1939	Medium
Nationwide Moldova	32188	Medium Low

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this assessment is to **contribute to the broader discussion on monitoring refugee numbers in Moldova**, and supports **identifying current existing information gaps and limitations** relevant to the refugee response in Moldova. The refugee population numbers produced in this assessment follow a **conservative approach, and some groups are not fully covered**, as outlined in the methodology and limitations. Taking this into account, these numbers can be used as a reliable estimate of refugees from Ukraine living in Moldova on a settlement level and to assist implementing partners in identifying refugee beneficiaries.



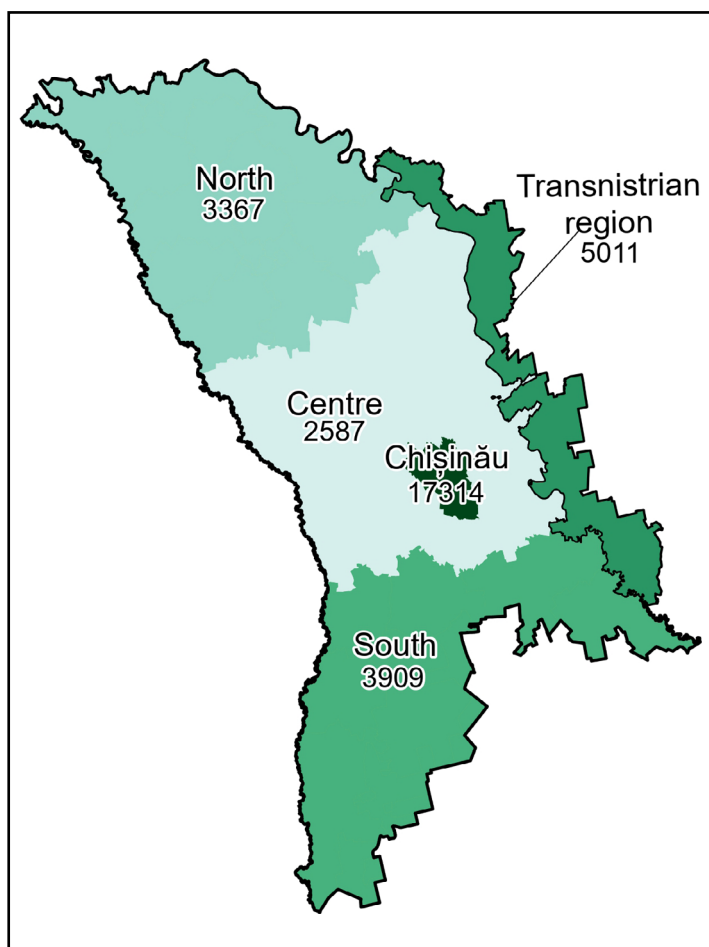
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REGIONAL LEVEL ESTIMATES

Map 2: RPoP estimates at the regional level.



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Endnotes

¹ UNHCR, [Operational Data Portal – Ukraine Refugee Situation, Country - Republic of Moldova \(unhcr.org\)](#), consulted 7 November 2024.

² The original duration of stay was until 1 March 2024, which was extended in the beginning of 2024 to 1 March 2025. Discussion regarding further extensions to TP are ongoing and a decision by the authorities is pending.

³ Either they are in the asylum system, have residency permits, or have acquired Moldovan citizenship since 24 February 2022.

⁴ General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM), Weekly Statistics of the General Inspectorate for Migration – Week 82, [Statistica săptămânală a Inspectoratului General pentru Migrație – Săptămâna 82 - Inspectoratul General pentru Migrație | Ministerul Afacerilor Interne \(gov.md\)](#), 30 September 2024.

⁵ UNHCR, [Cash assistance for refugees in - UNHCR Moldova](#), consulted 12 September 2024.

⁶ Sum of active beneficiaries of UNHCR and IOM MPCA, as of April 2024.

⁷ Cash-for-host and cash-for-rent databases containing residence information for refugees were used in the triangulation.

⁸ For unsampled settlements, data from different master databases were taken as the estimates. The recency of these databases varies from May 2024 to December 2023, and these differences are accounted for by using the more outdated databases only in areas where little change is expected since December 2023, and there are no more reliable alternative databases. The reliability levels assigned per settlement also aim to account for this.

⁹ Parliament of Ukraine, Bill No. 9281 of 9 May 2023, [Картка законопроекту - Законотворчість \(rada.gov.ua\)](#).

¹⁰ Due to being based on different data sources with varying reliability, some estimates are judged to be more reliable than others. For more details on the reliability levels, see [the Methodology Note](#).

* Respondents could select more than one answer, therefore the sum of values may exceed 100%.

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).



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