



# EMERGENCY APPEAL:

## Ukraine Humanitarian Response

March 2024 to February 2025

### Context

In February 2014, Russia unilaterally annexed Crimea, a strategically located peninsula in the northern part of the Black Sea connected to the Ukrainian mainland. For eight years, tensions between Russia and Ukraine continued to simmer, with intermittent clashes between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian military in the Donbas region, which borders Russia. Despite these ongoing tensions, daily life across most of Ukraine continued in relative peace. However, in February 2022, this peace was violently shattered when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on multiple fronts, turning once quiet communities into deadly war zones. Since February 2022, an estimated 10 million Ukrainians have been displaced from their homes, including around 6 million who have sought refuge in neighboring countries or further abroad.

### Moldova

With millions fleeing the violence in Ukraine, the crisis has had a reverberating effect on neighboring countries. The Republic of Moldova is a small land-locked nation that lies directly to the west of Ukraine. It is among the poorest countries in Europe, with social services that were already struggling to meet the needs of vulnerable Moldovans. Between February 2022 to February 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, over 1 million people entered Moldova from Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> Most of these refugees ultimately continued onward to Romania and other European countries to reunite with family or to pursue work opportunities; however, around 100,000 Ukrainian refugees have remained in Moldova.<sup>2</sup> This represents about 4% of the population of Moldova, the highest per capita of refugee receiving countries. Those refugees who have stayed are often among the most vulnerable including single-headed households with dependents, older persons, people living with a disability, those with limited economic means, ethnic minority groups (including Roma, a marginalized group which has experienced discrimination in Europe for centuries), etc. Many have also remained because they wish to stay close to Ukraine in the hopes that the war will end, and they might be able to travel home.

The people of Moldova have largely welcomed Ukrainian refugees and, in fact, are hosting more Ukrainians per capita than any other neighboring country. This can in part be attributed to close cultural ties between Ukrainians and Moldovans, and in some cases family connections across these nationalities. The Moldovan Government has similarly sought to ensure protections for Ukrainian refugees, with over 35,000 applications for Temporary Protection (TP) filed as of December 2023;<sup>3</sup> TP is a protection pathway that went into effect in March 2023. Despite these efforts, Moldova has struggled to meet the needs of refugees from Ukraine, especially as those needs have continued to evolve over two years of this crisis. Early in the response when most refugees were newly displaced, they demonstrated an urgent need for basic support (food, essential living supplies, shelter, etc.). These needs do persist for acutely vulnerable refugees (e.g., older persons, people living with a

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR (2024). [Operational Data Portal – Ukraine Refugee Situation / Republic of Moldova](#).

<sup>2</sup> Projections on the number of Ukrainian refugees still in Moldova vary but range from 90,000-120,000 individuals.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR (2024). [Ukraine Situation: Regional Refugee Response Plan](#).

disability) and refugees who are newly arrived from Ukraine. However, families who have been displaced for months or even years have evolving needs and shifting priorities.

As returning to their homes in Ukraine remains out of reach while the war persists, many refugees are beginning to wrestle with how they create stability and regain a sense of normalcy in Moldova. Among the highest priority for many Ukrainian refugees is children's education. Only about 4 percent of Ukrainian refugee children are currently enrolled in the Moldovan school system.<sup>4</sup> This is alarmingly low, considering that best estimates suggest fewer than 50 percent of refugee children are continuing their Ukrainian education virtually. While virtual education can be an important tool, without the social connection with their peers, children often become more isolated further undermining their wellbeing. For adults, their focus is increasingly shifting towards livelihoods and economic inclusion. Integrating into other social services, like healthcare, also remains a challenge. Language barriers, difficulty navigating the healthcare system, restrictions on eligible service, lack of specialists, and provider misconceptions and biases inhibit access for many refugees. Meanwhile, women and children, who together make up 81 percent of Ukrainian refugees,<sup>5</sup> also face heightened protection risks. Disruptions in their social support networks and the inability to cover basic needs make women and children more susceptible to gender-based violence, trafficking, and sexual exploitation and abuse. Older persons, people living with a disability, persons of Roma ethnicity, and single women with children are also especially vulnerable. These issues are often exacerbated by trauma from the war and displacement, social isolation, and increased stress due to high and sometimes fluctuating living costs (e.g., due to the ongoing energy crisis).

Finally, employment and income generation remain a persistent challenge, even for highly qualified Ukrainians. Language barriers, childcare costs, and mismatched skills are often key barriers for employable adults to find jobs in Moldova. These challenges are exacerbated by the Moldovan economy which has shrunk due to the compounding crises of the pandemic, global inflation due to the war, and an ongoing energy crisis which has also driven up costs.<sup>6</sup> Given these existing economic constraints, many vulnerable Moldovans also face challenges meeting their basic needs. It is critical that the humanitarian response in Moldova reaches vulnerable host community members (Moldovans) to mitigate risks of tension towards refugees and to strengthen cohesion and connection among these populations. Yet, against this backdrop, the number of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) who were providing services to either refugees or vulnerable Moldovans has begun to diminish. As funding begins to slow, organizations have been forced to close, leaving behind tremendous gaps and many people in need of assistance. Church World Service (CWS) remains a reliable and critical provider in Moldova, ensuring vulnerable families impacted by the war in Ukraine have the support they need to stabilize.

## Ukraine

Meanwhile, more than two-years of unrelenting conflict have had a profound effect on the lives of all those living in Ukraine. Many families from the east and other communities close to the frontlines have been forced to flee, as the security situation can devolve rapidly, and without warning. Those displaced from war-torn regions have lost their homes and their livelihoods. Children have been forced to leave school and families have been ripped apart, as men enlist to fight. These compounding conditions have compromised the ability of displaced families to cope, leaving them

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. UNHCR (2024). *Ukraine Situation: Regional Refugee Response Plan*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. UNHCR (2024). *Ukraine Situation: Regional Refugee Response Plan*.

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2023). [The World Bank in Moldova](#).

in dire need of assistance. Humanitarian needs extend beyond the displaced, however, as every person in Ukraine has suffered the negative impacts of this war. Families who have been fortunate enough to remain in their own homes—or who have begun to return home—also face challenges meeting their basic needs such as food, essential living supplies, health care, etc. Inflation coupled with a deteriorating economy, have undermined the purchasing power of already vulnerable families, often forcing them to exhaust what savings they may have and turn to negative coping strategies to make ends meet. The war has also resulted in what the United Nations calls a “protection crisis,” that impacts almost all Ukrainians;<sup>7</sup> key risks include exposure to conflict-related violence and trauma, overcrowding in shelter settings, gender-based violence, and other forms of sexual violence or exploitation. A 2023 multi-sector needs assessment found that 66 percent of returning families, 62 percent of displaced families, and 33 percent of non-displaced families reported having protection needs.<sup>8</sup> This demonstrates the need across the population, but particularly among displaced and returning families. Furthermore, public services—like the health system—are under tremendous strain, limiting the access families have to support.

Odesa Oblast (province) in the southwest of Ukraine sits at the intersection of displacement and return. In the past year, Odesa has experienced intermittent attacks from Russian forces, but overall, has been insulated from the worst of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> As such, families from frontline areas have fled to Odesa for relative safety. Early in the war, however, the rapid invasion drove many across the country to seek refuge abroad. Two-years on, with no signs of relenting, some Ukrainian refugees have made the difficult decision to return home, despite the continued dangers. Odesa is among several Oblasts that have begun to see an increase in returns. In 2024, there are an estimated 1.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Odesa; this represents over half of the population.<sup>10</sup> Among those in need, nearly 750,000 are native Odesans (non-displaced) with another 150,000 returning home to Odesa; the remaining 250,000 people in need are displaced from conflict-affected areas of Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> Within Odesa, needs are prevalent across urban and rural areas. Rural areas remain underserved, but populations in city centers have been more acutely impacted by the deteriorating economy.

## Response to Date

CWS has been working in partnership with local organizations in Moldova for over 15 years focusing on sustainable livelihoods, renewable energy, and addressing rural poverty. This existing work enabled CWS to rapidly mobilize a refugee response in Moldova beginning in 2022, meeting the emergency needs of vulnerable people fleeing Ukraine. Since then, CWS has expanded programs to include protection, education, health, and livelihoods programs. CWS continues to work alongside host communities and local organizations (see more on partnership below). Together with our partners, CWS has provided food, basic living items (including hygiene items), winter clothes, school supplies, supportive learning environments for children’s education, psychosocial support, medical assistance, vocational training, and language learning to vulnerable refugees and host communities in Moldova. Cutting across these activities, CWS continues to prioritize and target acutely marginalized groups including Roma. These important programs have reached over 44,000 refugees and host community members since 2022, helping these vulnerable and marginalized groups to

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<sup>7</sup> OCHA (2023). [Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan: Ukraine](#).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. OCHA (2023).

<sup>9</sup> Three recent attacks, including one March 15 that killed 20 and wounded 73, is a tragic reminder that Odesa is vulnerable to attack and of significant strategic interest geographically in the ongoing war.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. OCHA (2023).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. OCHA (2023).

meet their needs. CWS' continued presence in Moldova is a testament to our donors, and our partnerships with local organizations that have enabled us to remain agile, responsive, and impactful as the situation evolves. Full details about CWS' work in Moldova are available in our Year Two Ukraine Response in Moldova Report.

### Cross-cutting Priorities

**Social Cohesion and Integration:** Across all our programs, CWS aims to foster social cohesion and integration of Ukrainian refugees within Moldovan host communities. For example, within CWS-supported education centers, after-school and psychosocial activities Moldovan students are invited to participate alongside refugees. These activities are designed to build connections among the children. Another key example is CWS' work to "green the response," i.e., integrating long-term climate and environmental solutions into our humanitarian relief efforts to bolster long-term resilience, and realize a lasting benefit for Ukrainian refugees and Moldovans, alike. Amid an ongoing energy crisis, many Moldovans and refugees struggle to afford fuel and electricity, especially in the winter months. CWS has been working with a long-time local partner to install solar panels on refugee accommodation centers. As the crisis evolves, and one day ends, these centers will return to use as community facilities, ensuring a benefit that out-lives the project. As the crisis continues into a third year, CWS will continue to center all our programs around the needs of both Ukrainian refugees and vulnerable Moldovan communities, ensuring our programs are reaching the most vulnerable with critical, life-changing support.

**Partner Capacity Strengthening:** Underpinning CWS' work is our commitment to partnership principles which seek to position decision-making closest to the people impacted by crisis, while taking intentional steps to provide support and capacity strengthening to our local implementing partners. These steps ensure CWS' impact extends far beyond the life of our programs, as local partners are left better equipped to deliver high quality programs to communities in need.

## 12-Month Plan

### Moldova

The continued conflict in Ukraine will prevent most refugees in Moldova from returning home in the near-term. This marks a pivotal time wherein Ukrainian refugees are increasingly looking beyond their emergency needs towards stabilization support. In 2024, CWS will build on our comprehensive support package to date, focusing especially on medium- to longer-term program interventions. This increased emphasis on multi-sectoral recovery efforts align with the expressed needs of Ukrainian refugees and with the UNHCR Regional Refugee Response Plan. However, there have been troubling developments along the frontlines signaling that further displacements in Ukraine are indeed possible. This, in turn, would likely drive more Ukrainians into Moldova throughout the year ahead. Thus, CWS will maintain our preparedness to respond to emergency and basic needs of new arrivals, remaining agile in the event of a large-scale displacement. Projections for CWS' projects in Moldova for 2024 are as follows:

### *Multi-Sectoral Response*

*Multifunctional Center for Protection, Assistance, and Inclusion in Balti* – CWS and project partners will continue to provide food and essential living supply support to refugees in Balti (northern Moldova) and the surrounding area. This multi-sectoral project also includes mental health/psychosocial support, medical support, and livelihoods training. In 2024, the project will

increasingly focus on providing longer-term stabilization support for health, livelihoods, and mental health/psychosocial assistance.

### *Education/Psychosocial Support*

*Anastasis Educational Center, Education Access and Psychosocial Support* – With partner Diaconia, CWS will continue to provide a supportive learning environment where children can continue their education, remotely participating in their Ukrainian classes. The project will also offer complementary recreational and psychosocial support activities at this center. Women also participate in psychosocial activities at the center and can be connected to psychological support.

*After-School Support with the Diamond Day Center* – CWS with Diamond Day Center will continue to offer children afterschool activities including recreation, education, and psychosocial support. The Diamond Center is located in Telenesti, a more remote area in northern Moldova that is chronically underserved. This partnership ensures our support continues to reach vulnerable communities.

### *Protection*

*Support for Survivors of Gender-Based and Other Forms of Violence* – CWS will partner with the Moldovan organization Memoria, a rehabilitation center for survivors of torture and gender-based violence. The project will continue to offer complementary psychological support, medical assistance, and rehabilitation services to Ukrainian refugees and vulnerable Moldovans.

*Partnering with Roma-led Organizations to Promote Inclusion of Roma Refugees from Ukraine* – CWS will work with two Roma-led partners to continue providing Roma refugees with basic needs assistance (food, hygiene items, basic supplies, etc.), complemented by legal assistance and other supports to access services. In addition, CWS and partners plan to implement a new activity to respond to the evolving livelihoods needs of Roma refugees. CWS will seek to improve access to the labor market and integration into Moldovan society through job readiness and vocational skills trainings, vouchers to assist with certification fees, and matching with potential employers. These comprehensive services will enable participants to integrate into the social services in Moldova whilst ensuring this marginalized group has access to legal protections in displacement.

### *Basic Needs Assistance*

*Supporting Basic Needs through the Seasons* – CWS will continue to partner with Diaconia to provide families with winter clothing, blankets, firewood, and vouchers for hygiene and food items. The vouchers will help ease the financial burden on Ukrainian and Moldovan families during winter, when there are increased utility and heating costs.

*Supporting Social Cohesion, the Humanitarian/Development Nexus and Housing for Refugees: Sustainable Infrastructure Upgrades to Refugee Accommodation Centers* – CWS with partner Ormax will continue to upgrade community facilities benefitting Ukrainian refugees with renewable energy technologies (e.g., solar panels) to address the immediate needs of the refugee response while addressing the long-term needs of local communities.

## *Ukraine*

As the crisis enters year three, the war in Ukraine rages on and, as noted above, the frontlines are unstable. CWS anticipates continued displacements of Ukrainians away from the frontlines towards areas in western Ukraine which are more insulated from combat, including Odesa. In 2024, CWS will leverage our extensive experience working with Ukrainian refugees in Moldova to respond to the

needs of internally displaced and other conflict-affected communities still living in Ukraine. In contrast to the refugee response in Moldova, which is beginning to shift towards stabilization efforts, CWS' response in Ukraine will build on our humanitarian efforts to provide food, basic living supplies, and protection support to vulnerable Ukrainians in need. In October and again in November 2023, CWS led scoping missions to Odesa to identify community needs, gaps in the humanitarian response, and local organizations with whom CWS could partner. Following that mission, CWS selected the following projects which were responsive to the acute needs of conflict-affected Ukrainians and where CWS would fill a critical gap in the existing response. Our proposed projects in Ukraine for 2024 are as follows:

#### *Basic Needs Assistance and Protection*

##### **Turbotlivi sertsya (Caring hearts)**

CWS will partner with local organization Culture of Democracy to purchase and distribute food, medical assistance, hygiene items, and provide psychosocial support to conflict-affected Ukrainians. The project will focus on remote villages of the Odesa Oblast (province), which remain remarkably underserved in the humanitarian response. The residents of these villages are often older people and are more acutely vulnerable to the impacts of war as they face increased levels of poverty, but also struggle to access social services. In total, the project aims to reach 3,000 Ukrainians with support.

##### **Housing and Shelter for IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons)**

CWS will partner with local organization Faith, Hope, Love to convert a government building in Odesa City into temporary housing for displaced families. The project will adapt the building for use as a temporary shelter, ensuring the space provides appropriate safety and privacy to residents. The project will focus on the most vulnerable internally displaced people for this support, providing complementary mental health services, psychosocial support, and case management. The project aims to create a facility which can continue to serve vulnerable people beyond the life of the project, providing shelter and support to an estimated 200 vulnerable Ukrainians in the coming year.

##### **Support for Women and Children in Wartime Conditions in Ukraine**

CWS will partner with local organization Positive Women Odesa to provide critical services for acutely vulnerable women and children in Odesa City. CWS anticipates that key services will include psychosocial support, legal assistance, and basic needs assistance (food, medical supplies). This project will focus on women with acute vulnerabilities including those living with HIV, elderly women, and women in the LGBTQ+ community, aiming to reach 150 women and 50 children with project support.

##### **Ukraine Program Development**

CWS has developed the above projects with three local organizations. In the coming months CWS plans on further developing our programmatic and operational capacity in Ukraine. Additional funding is required for staffing, travel for further assessments, and for additional projects to respond to the evolving and critical needs of Ukrainians.

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