

Gender Analysis of the Labor Market Assessment for Ukrainian Refugees in the Republic of Moldova

2024

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I. Executive Summary

Since the onset of the Ukraine war in February 2022, Moldova has played a crucial role in managing the refugee crisis, becoming a key transit and destination country for those fleeing the conflict. As of August 2024, Moldova has recorded 1,157,864¹ border crossings from Ukraine.

Despite being one of the poorest countries in Europe, Moldova has shown remarkable resilience and solidarity in addressing the refugee crisis. However, the ongoing situation has placed considerable strain on its infrastructure and resources. Since the start of the conflict, there have been 900,107 return crossings to Ukraine, indicating a dynamic and complex migration pattern. Moldova continues to face challenges in integrating refugees, particularly women and children, into the labor market while ensuring their access to basic services.

The employment landscape for Ukrainian refugee women in Moldova reveals significant gender disparities, specifically impacting their economic integration and empowerment. Based on data gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted during the market assessment, it is evident that Ukrainian women face higher unemployment rates compared to men, with the disparity being even more pronounced outside the capital, Chisinau, where job opportunities are scarcer. This situation further marginalizes Ukrainian refugee women in their search for employment.

The concentration of women in lower-paying sectors exacerbates income disparities, as women not only earn less due to the sectoral divide but also face wage gaps within the same industries. These financial challenges hinder their economic integration and reduce their ability to invest in further training and career advancement.

The preference for part-time or flexible work arrangements among women refugees, often driven by caregiving responsibilities, further exposes gender-based inequities. While many women seek such arrangements to balance work and family life, the majority of Moldovan employers favor full-time, on-site workers. This mismatch not only restricts women's employment options but also reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations.

Despite these hurdles, there are opportunities for improvement. Moldova has introduced new childcare services and initiatives to facilitate refugee integration. However, a more comprehensive and gender-sensitive approach is needed. Recommendations include enhancing access to Romanian language courses tailored to women's needs and schedules, expanding affordable and flexible childcare options, creating mechanisms to recognize Ukrainian qualifications and provide targeted training, supporting women's entrepreneurship through microfinance and mentorship, combating discrimination, and improving access to information about job opportunities and rights. By addressing these multifaceted challenges through a gender lens, Moldova can create a more inclusive and equitable labor market that benefits both Ukrainian women refugees and the Moldovan economy.

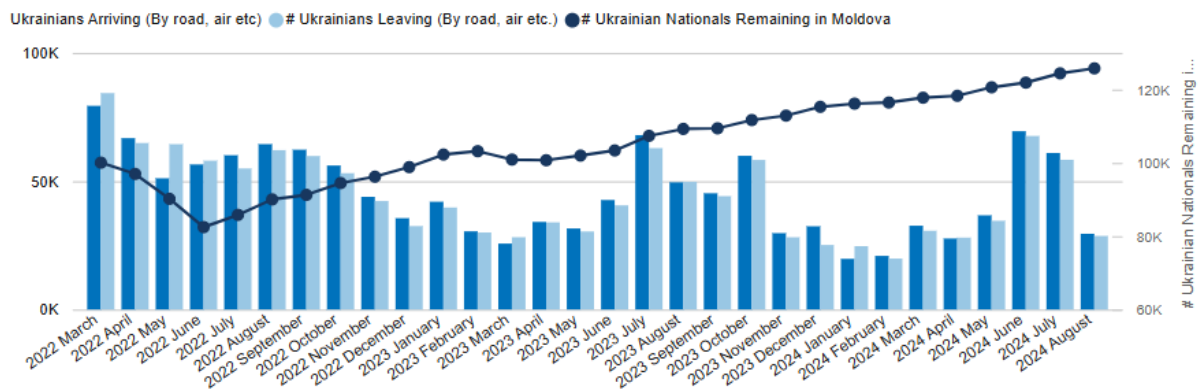
¹ [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/situations/ukraine/)

II. Introduction

In the first quarter of 2024, Moldova continued to play a pivotal role in addressing the ongoing refugee crisis precipitated by the conflict in Ukraine. The government, in close collaboration with international partners, extended the temporary protection (TP) status for these refugees until March 2025. This extension marked a significant milestone, offering a stable legal framework and access to essential services, though challenges in ensuring comprehensive health coverage and seamless integration into national systems remain.

The following chart (Figure 1.) indicates that while there was a significant influx of Ukrainian nationals into Moldova at the onset of the conflict in early 2022, the number of new arrivals has steadily decreased over time. However, the number of Ukrainians remaining in Moldova has continued to rise, suggesting that many of those who initially arrived chose to stay, despite the continued movement of others leaving the country. This trend reflects a gradual stabilization in the number of Ukrainian nationals residing (with the figure stabilizing between 100,000 and 120,000 individuals from mid-2022 onwards) in Moldova.

Figure 1. Ukrainian arrival & departure over time. Source: UNHCR Data Portal



Addressing the basic needs of refugees and host communities was a primary focus. Approximately 55,192 individuals received essential aid, including food, water, sanitation, and hygiene services. The infrastructure development projects were crucial in this endeavor, with 120 community infrastructure projects completed and support extended to 34 medical institutions, significantly enhancing local capacities to manage the influx of refugees.

The health and nutrition sectors saw substantial progress. Over 500 healthcare workers received training in various critical areas, including emergency medical care and mental health support. However, a recent measles outbreak in a refugee center highlighted the persistent health risks, necessitating robust vaccination and health monitoring systems. Despite these improvements, ensuring full access to state health insurance for all TP holders proved challenging. By the end of February, only 6,000 out of nearly 40,000 TP beneficiaries had registered with a family doctor, underscoring the need for continuous efforts in this area.

Educational integration of refugee children was another priority. By March 2024, 2,314 Ukrainian children were enrolled in Moldovan schools, including 727 in early childhood education². However, a significant portion of refugee children are not attending local schools because they are enrolled in and pursuing online education provided by the Ukrainian government. This option allows them to continue their studies within the Ukrainian curriculum despite being displaced from their home country.

Furthermore, 22,562 children participated in non-formal education activities, such as language courses and vocational training. Efforts to address the educational needs of marginalized groups, including Roma children, were ongoing. However, challenges such as language barriers and the preference for Ukrainian online curricula persisted, complicating integration efforts. Child protection was also a critical focus, with over 3,747 children receiving direct assistance from state services.

The livelihoods sector concentrated on integrating refugees into the labor market and providing socio-economic support. Despite the private sector's willingness to employ refugees, barriers such as language proficiency and limited childcare services hindered employment opportunities. Training programs in professional skills and Romanian language courses were vital in supporting refugees' economic integration, with 593 individuals benefiting from these initiatives in the first quarter of 2024.

Gender-sensitive aspects of the refugee response were particularly emphasized. Protection measures for refugees included extensive training and capacity-building efforts, with 444 individuals, including both women refugees and those working with them, who have been trained on gender-based violence (GBV) principles and response protocols. The extension of TP involved improvements in the protection framework, although issues such as documentation requirements at border crossings posed challenges. Inter-agency coordination was crucial in addressing GBV risks and providing psychosocial support, benefiting over 1,358 individuals who have received psychosocial support and other protection services in the first quarter of 2024.

Effective coordination was maintained through forums such as the Refugee Coordination Forum, ensuring that local actors and international partners could share information and align their interventions. Accountability to affected populations was a priority, with over 30,000 individuals engaged through various feedback mechanisms, ensuring their needs and concerns were addressed in program planning and implementation.

The statistical insights and narrative accounts illustrate both the achievements and the areas needing further attention. Moving forward, a focus on sustainable solutions and enhanced integration measures will be crucial in addressing the evolving needs of refugees and host communities alike, with a particular emphasis on gender-sensitive approaches to ensure inclusive and effective support.

III. Methodology

This study builds upon the 2023 Labor Market Assessment conducted by HIAS, incorporating a gender-sensitive lens and updated data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the labor market experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova. Given that the primary data from the 2023

² [Document - Ukraine Situation - 2024 RRP Mid-Year Report \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/publications/document/2024/04/ukraine-situation-2024-rpp-mid-year-report)

assessment might be insufficient and slightly outdated, the data was triangulated with insights from other recent reports, including the 2023 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), OHCHR Monitoring Fact Sheet January-February 2024, and the UNHCR Operational Update March 2024, as part of the desk review.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative component of the study utilized the existing data from the 2023 Labor Market Assessment, which surveyed 456 Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers aged 18-65. This data provided a baseline understanding of the overall labor market situation for refugees in Moldova. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) in Russian, covering the entire country except for the Transnistrian region. The sample was distributed across different regions, with Chisinau having the highest number of respondents. The survey questionnaire was designed to capture information on various aspects of the labor market, including employment status, types of employment, difficulties in finding work, sources of income, and skills and qualifications.

In addition to the refugee survey, the 2023 assessment also included a survey of 86 legal entities, of which 54 were open to hiring refugees. This survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) in Romanian and Russian, covering various regions of Moldova. The survey aimed to gather information on employers' perspectives on hiring refugees, including their willingness to hire, preferred working conditions, language requirements, and perceived barriers to employment.

Supplementary, the report includes insights and data from the 2023 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA). The MSNA methodology involved a non-probability purposive sampling approach and was carried out with 890 households covering 2130 household members. Among the 890 respondents, 81% were women, 19% were men. The largest age group of respondents was 35-59 years (54%) followed by 60+ (24%) and 18-34 (22%). Out of the total households, 14% had at least one person with a disability. Almost all respondents have Ukrainian citizenship and self-identified as of Ukrainian background.

The data collection process for the quantitative research involved several stages, including pre-testing of the questionnaire, interviewer selection and training, data collection quality control, and data input.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software, producing general results for each question of interest and cross-tabulations with demographic variables to identify correlations and associations. To ensure a gender-sensitive approach, all data was collected and disaggregated by gender. The research design was guided by feminist research principles, emphasizing power dynamics, intersectionality, and women's lived experiences. Data collection tools were designed to capture nuances of women's labor market experiences. The analysis employs a gender lens, examining how gender intersects with other social identities to shape labor market outcomes for Ukrainian women refugees.

Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations, including the non-representative nature of the sample, potential selection bias, and the underreporting of sensitive topics, such as discrimination, exploitation, and personal hardships. Respondents may feel uncomfortable or unsafe disclosing such information, which can lead to incomplete data on critical issues affecting refugees. Additionally, the exclusion of the Transnistrian region and the focus on Ukrainian refugees may limit the generalizability of the findings to other refugee populations in Moldova.

While the study triangulates data from multiple³ sources to ensure robustness, the integration of these data sets may introduce inconsistencies or gaps. The various data sources may have different methodologies, timeframes, and focal points, complicating the synthesis of a coherent analysis.

IV. Findings

This section responds directly to the requirements outlined in the ToR, providing a comprehensive analysis of the labor market experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova. It builds upon the initial labor market assessment, incorporating the latest available data and insights to present a holistic and up-to-date picture.

A. Comprehensive Profile of Women Refugees

The influx of Ukrainian refugees into Moldova has been substantial, with women and children constituting the majority of this population. As of March 2024, approximately 119,000 refugees from Ukraine were residing in Moldova, with women and girls comprising 58% of this group. This demographic is largely concentrated in urban areas, particularly in Chisinau, the capital city. The average household size is 2.36 individuals, with 54% of households including at least one child under 18.

The HIAS 2023 report provides detailed insights into the demographic profile of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova, with a particular focus on women. The study reveals that 72% of the surveyed refugees were female, underscoring the significant gender imbalance within this population. This predominance of women among the refugee community necessitates gender-sensitive approaches in policy formulation and support services.

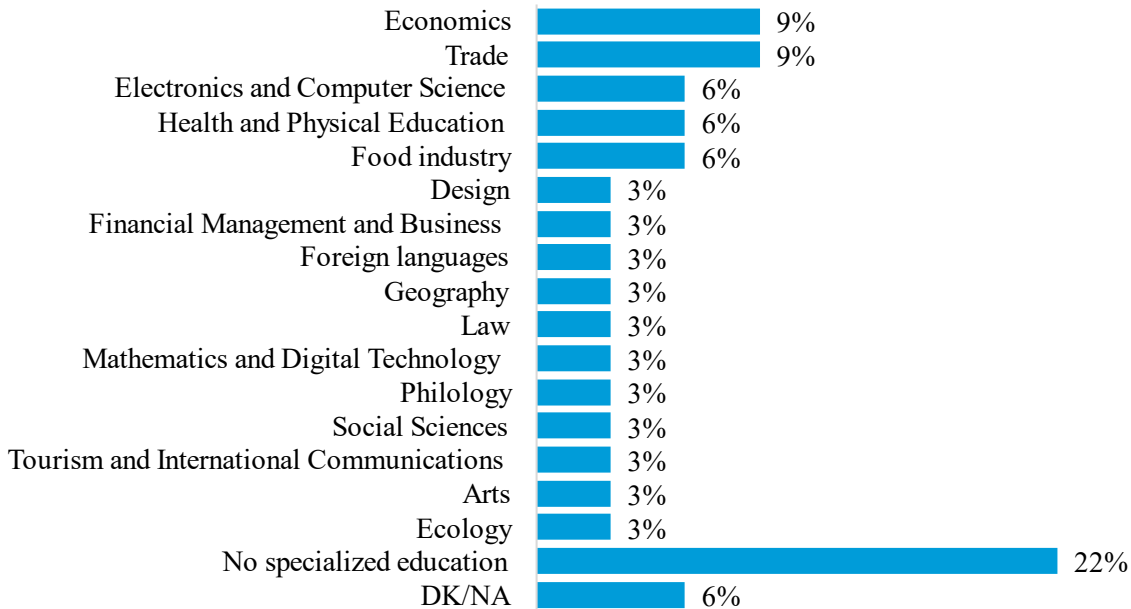
The age distribution of women refugees is concentrated in the prime working years, with 35% aged 30-39 years and 25% aged 40-49 years. This age profile suggests a population with substantial work experience and potential for economic contribution. However, it also indicates a group that may face unique challenges in adapting to a new labor market at a mature stage in their careers.

One of the most striking characteristics of the Ukrainian women refugee population is their high level of educational attainment. The HIAS report indicates that 45% of the surveyed refugees (both women and men) possess higher education qualifications. Economics emerges as the most common field of specialization, cited by 14% of respondents. Speaking of women who were not

³ The data presented in this document are sourced from multiple reliable sources, including the 2023 HIAS Labor Market Assessment, UNHCR, REACH 2023 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA), and other relevant reports from international organizations such as UN Women and the Moldovan government. Specific references include the [UNHCR Moldova Situation Reports](#) and the MSNA Gender, Age, and Disability Analysis (March 2024).

employed, being in Ukraine, 22% of them do not have specialized education, and 9% of refugee-unemployed women have degrees in economics or trade. This educational profile points to a potentially skilled workforce among women refugees, capable of contributing significantly to Moldova's economy given the right opportunities.

Figure 2. Areas of specialization of refugee women who were unemployed in Ukraine



However, the employment situation for Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova is complex. While a significant proportion are employed, many face challenges in finding jobs that match their qualifications and skills.

For example, the top 3 Positions held by women in Ukraine were: Manager (21%), seller (15%), teacher (10%). Being employed in Moldova, refugee women report working as a teacher (11%), manager (9%) and unskilled worker (9%). But at the same time, when asking refugee women about the difficulties of employment in Moldova, 16% said that the job proposals do not match their level of skills.

The 2023 Labor Market Assessment found that 25% of women refugees were employed in Moldova, with a higher percentage (31%) in Chisinau compared to other regions. Of which almost half are aged 35-44 (47%). To a lesser extent, women aged 25-34 years (23%) and 45+(26%) are included in the Labor field. And 4% of refugee women who are employed in Moldova are 18-24 years old. However, the MSNA data reveals a slightly higher unemployment rate among women (8.9%) compared to men (5.4%), with this disparity being more pronounced in regions outside of Chisinau. But elsewhere, 10% of refugee women are unemployed and not looking for work, according to the study. The reasons for this type of behavior are: family care, health issues and plans to leave Moldova

The primary sources of income for refugee households are diverse, with a significant reliance on external financial assistance. The 2023 Labor Market Assessment found that 36% of women

refugees rely on cash support from NGOs as their primary income source, while 10% rely on government cash support. The data further reveals that a higher proportion of households with female respondents reported receiving unconditional cash transfers compared to households with male respondents, suggesting potential gender disparities in access to aid.

A significant proportion of women refugees carry caregiving responsibilities. The report shows that 14% of respondents were on maternity leave before arriving in Moldova, and currently, 15% are on childcare leave. This high prevalence of caregiving duties among women refugees presents a critical factor that affects negatively their ability to seek and maintain employment in Moldova. It underscores the need for support services, particularly in childcare, to facilitate these women's participation in the labor market.

Despite their qualifications and previous work experience, Ukrainian women refugees face considerable challenges in integrating into the Moldovan labor market. Only 25% of the surveyed refugees are currently employed in Moldova, with an additional 23% actively seeking work. This significant gap between previous employment rates in Ukraine (56% of Ukrainian women were employed in Ukraine before coming to Moldova) and current employment status in Moldova highlights the barriers these women encounter in their new environment.

These barriers include language difficulties⁴, lack of recognition of qualifications, limited job opportunities matching their skills, and the competing demands of caregiving responsibilities. The low employment rate, despite the high proportion of women actively seeking work, suggests structural and systemic challenges in the labor market integration process.

Language difficulties: 56% of women and 40% of men cited the language barrier as a major obstacle.

Lack of job opportunities: 21% of women compared to 20% of men identified this as a barrier.

Mismatched qualifications: 16% of women and 8% of men reported difficulties finding jobs that match their skill levels.

Caregiving responsibilities: 14% of women, compared to only 5% of men, highlighted the challenge of caregiving as a significant obstacle to employment.

B. Career Pathway Comparison

Pre-Displacement Careers in Ukraine

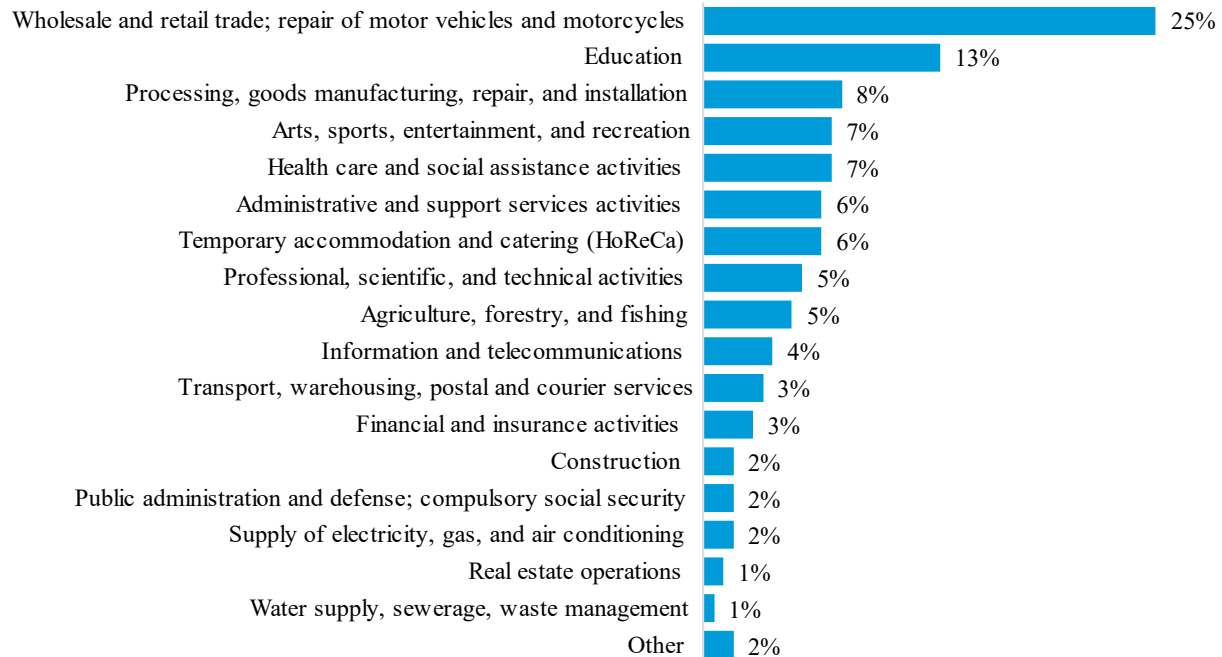
Prior to displacement, Ukrainian women refugees engaged in diverse and accomplished career pathways in Ukraine. The 2023 Labor Market Assessment shows that 56% of women who moved to Moldova were employed in Ukraine and 19% were on maternity leave, and 10% were unemployed. 57% of women employed in Ukraine worked as qualified workers and specialists. The top 3 industries in which women have been employed in Ukraine are: wholesale and retail trade (25%), education (13%), and processing, goods manufacturing, repair, and installation (8%). The most frequent job titles included manager/administrator (22%), shop assistant (12%), teacher (8%), engineer (6%), accountant (5%), and doctor/nurse (4%). This data⁵ indicates a well-educated

⁴ 2023 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA)

⁵ 2023 HIAS Labor Market Assessment.

and skilled workforce with experience in both white-collar and blue-collar professions. For more information about the areas in which Ukrainian women were employed before coming to Moldova, *Figure 2.* can be consulted.

Figure 2. Industries where Ukrainian women were employed at their last job



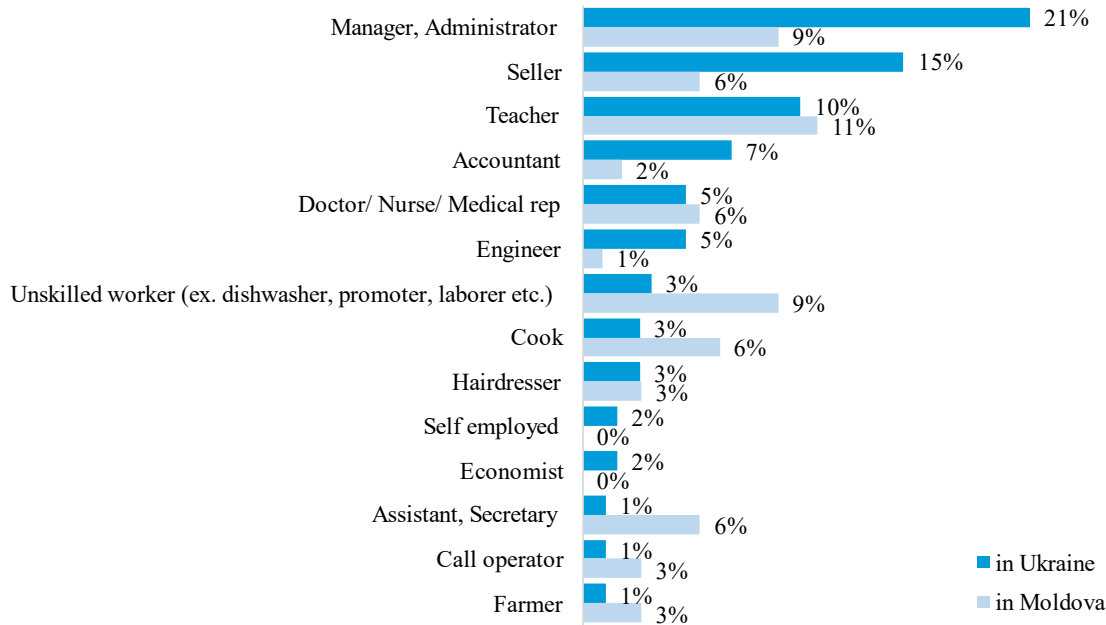
In terms of business administration in Ukraine, only 12% of refugee women have owned business in Ukraine, with 75% of these are no longer active due to the war. In 44% of cases, women managed the business for more than 10 years. At the same time, 30% of women had a young business that they managed up to 3 years.

In terms of sectors, 50% of women owned businesses were in wholesale and retail, and 14% in arts, sports, entertainment and recreation.

Post-Displacement Employment in Moldova

The employment landscape for Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova shows that a significant proportion (27%) are currently employed. However, there is a shift in the types of jobs they hold compared to their pre-displacement careers. The most common jobs in Moldova include manager/administrator (10%), unskilled worker (9%), teacher (9%), cook (7%), and volunteer (7%). These results point to blocked opportunities in the labor market that compels Ukrainian women refugees to engage in jobs below their qualifications and skills.

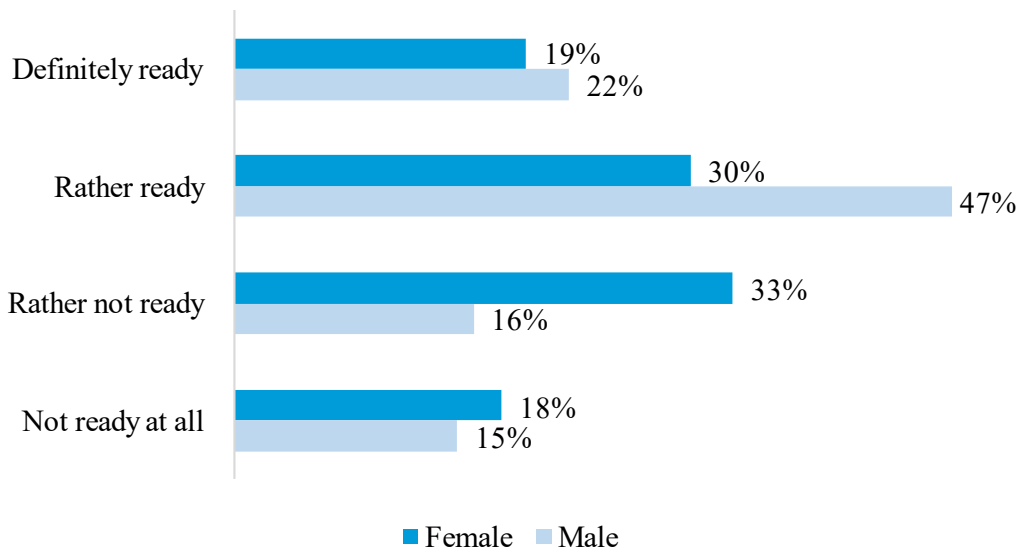
Figure 33. Positions held by women refugees in Ukraine vs. in Moldova



The data analysis shows a gap between Ukrainian men and women with regards to their willingness to start working in Moldova. 49% of women are ready to engage in Moldova (of which 19% are definitely ready to engage in Moldova and the least 30% - rather ready) compared to 69% of men. The lower readiness among women can be attributed to several factors, including caregiving responsibilities, availability of prospective job opportunities, and uncertainty regarding their long-term plans in Moldova.

Moldovan companies have expressed their willingness to accept refugees for work. 65% of the surveyed enterprises from Moldova confirmed their willingness to employ refugees.

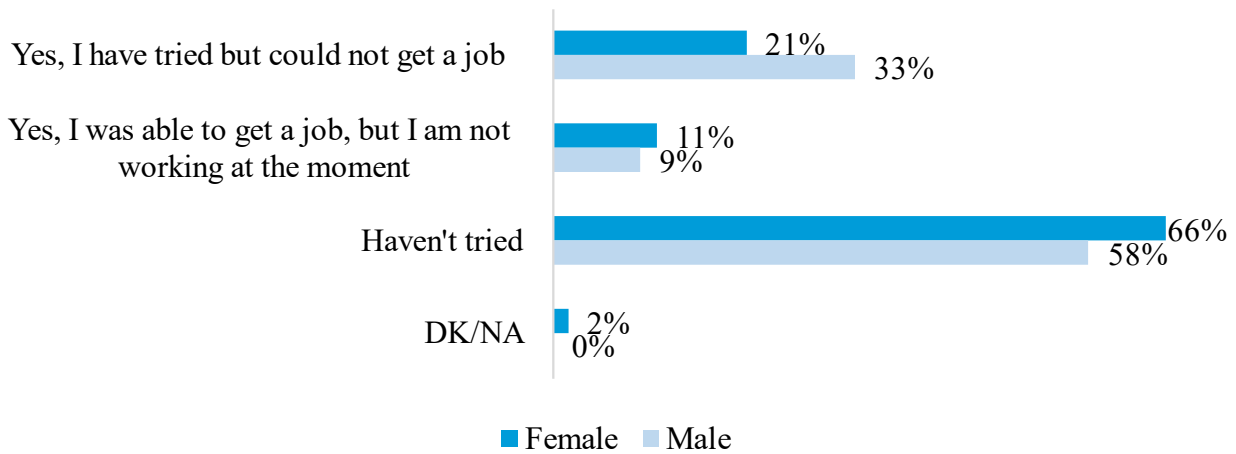
Figure 44. The willingness of refugees to get a job in Moldova



The data analysis shows a gender gap in access to jobs among refugees who are not employed in Moldova. 1 out of 5 unemployed refugee women tried to get employment in Moldova, but did not succeed, compare to 1 out of 3 unemployed refugee men.

At the same time, it is observed that a higher share of women, than men, did not try to engage in Moldova (66% of Women vs. 58% in men).

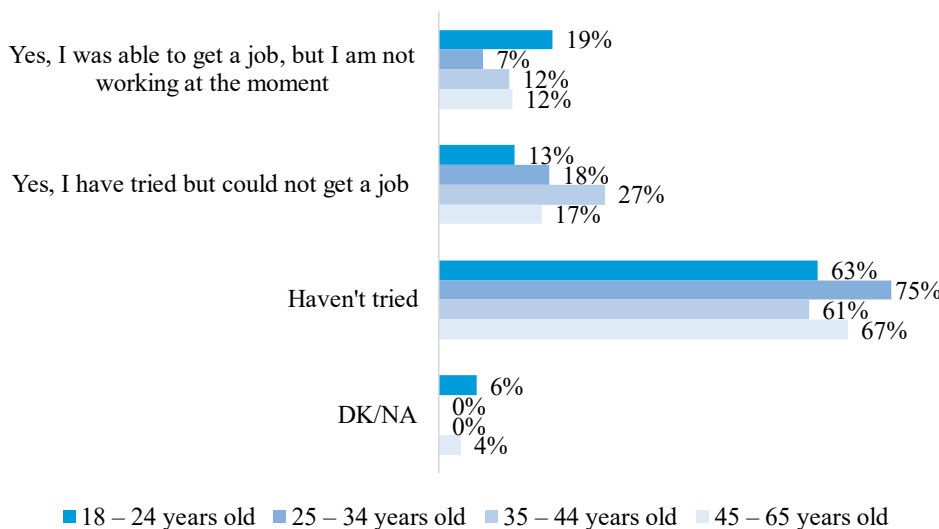
Figure 5. Have you tried to get a job while living in Moldova? (disaggregated by gender)



According to the results of the study, 2023 HIAS, women of any age mostly did not try to find a job in Moldova (data shown in the figure below).

On the other hand, it is observed that almost every fourth woman who at the time of the study did not work in Moldova, previously managed to have a job in Moldova.

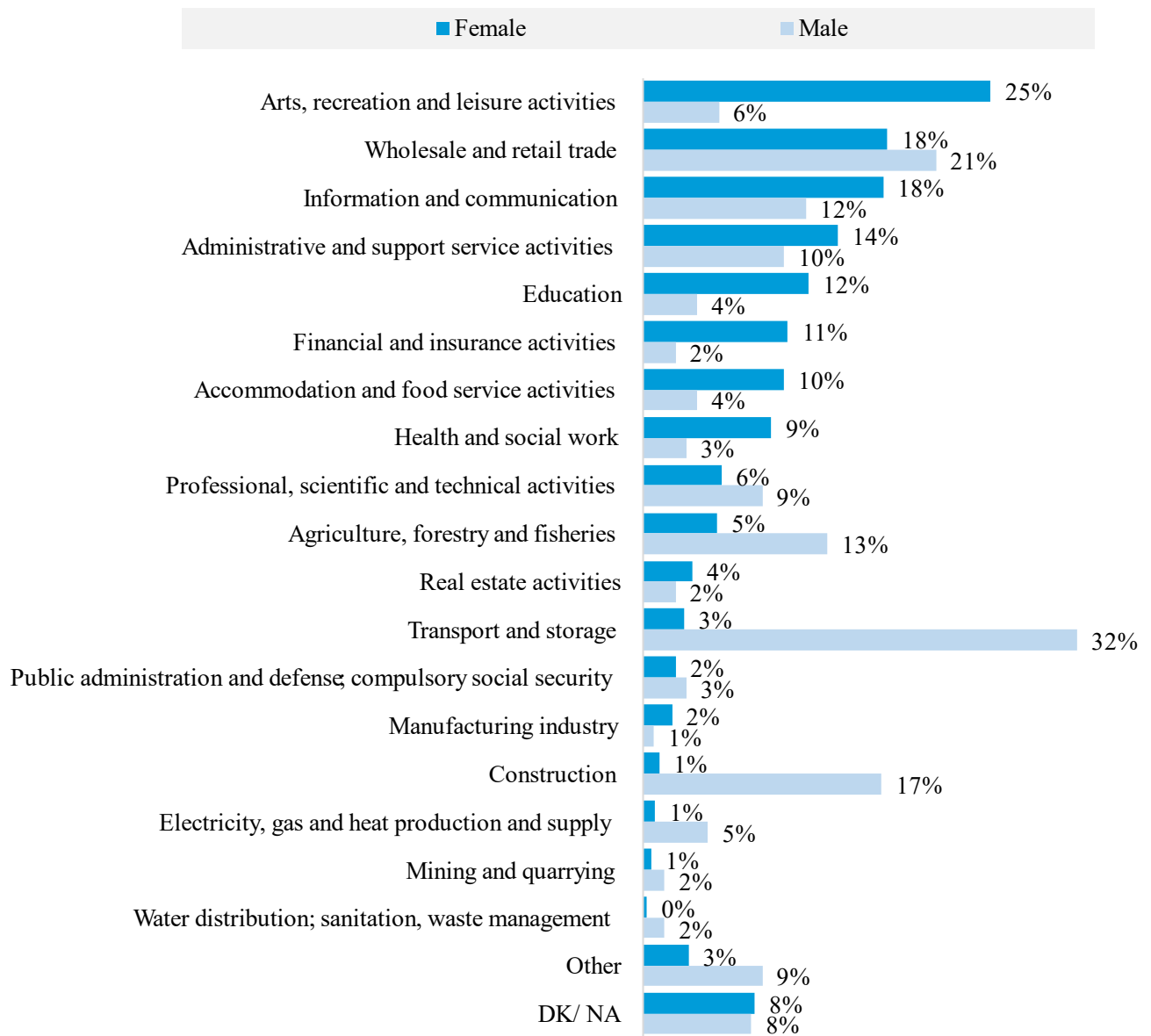
Figure 5. Have you tried to get a job while living in Moldova? (disaggregated by age, women only)



In terms of preference of the job seekers, areas of work, refugee women would accept to work in the fields of artistic, recreational and leisure activities, wholesale and retail trade, information and communication, administrative and support services activities and education.

Men show different preferences such as transport and storage, wholesale and retail, construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Figure 76. Areas refugees would agree to get an offer to work in Moldova (disaggregated by gender)



C. Gender-Based Employment Inequity Assessment

The employment landscape for Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova shows significant gender-based disparities that impact their economic integration and empowerment. This chapter delves into the complexities of gender-based employment inequities, offering an analysis of the obstacles and challenges that hinder the participation of women refugees in the labor market.

The initial HIAS Moldova Labor Market Assessment ⁶highlighted a gender disparity in employment sectors among refugees working in Moldova, with men more prevalent in agriculture and construction, and women in public administration, education, health, and social assistance. The data shows that, while a large proportion of individuals reported having access to healthcare services, there were still disparities: a higher proportion of unemployed females in the center, north, and south of Moldova compared to males in those regions.

- Unemployment

the employment rates among Ukrainian refugees in Moldova show that women experience higher unemployment rate (8.9%) compared to men (5.4%). The gap increases in locations with lower employment opportunities like it is the case rural areas. Despite the willingness of many women to participate in the labor market—49% express a desire to work—the structural barriers they face significantly impede their employment prospects like language barriers, lack of job opportunities etc. This higher unemployment rate underscores the need for targeted interventions to support women in finding and securing suitable employment. But elsewhere, 10% of refugee women are unemployed and not looking for work, according to the study. The reasons for this type of behavior are: family care, health issues and plans to leave Moldova.

Another study, UNHCR: Protection Brief # 4⁷, confirms that just under half of those surveyed (44%) had been employed or self-employed before leaving Ukraine, although this number was lower than the previous reporting period (April 2024) - 57%. Despite their backgrounds, only 14% of respondents were employed in Moldova or working remotely from Moldova at the time, a decrease from the previous round (April 2024) - 20%.

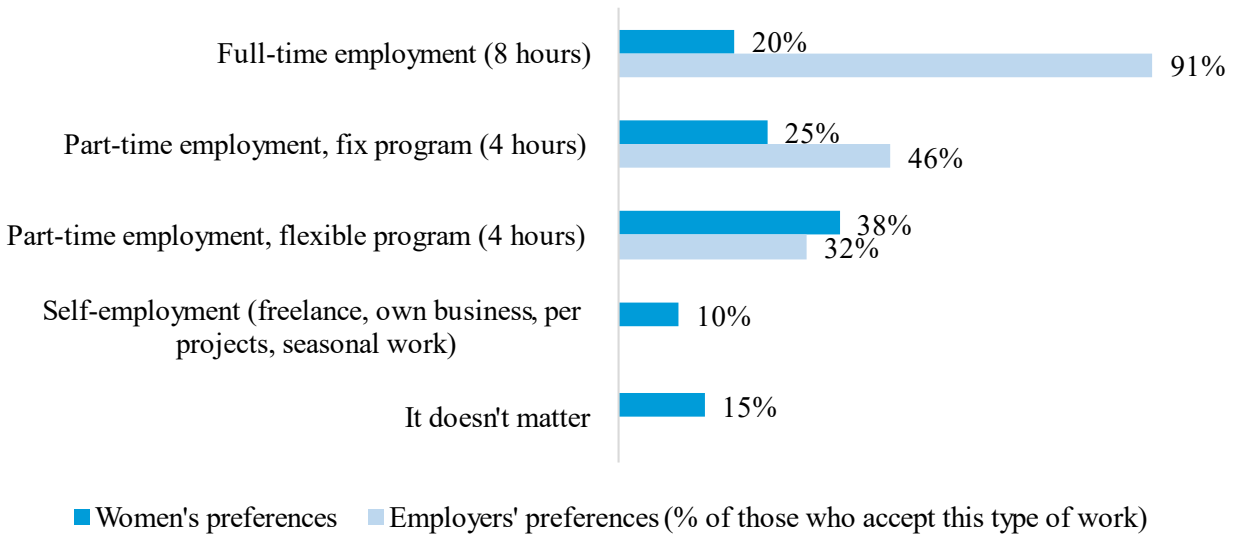
- Job conditions

Although, Moldovan companies declared that they are willing to hire refugees, a more detailed analysis shows that the preferences are to hire full-time employment (91%). 56% of employers are open to hiring refugees on part-time program with fixed working hours, and 35% - part time program with flexible program. However, these preferences can impact more negatively women job seekers. As seen in Figure 5, most women in the sample (63%) prefer a part-time position mostly due to their obligations as single parents. ,.

⁶ [Labor market assessment for refugees and asylum seekers in the Republic of Moldova](#)

⁷ [UNHCR: Protection Brief # 4](#),

Figure 8. Preferable work program for the women-job seekers vs. employers



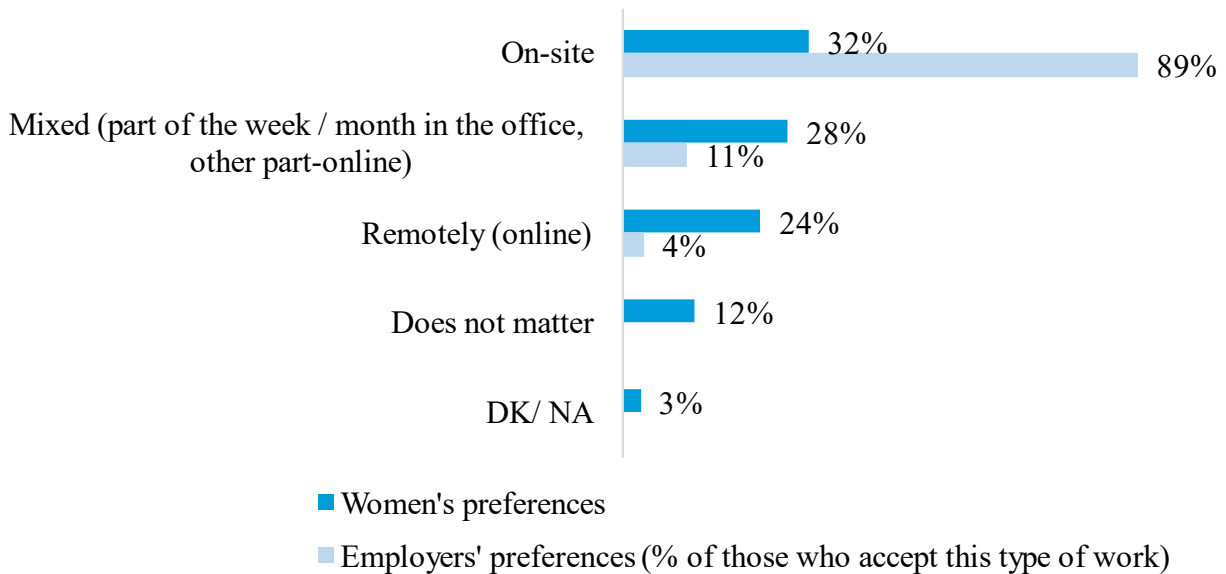
In terms of location preferences, refugee women and men choose to work in the employer's location, either with the possibility of combining office work with remote work.

In terms of modality, women show a preference for remote work (24%) compared to men (10%). The preference for part-time and flexible work among women refugees is driven by their caregiving responsibilities, which significantly restrict their availability for full-time employment. Many women are primary caregivers for children and elderly family members, necessitating work arrangements that can accommodate these duties.

Regarding employers' requirements for modality of work, most companies open to hiring refugees, prefer to hire individuals for on-site work (91%). Companies are less open to hiring people working remotely (9%) and mixed programs (21%). One positive insight is that employers who participated in the interviews opened the door to some flexibility on a case-by-case basis. . . At the same time, the HoReCa sector offers the option of working in shifts (two working days, two days off) and offer special conditions (the day starts one hour earlier and ends one hour earlier) for parents with children in kindergarten The HoReCa sectors seems to offer more opportunities for parents with special needs.

Another sector that offers opportunities for refugees and some flexibility is the delivery services are open for refugees, which offer the possibility to establish independently the preferred work schedule and to respect it provided they work at least 20 hours per week.

Figure 9. Preferred format of work for the women-job seekers vs. employers



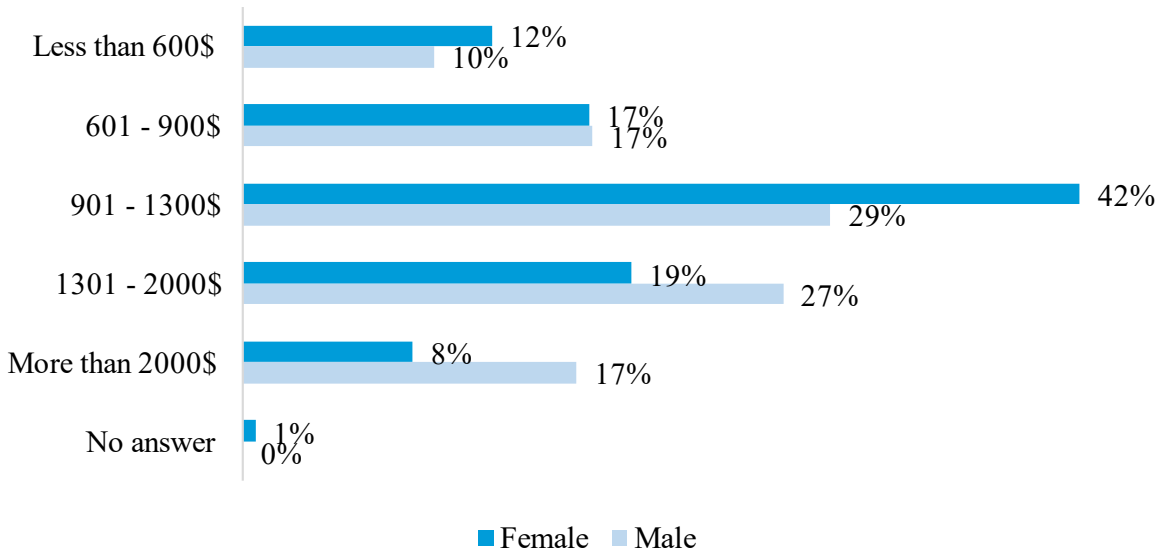
- Income

Income disparities further highlight gender-based inequities. Women refugees are frequently relegated to lower-paying jobs compared to men. For instance, men are more likely to be employed in higher-paying sectors such as construction, while women dominate the public administration, education, health, and social assistance sectors, which typically offer lower wages. Referring to the salary expectations of refugees, it can be said that women have a lower salary threshold than men. 42% of refugee women who participated in the survey communicated that they would accept a full-time job with a salary, between \$900-1,300. While 29% of refugee men declared the same salary expectations, it is worth to mention that 27% have higher salary expectations between \$1,300-\$2,000.

according to the data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova, in the third quarter of 2023 (same period of data collection for the survey), the average gross salary per country amounted to 12,357 MDL (about \$650),.

So, it is important to highlight that the expectations of refugees do not coincide with the salary situation in the Moldovan market. This income gap not only affects the economic stability of women refugees but also limits their ability to invest in further training and education, perpetuating a cycle of economic dependency and vulnerability.

Figure 10. Refugees' desired salary expectations



With regards to entrepreneurship, 11 % of refugees from the total sample, who do not have a stable job in Moldova, mentioned that they are interested in self-employment/ opening a business. Of these 71% are women.

The 3 leading sectors to open a business are: beauty industry, IT sector and art/ design.

According to the participants in the survey, lack of finance is the most common barrier, followed by lack of business education, language difficulties and lack of knowledge about the legislation of Moldova on opening a business. These barriers are similar for men and women

At the same time, the study shows that half of the women who would like to open a business in Moldova consider that they need financial support in this process. The second type of help that refugee women would need to open a business is mentoring in business or trainings on the subject, followed by support in communication and state language. Discussing how refugees can be supported by the state or NGO, in Focus groups refugee women shared certain ideas, based on their experience. Discussing how refugees can be supported by the state or NGO, in Focus groups refugee women shared certain ideas, based on their experience

For example, one interviewed woman who is involved in offering cleaning services believe that the state or NGOs can help by providing material support, i.e. purchasing those necessary devices, or through financial support that would be allocated for the purchase of materials necessary for more efficient work, which will increase income and clientele.

At the same time, refugees who would like to deal with the distribution of goods mentioned the need for financial support, necessary at each stage of the distribution and sale cycle: transportation of goods to Moldova, assembly/disassembly, rent of a warehouse/commercial space/point of sale, logistics process through the country, etc.

In addition, the interviewee with the barber services mentioned that finances were necessary both in case of opening a shop – rent of space, payment of utilities, salaries, etc., and in the case of renting “an armchair” in an already existing shop.

When asked if they had tried to obtain funding by applying for grants, some refugees mentioned that they had had experience applying for grants, but it had been fruitless: *"They called us, they promised to help us, they promised to help us all, who participated in trainings organized for 2-3 days, but [nothing came of it]..."*.

On the other hand, one of the participants in the discussion says that, living in a small village, Local Public Authorities representatives found out that he had a business in Ukraine and recommended that he apply to the project to acquire financing for opening his own business in Moldova. This highlights the gender gap, as women refugees often face additional barriers such as lack of access to business networks, information, and financial resources. Unlike their male counterparts, women are less likely to receive such targeted support or recommendations, reflecting the broader challenge of empowering female entrepreneurship within refugee communities.

For the most part, the interviewed refugees do not know where they can turn to receive the support, they need for opening a business in Moldova, including legal, financial, material, or technical support.

Ukrainian refugee women in Moldova primarily seek information and opportunities through several channels. These include social media platforms, community networks, support from local NGOs, and assistance provided by international organizations like UNHCR. Additionally, word-of-mouth within refugee communities and informational sessions held at refugee accommodation centers play a crucial role in disseminating vital information.

D. Employment Obstacles and Aspirations

This chapter delves deeper into the specific obstacles faced by Ukrainian women refugees in seeking and maintaining employment in Moldova. Both the HIAS Moldova Labor Market Assessment⁸ and the MSNA Gender, Age, and Disability Analysis⁹ have identified several key barriers.

Based on the HIAS Moldova Labor Market Assessment, refugee women who tried to get employment in the Republic of Moldova, as the first barrier for employment they call the language barrier (56% for women and 40% for men), followed by the lack of work opportunities (21% for women vs. 20% for men), the lack of positions corresponding to their abilities (16% for women and 8% for men) and the presence of the child in need of care (14% for women vs. 5% for men). Less popular were responses that referred to uncertainty over plans for the future, lack of experience or qualifications, discrimination based on my refugee status, lack of programs facilitating the inclusion of refugees in the workforce, lack of permanent legal status.

⁸ [Labor market assessment for refugees and asylum seekers in the Republic of Moldova](#)

⁹ [MSNA Gender, Age and Disability Analysis](#)

Speaking about the difficulties faced by refugees in the process of self-employment in the Republic of Moldova, focus group participants who had a business in Ukraine mention that the state does not provide conditions for refugees to open in Moldova the business they had in Ukraine. The interviewees claim that it is difficult or impossible to obtain an entrepreneur patent¹⁰, in Moldova the laws being different from those in Ukraine. Some interviewees say that for a refugee to open their business in Moldova, they must reach illegal paths through the involvement of Moldovans: *"... You must hire Moldovans, pay people someone to open the business. But I don't want to."*

Another barrier is the lack of possibility to distribute goods through points of sale in Moldova, such as supermarkets, groceries, etc. In this regard, the interviewee proposes that the state allow producers to distribute their goods through shops, supermarkets, small groceries, etc. In order to organize this process, refugees also ask for support and explanations.

In discussing the barriers and difficulties faced by **refugees who have tried to become or are self-employed**, an interviewee mentioned that the main difficulty for offering cleaning services is the lack of equipment necessary to perform more complex work – steamer, vacuum cleaner, etc.

Refugees who provide barber/hairdressing services mention that they face high prices for tools and equipment for his salon, the price being 2-2.5 times higher than in Ukraine: *"I cannot get used to the prices. Everything is very expensive in Moldova. [...] When I started buying equipment, it hurt my soul that I knew it was cheaper in Ukraine."* Financial difficulties related to the development of the business – renting a larger space, arranging the work area, recreation for clients, etc. – were mentioned as a difficulty.

In addition to financial challenges, at the beginning of launching the business, some refugees claim to have faced organizational and legal difficulties. In this regard, the participants say that it was not clear how to obtain the patent and to whom to address this request, being redirected from the City Hall to the State Tax Service, then to other institutions. The process of obtaining the patent was sophisticated and complicated, even with the support of lawyers: *"... even at the town hall they did not know how to do it correctly. They sent me to the Tax Service, the Tax Service – to the town hall to get a work permit. Even if the lawyers helped, there were times when I didn't know how to do it, because then they had changed the law, I didn't have the temporary protection."*

Overall, the labor market participation of Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. While 25% of refugees are employed, a significant portion faces substantial barriers to entering the workforce. These barriers, as highlighted in the 2023 Labor Market Assessment and the MSNA report, include:

Language and cultural barriers

The lack of Romanian language proficiency is a major hurdle for many women, limiting their access to information and job opportunities. This is particularly pronounced in the North, where 43% of refugees in the 2023 study reported language barriers as a significant obstacle. The MSNA report further emphasizes this, noting that a "lack of knowledge of local languages" is one of the top two reasons for employment difficulties.

¹⁰ The entrepreneur's patent is a nominative state certificate, certifying the right to carry out the type of entrepreneurial activity indicated in it during a certain period of time. (art. 1 par. (1) of the Law regarding the entrepreneur's patent no. 93-XIV of 15.07.1998).

Skills and Qualifications Mismatch

The Moldovan labor market is characterized by a predominance of low-skilled jobs, while many Ukrainian women refugees possess higher education and specialized skills. This mismatch leads to underemployment and frustration among refugees, as 21% of respondents in the 2023 study indicated. Skilled workers are not willing to change their field of work or engage in unskilled labor as it is both professionally and financially un-rewarding. There is also a lack of quality training and upskilling programs both within the public sector (through the National Employment Agency) as well as the private sector, where small and medium-sized companies lack the necessary resources to train staff.

Intentions and motivation

While some intention surveys indicate that the Ukrainian refugees are willing to stay in Moldova for the next 6 to 12 months, the long-term intention is to return to Ukraine as soon as the war is over. This prevents refugees from seeking a long-term career and employment in Moldova and limit themselves primarily to short-term and service contracts. Refugees who do not actively seek employment, rely on prior savings, continue their former work online, and/or are receiving humanitarian assistance to cover all their essential needs. Lack of motivation to work, is especially noticeable in individuals living in RACs as their accommodation, food and financial needs are covered the response community and Moldovan Government.

Childcare Responsibilities

For women with children, the lack of affordable and accessible childcare is a significant barrier to employment. The 2023 study found that 11% of respondents cited childcare as a reason for not seeking employment. However, the MSNA report suggests that while childcare is a concern, it may not be the primary barrier for all women. Only a small proportion of respondents prioritized the need for childcare support (2.2% female compared to 0.6% male respondents), and among male- and female-headed households, only female-headed households with children identified this as a priority need (4.3%) compared to male-headed households with children (0%). This suggests that the childcare gap, identified in earlier gender analyses as a barrier for women to access services and employment, may not (or no longer) be the main barrier¹¹.

E. Women-Specific Opportunities and Support

The dynamics of the refugee situation in Moldova have shifted since the initial 2023 Labor Market Assessment. While the earlier assessment focused on the general labor market challenges faced by refugees, the subsequent MSNA report and the Inter-Agency Update Report Q1 2024 have brought a sharper focus on the gendered experiences of Ukrainian women refugees. These later reports highlight the persistent barriers to employment faced by women, such as childcare responsibilities, language barriers, and the mismatch between their skills and available job opportunities.

Moldova has a range of services aimed at supporting the economic empowerment of Ukrainian refugee women. These services are primarily provided by a combination of governmental bodies,

¹¹ Both male- and female-headed households with children listed education, feeding support for babies, and baby items as priority needs, as compared to male- and female-headed households with no children which did not. This makes sense given their specific responsibilities for childcare and support.

UN agencies and development organizations, international NGOs, and local NGOs and civil society organizations.

Governmental bodies like the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research and the National Employment Agency (ANOFM) offer vocational training and employment services. However, these services are not always tailored to the specific needs of refugees. UN agencies and development organizations, such as UN Women and the ILO, focus on economic empowerment, skills development, and job creation. International NGOs like UNHCR, DRC, and NRC provide a variety of services, including cash assistance, education, and vocational training. Local NGOs and civil society organizations play a crucial role in language training, cultural orientation, psychological support, and employment assistance.

There have also been positive developments. There have been positive developments in the support system for Ukrainian refugee women. The Moldovan government has introduced new childcare services, which can help women balance work and family responsibilities. Additionally, initiatives like the "Friendship Officers" program, supported by the EU and UNDP, are facilitating refugee integration by providing guidance on accessing essential services and employment opportunities. The Inter-Agency Update Report Q1 2024 also highlights an increased engagement of community mental health centers in providing services to refugees, indicating a positive shift towards integrating mental health support into the overall assistance framework.

The data reveals that a significant proportion of women refugees are employed in sectors such as education, healthcare, and social services, suggesting a potential for leveraging their existing skills and experience in these areas. This presents an opportunity to develop targeted programs that build on these skills and facilitate their integration into the Moldovan workforce. Additionally, the report notes that the majority of respondents were aware of existing gender-based violence (GBV) services, indicating that information dissemination efforts are reaching the target population.

Regarding the possibility of Moldovan companies to provide their employees with any kind of training, more than half of surveyed companies (56%) state that they could provide training on the specific skills required for the job for the successful integration of refugees into their company, in the case of their employment. And 2% of the surveyed companies have the opportunity to provide language courses. At the same time, 16% of the Moldovan companies surveyed are not able to provide any courses at all.

It is important to mention that the Moldovan government has made strides in recognizing the importance of childcare for workforce participation, particularly among women. Following the adoption of Law No. 367/2022, three new types of alternative childcare services for children under three were introduced: employer-provided childcare at the workplace, individualized childcare services, and family-type childcare services. These services are designed to complement existing preschool and early education institutions and are not considered forms of social assistance. While the specific impact of these new childcare options on Ukrainian women refugees is not detailed in the provided reports, their existence indicates a positive step towards addressing the childcare needs of working parents in Moldova.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

The comprehensive analysis of the labor market experiences of Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova reveals a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities. While the overall employment rate among refugees is relatively high, significant gender disparities persist, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to promote equitable economic integration.

Our findings indicate that Ukrainian women refugees face distinct barriers to employment in Moldova. Despite their high levels of education and diverse professional backgrounds, many struggle to find jobs that match their qualifications and skills. This mismatch not only represents a lost opportunity for these women but also for the Moldovan economy, which could benefit from their expertise and experience.

The gender disparities in employment are particularly striking, with a higher unemployment rate among female refugees (8.9%) compared to their male counterparts (5.4%). This gap widens in locations with lower job opportunities like f outside of Chisinau, underscoring the need for geographically targeted interventions. The reasons for this disparity are multifaceted, including language barriers, childcare responsibilities, limited job opportunities matching their skills, and uncertainty about long-term plans in Moldova.

Furthermore, we observe a clear pattern of gender-based sectoral segregation in employment. Women refugees are more prevalent in public administration, education, health, and social assistance sectors, while men are more represented in agriculture and construction. This segregation may reflect both societal norms and the differing skillsets of refugee populations, but it also points to potential areas for diversification and integration efforts.

One key finding is the mismatch between the work preferences of refugee women and the expectations of Moldovan employers. Many women express a preference for part-time or remote work, likely due to caregiving responsibilities. However, the majority of employers still favor full-time, on-site workers. This disconnect highlights the need for more flexible work arrangements and a shift in employer attitudes to accommodate the unique circumstances of refugee women linked mostly to childcare duties.

For those interested in self-employment, significant hurdles exist. Women refugees face challenges in accessing financing, navigating unfamiliar business regulations, and overcoming language barriers. Despite these obstacles, there is a clear entrepreneurial spirit among many refugee women that could be harnessed with the right support mechanisms.

In light of these findings, this report presents a series of recommendations aimed at humanitarian organizations, policy-making bodies, with the goal of promoting more equitable labor market integration for Ukrainian women refugees in Moldova.:

1. **Improve childcare access:** Establish affordable, flexible childcare options to enable more women to pursue employment and training opportunities. Building upon Moldova's recent progress in this area, as evidenced by Law No. 367/2022, efforts should focus on expanding and adapting the newly introduced childcare services to meet the specific needs of refugee families. This multifaceted approach not only addresses a critical barrier to employment for refugee women but also aligns with Moldova's broader childcare initiatives. By positioning

childcare provision as an entrepreneurial opportunity for refugee women, this recommendation promotes economic empowerment, cultural integration, and sustainable solutions to childcare challenges

2. **Enhance language support:** Develop accessible, job-specific Romanian language free of charge courses that accommodate women's schedules and caregiving responsibilities. This could include mobile language labs, digital learning platforms, and community-based classes with integrated childcare. Intensive language immersion programs that combine language learning with vocational training should be considered. The goal is to make language learning as flexible and accessible as possible, especially for those in rural areas or with limited mobility.
3. **Bridge the skills gap:** Create mechanisms to recognize Ukrainian qualifications and provide targeted training to adapt skills to the Moldovan context. This should include a streamlined process for validating foreign qualifications, short-term "bridge" programs to adapt existing skills, mentorship programs, and internship opportunities. Another option would be piloting integrated programs that combine essential services such as language learning or vocational training with on-site childcare, utilizing the newly established childcare models.
4. **Support entrepreneurship:** Provide comprehensive support for women interested in self-employment, including access to microfinance, business education, mentoring, and guidance on local regulations. This could involve streamlined business registration processes, tailored microfinance products, dedicated incubation programs for refugee entrepreneurs, and networking opportunities to connect with local business communities.
5. **Combat discrimination:** Implement awareness campaigns and incentives to address potential biases against hiring refugee women. This includes training on unconscious bias and fair hiring practices, public campaigns highlighting success stories, and strengthening mechanisms for reporting and addressing workplace discrimination against refugees.
6. **Enhance information access:** Improve outreach efforts to ensure women refugees, especially in rural areas, have access to information about job opportunities, rights, and support services. Specifically, we recommend building on the commendable efforts of ANOFM's territorial subdivisions to visit temporary placement centers for refugees, by enhancing and expanding this outreach program to more effectively support the integration of Ukrainian refugees, particularly women, into the Moldovan labor market. A comprehensive information package could be developed in Ukrainian and Russian, covering the Moldovan labor market overview, job search strategies, employee rights and responsibilities, available training courses, and self-employment opportunities. To further improve accessibility, mobile employment service units should be established to provide on-site assistance at refugee centers, offering skills assessments, job matching services, CV writing workshops, and information on job openings.
7. **Implement gender-sensitive policies:** Ensure refugee employment and integration policies explicitly consider and address the unique challenges faced by women. This includes reviewing and amending labor laws, developing gender-responsive employment services, and involving refugee women in policy consultations and decision-making processes.

The successful integration of Ukrainian women refugees into the Moldovan labor market is not just a matter of economic policy; it is an opportunity to build a more resilient, equitable, and prosperous society. By addressing the gender-specific challenges and harnessing the potential of these women, Moldova can set a positive example for refugee integration in the region and beyond.

In conclusion, while the challenges are significant, so too are the opportunities. With targeted interventions, collaborative efforts, and a commitment to gender equity, Moldova can create a more inclusive labor market that benefits refugee women, their families, and the broader Moldovan society. This not only addresses the immediate crisis but also lays the groundwork for a more diverse, skilled, and resilient workforce for the future.

Disclaimer:

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