UNHCR's comments on the Draft Law Amending Certain Normative Acts Related to the Integration of Foreigners in the Republic of Moldova

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Representation in the Republic of Moldova (hereafter "UNHCR") is grateful to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) for the opportunity to express views on the Draft Law amending certain normative acts related to the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova (hereafter the "Draft Law"), including amendments to Law No. 274/2011 on the Integration of Foreigners in the Republic of Moldova, Law No. 270/2008 on Asylum in the Republic of Moldova, Law No. 139/2007 on savings and loan associations, and Law No. 198/2007 on state-guaranteed legal aid.[1]

2. UNHCR offers these comments as the agency entrusted by the United Nations General Assembly with the responsibility for providing international protection to refugees and other persons within its mandate, and for assisting governments in seeking permanent solutions to the problem of refugees.[2] As set forth in its Statute, UNHCR fulfils its international protection mandate by, *inter alia*, "[p]romoting the conclusion and ratification of international conventions for the protection of refugees, supervising their application and proposing amendments thereto."[3] UNHCR's supervisory responsibility under its Statute is reiterated in Article 35 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees ("the 1951 Convention")[4] according to which State parties undertake to "co-operate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees […] in the exercise of its functions, and shall in particular facilitate its duty of supervising the application of the provisions of the Convention." The same provision is included in Article II of the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees ("the 1967 Protocol").[5]

---

[1] *The Draft Law on the Amendment of Certain Normative Acts (Related to the Integration of Foreigners in the Republic of Moldova), available at https://particip.gov.md/ro/document/stages/proiectul-de-lege-pentru-modificarea-legii-nr-2742011-privind-integrarea-strainilor-in-republica-m/16070.*

[2] *UN General Assembly, Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 14 December 1950, A/RES/428(V), available at: https://www.refworld.org/legal/constinstr/unga/1950/72586 ("the Statute").*

[3] *Ibid., para. 8(a).*

[4] *UN General Assembly, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html According to Article 35 (1) of the 1951 Convention, UNHCR has the "duty of supervising the application of the provisions of the Convention".*

[5] *UN General Assembly, Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 31 January 1967, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 606, p. 267, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3ae4.html. UNHCR's supervisory responsibility has also been*

3. UNHCR's supervisory responsibility is exercised in part by the issuance of interpretative guidelines on the meaning of provisions and terms contained in international refugee instruments, in particular the 1951 Convention. Such guidelines are included in the UNHCR Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status and subsequent Guidelines on International Protection ("UNHCR Handbook").[6] UNHCR also fulfils its supervisory responsibility by providing comments on legislative and policy proposals impacting on the protection and durable solutions of its persons of concern.

4. The following sections, thus, include observations related to various aspects of the Draft Law, addressing selected points where further clarification or adjustment may be required to ensure legal certainty, procedural safeguards, effective access to rights, and sustainable integration outcomes for persons concerned by the proposed amendments. UNHCR stands ready to offer additional clarifications as considered useful and to continue the dialogue with the MIA to further improve the Draft Law, with the involvement of other relevant stakeholders.

II. General Observations

5. UNHCR welcomes the efforts reflected in the Draft Law to further strengthen and update the legal framework governing the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova, in light of recent normative and policy developments in the fields of migration and asylum that Moldova is undertaking, mainly as part of its EU accession process. UNHCR notes positively the intention to improve the efficiency, accessibility and inclusiveness of integration measures and enhance inter-institutional coordination and cooperation with national and international non-profit organizations.

6. UNHCR further notes positively a number of proposed amendments aimed at improving the coordination of the integration process, including the establishment of an inter-institutional working group, the development of individualized integration plans based on identified needs, and the increased involvement of relevant public authorities and non-commercial organizations in the implementation of integration

reflected in EU law, including by way of general reference to the 1951 Convention in Article 78 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

[6] *UNHCR, Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status and Guidelines on International Protection Under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, April 2019, HCR/1P/4/ENG/REV. 4, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5cb474b27.html*

measures. Such measures may contribute to a more coherent, predictable and needs-based integration framework.

7. UNHCR recalls that effective integration measures are critical to ensuring access to healthcare, education, employment, and other fundamental rights for beneficiaries of international protection, stateless people, and other legally residing foreigners in the Republic of Moldova. Beyond safeguarding rights, integration promotes dignity and social cohesion by enabling refugees to rebuild their lives and contribute to host communities through economic participation, cultural exchange, and civic engagement. Inclusive integration policies strengthen self-reliance, reduce long-term dependency, generate mutual benefits, ultimately fostering resilience, stability, and social cohesion for both refugees and host societies.[7]

III. Specific Observations

a. Limitations in the scope of the Law

i. Timely access to integration measures

8. UNHCR notes that in the provision relating to the organization of socio-cultural accommodation sessions which are mandatory for beneficiaries of international protection, the amendment under para. 10.1 (Article 10(7)) replaces the fixed time-limit of 90 days with the wording “a reasonable period depending on institutional capacity”. These sessions include trainings on national values and traditions, the rule of law and its principles, the system of political-administrative organization of the Republic of Moldova, cultural diversity, norms of peaceful coexistence. Whereas UNHCR has no specific concerns regarding this new formulation, it is suggested to also include asylum-seekers in these sessions, despite their explicit exclusion from the scope of the Law. Certain categories of asylum-seekers could be targeted, such as those who have registered a claim and are present on the territory for a specified period of time (for instance a few months) or those who are employed or those coming from the same country of origin. Prompt access to integration measures constitutes an essential component of early integration and effective inclusion. Moreover, from a practical point of view, the organization of trainings for larger groups would reduce the costs and increase impact.

9. Early access to integration measures improves both protection outcomes and long-term inclusion prospects for forcibly displaced people. Promoting self-reliance from the outset reduces dependency, preserves dignity, strengthens

[7] *Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme (ExCom), Conclusion No. 104 (LVI): Local Integration - Adopted by the Executive Committee (2005), No. 104 (LVI) 2005, 7 October 2005, https://www.refworld.org/policy/exconc/excom/2005/114429 [accessed 15 May 2026]; Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme (ExCom), Conclusion No. 117 (LXXV): Durable Solutions and Complementary Pathways - Adopted by the Executive Committee (2024), No. 117 (LXXV), October 2024, https://www.refworld.org/policy/exconc/excom/2024/148870 [accessed 15 May 2026]*

social cohesion, and enables refugees and asylum-seekers to contribute economically and socially to host communities. Comprehensive solutions arrangements should be developed as early on as possible and, in practice, delaying language training, education, employment access, and community orientation until a formal status (international protection) is formally granted often prolongs exclusion and increases future integration costs. Integration measures should therefore also be made available to asylum-seekers, particularly given the length of many asylum procedures and the clear evidence that early inclusion supports more sustainable integration outcomes for both individuals and host societies.[8]

ii. Access to active labour market measures (ALMMs) for beneficiaries of temporary protection

10. Beneficiaries of temporary protection are currently excluded from the scope of the Law. They have access to basic employment services but remain excluded from active labour market measures (ALMMs), including vocational training, employment subsidies and other labour market integration support which are provided for as part of the integration measures in the Law. Expanding access to such measures could support faster labour market integration, foster skilled employment, promote self-reliance and reduce dependency. Available socio-economic analysis[9] also indicates significant labour market activation potential among beneficiaries of temporary protection, while the estimated fiscal impact appears manageable and could be implemented gradually. Increased formal employment could further contribute to higher tax revenues, social insurance contributions and higher purchasing power over time.

11. At the same time, the planned expansion of ALMMs in 2026, including in the context of the EU Growth Plan for the Republic of Moldova and the Government's broader labour market reforms, creates favourable conditions for the gradual inclusion of additional beneficiaries without generating disproportionate pressure on the existing system. Publicly available Government planning documents indicate that the budget and implementation capacity for ALMMs in 2026 are expected to increase fourfold compared to previous years.

---

[8] The Directive (EU) 2024/1346 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection, of relevance to Moldova in view of its EU accession, refers on standards on early integration measures. These standards include, among others, language learning and upskilling, cultivating the ability to act autonomously, early access to labour market, access to education and healthcare. For good practices from the EU Member States see the Language buddy project, with best practices across 8 EU countries, which includes language, mentorship and community building initiatives. Also, of relevance UNHCR's toolkit on effective inclusion of refugees at the local level, that includes good practices from states that could be a reference.

[9] UNHCR Moldova, in collaboration with the World Bank and the Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement, „Unlocking Refugee Workforce Potential: Estimated Demand for Active Labor Market Measures Among Ukrainian Temporary Protection Holders in Moldova", February 2026, English and Romanian; UNHCR note on Estimated Demand For Active Labor Market Measures.

12. UNHCR recommends amending the Law No. 274/2011 and Law No. 105/2018 to allow beneficiaries of temporary protection to access active labour market measures. In this regard, the following amendments could be considered:

a. In Article 2(2)(b) of Law No. 274/2011 on the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova, supplement the text with the following wording: "except for access to employment promotion measures and active labour market measures, under the conditions established by Law No. 105/2018 on employment promotion and unemployment insurance".

b. In Article 2(2) of Law No. 105/2018 on employment promotion and unemployment insurance, after the reference to "Law No. 274/2011 on the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova", add the following wording: "including the persons referred to in Article 2(2)(b) of the same Law".

b. Safeguards related to material support and accommodation for vulnerable beneficiaries of international protection

13. UNHCR notes with concern the proposed amendments under Article II points 1 and 2, repealing Article 33 para. (2) and Article 91 para. (3) of Law No. 270/2008 on Asylum that offer the possibility to beneficiaries of international protection to apply for financial assistance for a period of six months. Furthermore, under Article I point 19.1, Article 27 para. (2) of Law No. 274/2011 on Integration of Foreigners is amended to reduce the possibility for free accommodation for vulnerable beneficiaries of international protection from six to three months. Taken together, these amendments may significantly reduce the level of material support available during the initial integration period for beneficiaries of international protection with special needs and limited prospects for immediate self-reliance.

14. UNHCR recalls that beneficiaries of international protection often continue to face substantial difficulties following recognition, including access to stable housing, employment, healthcare, and other essential services. Older people, people with disabilities, single-parent households, survivors of violence and people with serious medical conditions may require longer periods of support and accommodation in order to achieve a minimum level of stability and sustainable integration. In this context, the simultaneous removal of the possibility to request financial assistance and reduction of the accommodation period may increase risks of homelessness, destitution, social exclusion, and negative coping mechanisms, while also reducing long-term integration prospects.

15. While the explanatory note refers to alternative forms of material support under Government Decision No. 720/2025, UNHCR observes that these measures are aimed at asylum-seekers as part of material reception conditions, rather than beneficiaries of international protection after recognition. The explanatory note also does not sufficiently demonstrate that beneficiaries of international protection will continue to enjoy effective access to adequate material support following the proposed amendments.

16. UNHCR further states that, under Article 31(1) of Regulation (EU) 2024/1347 of the European Parliament and the Council (Qualification Regulation), which will enter into force on 12 June 2026 for EU Member States, beneficiaries of international protection should have access to social security and assistance under conditions equivalent to those applicable to nationals. Although Moldova is not an EU Member State, this point is of relevance in view of its accession procedure and the alignment with the EU acquis. As a result, and even though States retain discretion regarding the form of assistance provided, reforms reducing existing safeguards should continue to ensure conditions compatible with human dignity and effective integration.

17. UNHCR therefore recommends reconsidering the proposed repeal of Article 33 para. (2) and Article 91 para. (3) of Law No. 270/2008 on Asylum, as well as maintaining the possibility of free accommodation for vulnerable beneficiaries of international protection at six months under Article 27 para. (2) Law No. 274/2011 on Integration of Foreigners. Any reform of the assistance framework should ensure that beneficiaries of international protection continue to have effective access to adequate material support and accommodation, particularly during the initial integration period and in cases involving heightened vulnerabilities.

c. Creation of the new Working Group and development of the Individual Integration Plan (IPP)

18. Article 34 of Law 274/2011 on Integration of Foreigners providing for the mechanism of coordination of the integration process is amended to include the creation of an “Inter-institutional Working Group on the Inclusion of Foreigners in Integration Measures” (WG). It is further stated in paragraph 1 of that article that its organization and operation are approved by the Government. According to paragraph 2 of the amended article 34 “*The Working Group meets biannually or whenever necessary to discuss the individual integration plans for foreigners, developed in accordance with Article 22, to evaluate the integration process and identify shortcomings in the implementation of integration activities, to plan joint activities, and to systematize information in the field of integration*.” In the amended article 22 it is provided that “*the individual integration plan shall be drawn up based on the individual*

needs identified during the interview provided for in Article 21 by the competent authority for foreigners". It is also stated in amended article 22 that the WG can be involved in the development of the IIP, in cases of beneficiaries with special needs. Article 30 and the newly added article 30[1] further include that the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and the Ministry of Health respectively participate in the development of individual integration plans. As a result, the involvement of multiple actors in the drafting of the IIP, particularly where referrals are overused, may create an unnecessarily complex procedure, leading potentially to delays and creation of a backlog of cases.

19. UNHCR recommends that the WG maintains a systemic role, focused on overseeing the general normative framework and implementation of the integration measures, rather than being systematically involved in the drafting of the IIP. The amended Law 274/2011 should clearly define the procedure of the drafting of the IIP, specifying that it is prepared by designated social or case workers within the competent authority for foreigners. Under only exceptional and specific circumstances, cases should be escalated to the WG and/or institutional bodies of the Ministries. These exceptional circumstances should be named in the normative act of the operation and organization of the WG.

d. Equitable access of stateless people to integration measures

20. UNHCR notes that stateless people lawfully residing in the Republic of Moldova face integration challenges comparable to those encountered by beneficiaries of international protection, particularly in relation to access to employment, education, healthcare and other essential services, where knowledge of the Romanian language is often a practical prerequisite. Under national legislation, proficiency in the state language is required or strongly facilitates effective access to a wide range of rights and opportunities, including interactions with public authorities, participation in education and access to the labour market. In accordance with Law No. 200/2010 on the Regime of Foreigners, stateless persons are recognized as a distinct category of foreigners with lawful residence and entitlement to a range of rights and obligations. At the same time, Law No. 274/2011 on the Integration of Foreigners is intended to facilitate the social, economic and cultural integration of foreigners residing legally in the Republic of Moldova. In practice, however, the current legal framework does not ensure that stateless people benefit from integration measures on an equitable basis as beneficiaries of international protection, despite the fact that both categories may require targeted support to achieve self-reliance and participate fully in society.

21. In UNHCR's view, this distinction is not justified. All integration measures currently available to beneficiaries of international protection, including free Romanian language courses, individualized integration

plans, counselling and other support services, should be made equally accessible to stateless people who are lawfully residing in the country.

22. More specifically, Article 5 para.1 (a) of Law 274/2011 sets out the integration measures for all foreigners covered by the scope of the law (Article 2 para.1), i.e. including stateless people. Nevertheless, Article 6 (before and after the amendment) covers access to assistance for people with special needs, under specific conditions, only for beneficiaries of international protection. In Article 3, providing for the notions used in the Law, only beneficiaries of international protection are named explicitly as a category with special needs covered by the Law. Some uncertainty is added by the fact that Article 17 on access to welfare and social security applies alike for all categories of foreigners covered by the scope of the Law. In addition, Article 11 on Romanian language courses provides in its para. 10 that beneficiaries of international protection enjoy these courses for free, while in para. 8 it is stated that courses for stateless people are offered at a fee (although some allowances might be granted). Last, UNHCR recognizes that Chapter II of the Law, titled "Carrying out the Integration Process" provides for a series of integration rights and measures for all foreigners, i.e. including stateless people, under the scope of the Law, nevertheless only beneficiaries of international protection can be part of the integration program that includes the Individual Integration Plan (Articles 21 *ff*).

23. UNHCR understands that the access to rights and services might not be identical for the two categories of foreigners (stateless and beneficiaries of international protection). Nevertheless, the provisions of the Law seem to vary significantly as per their scope of implementation creating some uncertainty on what applies to whom. Furthermore, the situation of stateless people in Moldova, their vulnerability and need of integration is of similar nature to that to beneficiaries of international protection and this should be reflected in the Law.

24. UNHCR recommends that the scope of application of the Law as per the various categories of foreigners is clarified and that stateless people enjoy similar rights and services in terms of integration as beneficiaries of international protection. Indicative provisions include Article 6, Article 11 and Articles 21*ff* of the Law 274/2011 on Integration of Foreigners.

e. Information to be provided to beneficiaries of international protection

25. Article 8 of the law 274/2011 provides in its paragraph 3 for the information of the foreigner of its rights and obligations upon recognition as stateless or beneficiary of international protection (among others). The paragraph is amended to include the need to communicate in a language the person understands but deletes the provision that the

beneficiary has to sign an official document that they were informed. It should be reiterated that the rights and obligations of a person recognized as stateless or as beneficiary of international protection are numerous and linked to different institutions. It is thus recommended to have a written document, translated into a language the person understands, to be shared with the beneficiaries and that this document should include information on how to apply for integration measures.

26. UNHCR recommends including in paragraph 3 of the amended article 8 of the law 274/2011 that the information of the content of the rights and obligations, including access to integration measures, of foreigners upon recognition as stateless or beneficiaries of international protection (among others) should be shared in writing, in a language the person understands.

IV. Conclusions

27. In the context of consultations on the Draft Law, UNHCR welcomes the authorities' continued efforts to strengthen the legal and institutional framework governing the integration of foreigners in the Republic of Moldova and would like to reiterate the importance of reviewing certain aspects of the proposed amendments with a view to ensuring effective access to rights, sustainable integration outcomes, and full compliance with applicable international and European standards.

28. UNHCR trusts that the MIA will give due consideration to UNHCR's comments and recommendations. UNHCR remains committed to supporting the authorities of the Republic of Moldova and remains available to provide further technical support, expertise, and necessary clarifications.

UNHCR
19 May 2026