

Refugee Crisis in Moldova

Where is the Cavalry?

Monday 4 April 2022, by [SMITH David](#) (Date first published: 24 March 2022).

Today we're going to do an unusual post but one that is a long time coming. Before we get going I want to say up front that the contents of this post are my opinions alone based on many off the record conversations during the last month. If this post ruffles feathers - it is supposed to.

Where is the Cavalry?

As we have discussed many times since the beginning of this war 1 month ago, Moldova is experiencing an unprecedented refugee crisis. There are well over 100,000 Ukrainian refugees currently in Moldova staying at government centers (5,000) at makeshift centers registered with the government (20,000) and in Moldovan's homes (75,000). The Moldovan government has heroically responded with its limited resources and without any past experience dealing with a humanitarian crisis of this size. The Moldovan people have opened their homes to host refugee families and people have donated food, clothing, blankets diapers, baby food and much more to help people who left their home on moment's notice. Local NGOs have thrown all of their weight and staffing to understanding the needs of their communities and responding with support. Church groups in particular have been critical and with the *notable* exception of the Orthodox Church (which has done nothing) and have organized refugee centers, funneled in donations and set up hot food kitchens at border crossings. I write this from what used to be my BBQ restaurant which now distributes food, clothing, and other necessities to around 1,500 people a day.

This is how things are being done now. An effort of many small groups working with the Moldovan government holding things together with bubblegum and hope.

Now, every day I am getting nervous calls from these churches and NGOs asking "Where is the Cavalry?"

The whole effort described above was meant to be a stop-gap. A holding tactic to help Moldova's government and authorities manage a crisis while the UN, USAID, World Food Program, and other groups with tents, blankets, mattresses and lots of volunteers wearing vests with logos on them show up.

One month into the war they are not here.

It is important to note that this is not an exaggeration. This [week the Swiss Government sent 2 million Swiss Francs](#) to the Moldovan government. Based on public reporting that is the first monetary transfer at a government to government level since this crisis began. This is wonderful, but not the millions of dollars in aid that the UN and other groups keep talking about on CNN.

The United Nations, which is supposed to be coordinating aid in Moldova, has not spent a **single dollar** at the time of writing. If no international aid organization had done **anything at all** to help

refugees in Poland, Romania or Hungary in the last month it would be an international scandal. Why has Moldova, the smallest country with the largest number of refugees per capita ***by far*** received no help? Moldova, which is not a member of the EU and does not benefit from the protection of NATO. Moldova which had innumerable challenges before this crisis. Where is the Cavalry?

So What is Going on Here?

I've met with a lot of people from various aid organizations in the last month. Organizations big and small have sent staff to Moldova to "analyze the situation." Some small groups have setup programs and responded rapidly to meet the needs right in front of them. But through all these talks, there is a common thread that seems to highlight the major problem.

Firstly, they didn't send any staff. The typical conversation goes like this:

"so we sent all of our staff to Poland except our 2-3 person team in Moldova. Our goal is to try to find a partner here to (do whatever). We have money for [something - whatever they focus on]."

The problems here are manifold. Firstly, Moldova is absolutely overwhelmed and expecting local NGOs with national reach to be sitting and waiting to be asked to do something is super impractical. These groups are not trying to fund existing efforts in almost all cases but want someone in Moldova to setup the international organizations response (many want to "support remotely from Poland").

The second major problem is a lack of central coordination. At the Moldovan government level coordination still works through Moldova for Peace volunteer working group. But they are completely overwhelmed and working day to day problem by problem. They have not managed to create a database of relief efforts around the country. By all accounts, no one knows where around 75% of the refugees are staying except to say they are "with families." Many groups go to the UN which is supposed to be coordinating this effort. There the story seems the same - they have not yet staffed up to even ***begin*** this coordinating effort.

Where do Things Stand?

Right now, at the border refugees are being served hot food while they wait for busses. This food is donated by individuals, and companies. It is cooked by church groups. It is served under a large tent borrowed from a local brewery. You can see UN stickers on government busses so presumably they have someone going to pass those out. Information for refugees is provided by Moldova for Peace. Medical support is provided by the Moldovan government and small NGOs from across Europe and the US. At Palanca, electricity is provided by a local company that tapped the power lines on their own initiative.

All of this is amazing, inspiring and necessary. It takes time for large international efforts to get deployed. But these efforts on the ground have already bought them 1 month and there are no indications that the cavalry is on the way. Moldova is stretched as thin as it can stretch right now.

From where I sit, it is impossible to imagine this same situation playing out in Poland without creating an international scandal. The UN and World Food Program and other agencies keep talking about the millions of dollars they have allocated too Moldova. My question is - where is it?

Moldova Matters. If you have the opportunity to email your elected representatives ask them why all the international donor money, channeled through the UN, is not yet deployed in Moldova? Why haven't they spent a single dollar so far? Where is the cavalry?

David Smith

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P.S.

Moldova Matters

<https://moldovamatters.substack.com/p/quick-hit-12-refugee-crisis-in-moldova?s=w>