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Asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs in Moldova

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Refugees in Moldova

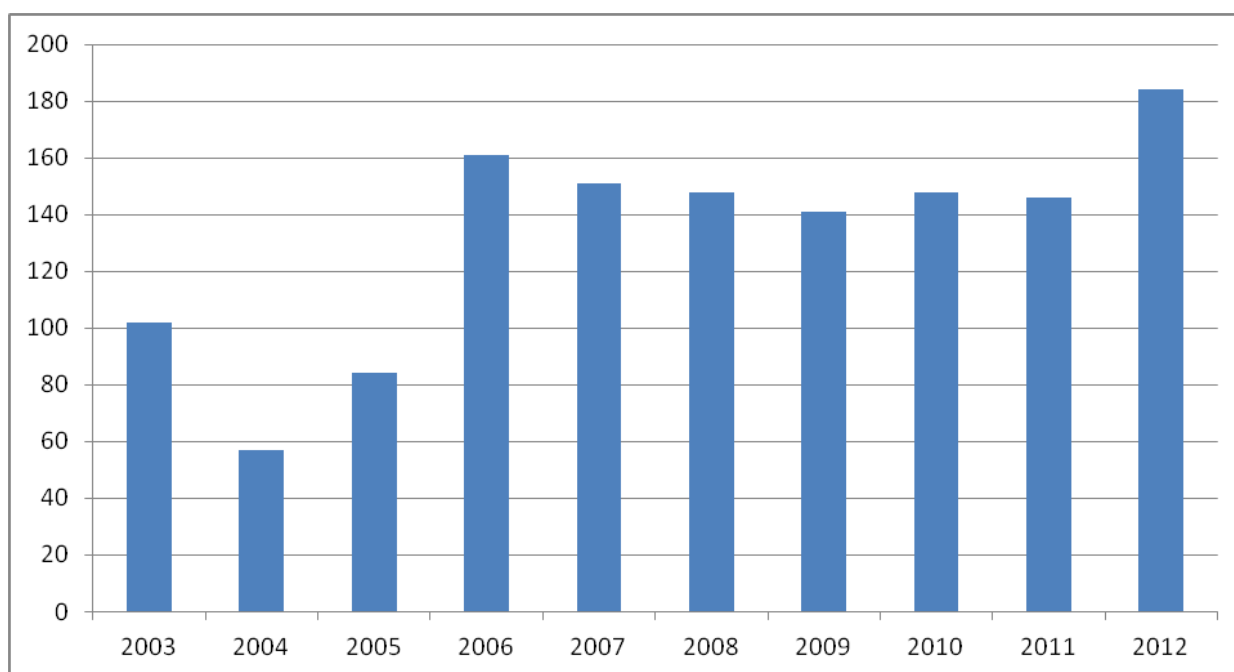
In 2001 Moldova was the 140th country to ratify the 1951 Convention on refugees.

The legal authority responsible for administrating and solving refugees' problems is the Refugees division of the Bureau of Migration and Asylum, within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

First law on the refugees' status came into power in January 2003. The law was elaborated mostly by UNHCR given its mandate and lack of experience of Moldovan authorities. In 2008 another law on asylum, closer to the EU regulations, was adopted.

Available data offered by the UNHCR¹ indicate two distinct phases: the first three years of the implementation of the law on refugees, when the number of persons granted asylum fluctuated and was lower than 100 per year, and the period from 2006 to 2011 when the yearly number of refugees was more stable, around 150 persons.

Figure1. Number of refugees in Moldova, 2003-2012, persons



Source: UNHCR

The higher value of refugees registered in 2012 was caused by a significant increase of refugees from Syria: from 11 persons in 2011, to 55 in 2012.

On average, about 9% of asylum seekers are recognized as refugees.

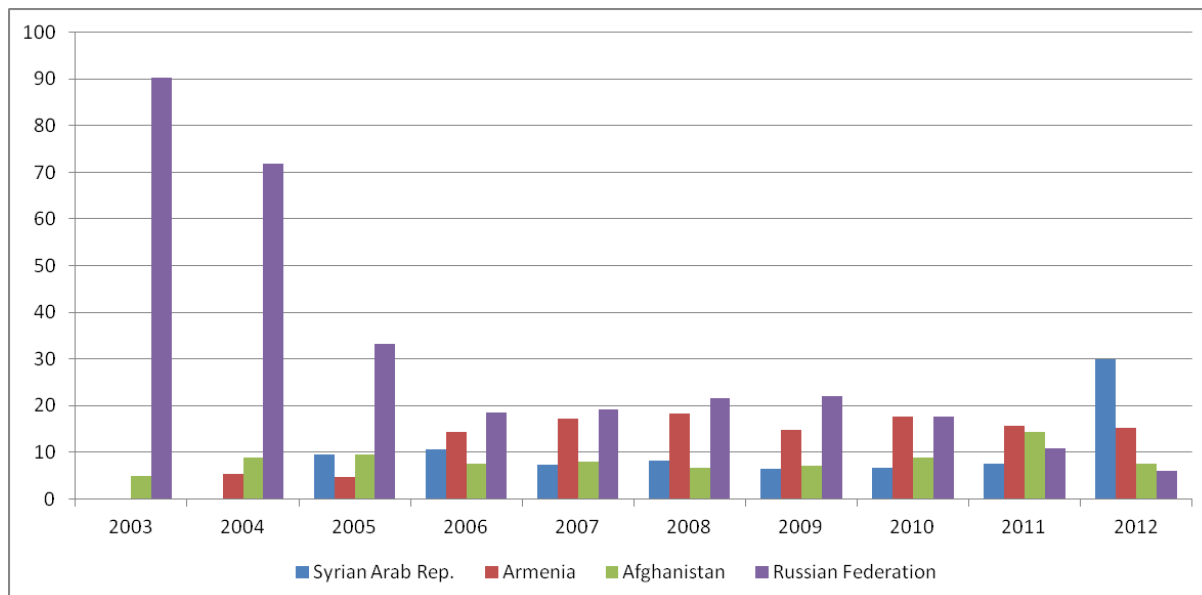
Across the years there was a shift in the share of countries where refugees came from. In 2003 about 90% of refugees were coming from Russia (mostly Chechen Republic). By 2012 this share gradually decreased to 6%.

Armenia is the country that increased its share from almost 0% in 2003, to a stable 16% (on average) starting with 2006.

¹ <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNHCR&f=indID%3AType-Ref>

On average, about 8% of refugees registered yearly are from Afghanistan (except for 2011 when the share almost doubled) and other 8% are from Syria. In case of Syria, the share reached 30% in 2012, being the highest increase over one year, since 2003.

Figure 2. Share of refugees originating from selected countries, 2003-2012, percent



Source: UNHCR

This high increase in refugees from Syria, in 2012 generated a high interest of media against integration problems faced by refugees in Moldova.

Organizations fighting for human rights and helping refugees used this interest to highlight the main problems.

It seems that bureaucracy and inefficiency of public services worsen refugees' condition. Moreover, one specific problem generated by authorities doesn't allow refugees to benefit their right to travel abroad.

This happens because authorities cannot print passports. The German company that won the contract cannot start printing them because another company accused authorities for not playing fair while selecting the company that will print the passports. According to Ecaterina Silvestru, Head of Refugees Division of the Bureau of Migration and Asylum, by the end of 2013 or beginning of 2014 refugees may obtain the passports.

Another important problem for refugees is finding a good job in Moldova, which is difficult even for Moldovans. For refugees it's more difficult because many of them don't speak neither Romanian or Russian.

Refugees who studied in Moldova or who have relatives in Moldova have better chances to find a job or start a business.

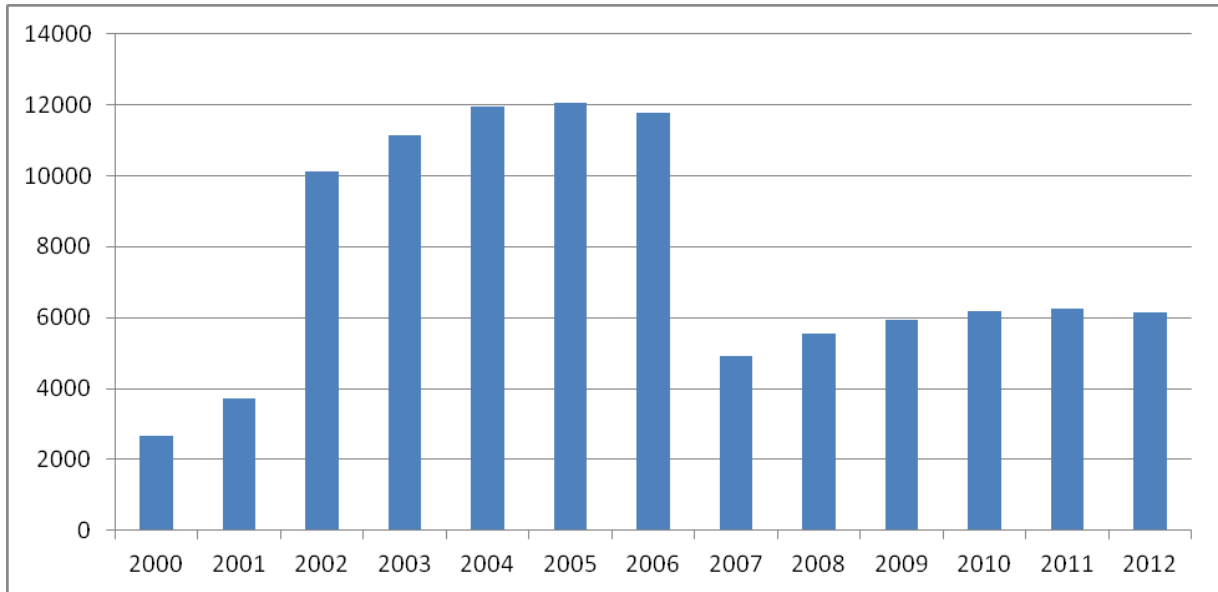
One the positive side, there's one factor that refugees mention as facilitating their integration in Moldovan society that is the tolerance of Moldovans.

Refugees from Moldova

In the last 20 years two main events may have forced people leave Moldova: the war against Russia in 1992 and 8 years under a communist government.

According to UNHCR data, the number of refugees from Moldova increased from 2000 to 2010 with an surprising boom in 2002- 2006 and became stable.

Figure 3. Refugees from Moldova, 2000-2012, persons



Source: UNHCR

It's interesting to mention that the huge increase in refugees in 2002 happened after the communist party won the elections in 2001. This increase was caused by a high number of refugees to Germany: 5370, compared to 0 refugees in 2001.

There was also an increase of refugees from Moldova, going to the United States, from 3194 to 4213.

Together, starting with year 2002, US and Germany hold more than 70% of refugees from Moldova. During 2002-2006 the share was more than 90%.

In that period many politicians from opposition and their supporters suffered from communists authorities.

In the last years, among other important countries of destinations for refugees are the United Kingdom, France, Canada.

There are no data on why people were forced to leave Moldova. Increase in the number of refugees from Moldova happened next year after the communist party won the elections. Additional data on reasons of leaving Moldova could offer more exact explanations of the phenomena.

Internally Displaced Persons

In present, it's impossible to track IDPs as there are no data on them. Taking in account the war against Russia in 1992 and the current situation in Transnistria it's reasonable to assume that many people from that region were forced to move to other regions of the country.

Moreover in the last 5 years, Moldova faced extreme natural phenomena like floods² and dries³, which had great impact on rural areas. Many⁴ people lost their houses and moved to other villages or dropped agriculture and went to cities.

Unfortunately, no data on such moves are available. Such persons could be tracked by observing the change of their residence in the population register, but few people bother doing this as this is an administrative procedure that involves some costs and is done only if it helps to obtain some benefits.

² In July-August 2008 Moldova faced one of the one of the biggest flood in the last 200 years. In the North the level of precipitations were 4 to 9 times higher than the seasonal average, in the rest of territory 2-4 times higher.

³ In 2007 Moldova was hit by an extreme dry which reduced the productivity of agriculture to the level registered after the Second World War. The damage was estimated to ¼ of the GDP. The 2011 dry was similar to that in 2007.

⁴ After floods in 2008 about 1200 houses were destroyed and 8000 persons evacuated.