

OLDER REFUGEES BRIEFING NOTE

Disability & Age Task Force
Refugee Coordination Forum Moldova

The **Disability & Age Task Force** was established in March 2022 with the support of the Refugee Coordination Forum and under the Protection Working Group. The Task Force include humanitarian actors providing specific services for people with disabilities and older people.

BACKGROUND

The Ukraine emergency has been described as the oldest humanitarian crisis in the world, with 8.9 million people, or 24 per cent of the population, over 60 years of age. Older refugees face disproportionate barriers in accessing essential humanitarian support due to poverty and limited accessibility to assistance, services, and information. Moldova has been significantly impacted by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, with, as August 2023, over 894,000 Ukrainian refugees and 109,000 third-country nationals seeking refuge in the country since February 2022.

As of August 2023, more than 117,000 refugees have decided to remain in Moldova. Based on UNHCR cash enrolment data, it is estimated that over **21% of refugees are more than 60 years old in Moldova** and therefore considered older refugees.

Compared with other groups of refugees, older people over 70 are more likely to be alone, face more obstacles to receiving information, and face a greater risk of having insufficient money to buy essential food and non-food items, since they are unlikely to work and have an income beside cash assistance.

The mental health and psychosocial impacts of the war on older people is worrisome. The majority of older refugees said that the war had impacted them emotionally due to separation from their loved ones, loneliness or isolation, disagreements with relatives or friends, and loss of loved ones.

"I was forced to leave Chernihiv, Ukraine, with my daughter (38) and two grandchildren. Our city was one of the towns that managed to resist. Every day we were bombed, many civilians died. I thought we would not survive. We travelled one week to arrive here in Criuleni, where I feel protected and safe. I am visually impaired since childhood. I have no intention of returning home. My apartment was destroyed by a missile. I have nowhere to go."

(Older refugee women, 65, Criuleni)

At the end of 2022, HelpAge International conducted an assessment. The results showed that **82% of older people** interviewed had **at least one health condition**, with 51% having more than one. The top six health conditions were: hypertension; joint aches and pains; heart problems; gastro-intestinal problems; diabetes; and respiratory diseases. 32% percent of those interviewed with a health condition reported they could not fully access their medication.

Of particular concern is that **60% of older refugees** in the community reported having to **adopt negative coping strategies** such as using savings (47%), not paying rent (20%) and borrowing money (16%) to subsist in Moldova.

This briefing note aims to provide an overview of the situation of older refugees in Moldova and the gaps and needs they face, as well as the current efforts being made by humanitarian stakeholders to address these challenges.

KEY RESULTS 2022/2023

Since the beginning of the response humanitarian actors have supported older refugees through different programs and activities, as reported to the Refugee Coordination Forum. Among the key results **since the refugee crisis began in February 2022 until July 2023*** reported by the organizations with include:



11.612 older people benefited from multipurpose cash assistance



6.208 older refugees received personal hygiene kits



3.905 older refugees received dignity packs upon arrival to the refugee accommodation centers



2.432 refugees received kits during the 2022/2023 winter season



367 older refugees benefited from the EU+ Air Transfer Program to move to another EU country



700 older refugees benefited from home-based care



600 older refugees per month residing in the refugee accommodation centres receive three hot meals per day



497 older refugees received assistive devices

"A lot has changed, with women and even children taking on many responsibilities. I am now taking care of everyone, the mom and the child."
(Older woman Ukrainian refugee in Calarasi)



GAPS AND NEEDS OF OLDER REFUGEES

The main gaps identified by the Disability & Age Task Force members through different assessment and monitoring exercises are:

- Need to increase the availability of **accessible accommodation** options, both in private settings and Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs).
- Lack of **medicine** and **diagnostic services** for older people with chronic conditions which can lead to secondary complications and disability if not treated.
- Lack of **rehabilitation services** such as physical and occupational therapy and **qualitative assistive devices** to improve the independence and autonomy of older persons.
- Need to **collect** and **analyze Sex, Age and Disability disaggregated data** on older persons in the humanitarian response assessments and reporting system.
- Need to create **communication channels** that are appropriate for older people, i.e.: in-person visits and phone calls to communicate.
- Need for **socialization spaces** and **activities** tailored to older men and women with and without disabilities.
- Need to ensure **GBV service** providers **do not exclude** older refugees.
- Need to **reduce social isolation** of older people by engaging with them and providing appropriate community activities.
- Lack of **consultation with older people and OPAs** (Older People Associations) to ensure participation in decision making processes.
- Need to **monitor access** of older people to **temporary protection**, addressing registration difficulties, and ensuring access to basic rights.

"I have enough food, and enough rest, my main problem is absence of community."
(84 years older woman in Calarasi RAC)

STORIES FROM REFUGEES

Vasly and Nadezhda, his 74-year-old wife, left their hometown Kamianske (Dnipropetrovsk oblast) in the second week of March 2022, after the invasion of their town by Russian soldiers. After the invasion, the couple took refuge for almost three weeks in the house basement. During this time, Nadezhda suffered a heart attack, and she needed rest to recover. As soon as it was possible, they decided to go to Balti, in the Republic of Moldova, where they had previously worked in the 1980s. The trip to reach Balti in March 2022 was difficult and took them two full days.

The couple had to make several stops so his wife could receive the necessary care. Nadezhda, as well as recovering from a heart attack, has diabetes and high blood pressure. Vasylis often feels pain in his legs but has never complained about it. They receive vouchers for food and hygiene kits provided by HelpAge. All of this support partially covers expenses for food and personal hygiene products. With the money saved, they purchase the necessary expensive medicines for Nadezhda which she previously received for free in Ukraine, but now has to buy in Moldova.



The couple look forward to the war ending and plan to return home when it does.

Contacts

Co-leads of the Task Force

Ludmila Malcoci, Director Keystone Moldova, Lmalcoci@khs.org

Alberto Tonon, Disability Inclusion Specialist OHCHR/UNHCR, Tonon@unhcr.org

Member of the Task Force

Daniele Pedretti, Age Inclusion Specialist HelpAge, Daniele.Pedretti@helpage.org