Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

Refugee Response Plan

2023 Year End Report

Republic of Moldova

Foreword

2023 was a year of significant achievements for the refugee response in Moldova. The united efforts and collaboration of Refugee Response Plan (RRP) Partners, in support of the Government-led response, yielded tangible results in the lives of refugees from Ukraine and their host communities. While confronted with immense human suffering due to the ongoing war, we witnessed the remarkable power of solidarity and collaboration.

This report showcases the outcomes achieved by partners who mobilized through the Refugee Response Plan for Moldova and coordinated through the Refugee Coordination Forum. Local communities, civil society actors, refugee-led organizations, municipalities, the private sector, and the Government of the Republic of Moldova all played critical roles. Their work ensured that refugees from Ukraine received protection and assistance in a welcoming environment.

I take this opportunity to share my heartfelt gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Moldova. Their leadership and unwavering commitment throughout 2023 – and since the onset of the war in Ukraine - has allowed the country to build a refugee response that serves as a global example, garnering international praise and recognition.

This success would not have been possible without the extraordinary engagement of the United Nations and civil society organizations, including national, local, and international NGOs. Importantly, there has been a marked increase in the number of national and local CSOs involved in the response since 2022, culminating in their majority representation among RRP partners in 2024. This represents a significant milestone towards a more localized response.

As we face new challenges in the coming year, including the uncertain situation in Ukraine, we must remain confident. The spirit of collaboration among partners, supported by international solidarity and burden sharing, shall continue to ensure refugees find protection, feel welcomed, and contribute to the development of Moldova.

Until peace prevails, we stand together for refugees and for Moldova.

Francesca Bonelli

Refugee Response Coordinator

Foreword

In times of crisis, the character of a nation is revealed not only by its ability to endure but also by its capacity for compassion and solidarity. As the conflict in Ukraine unfolded, the Republic of Moldova stood as a welcoming refuge for those forced to flee their homes in search of safety and security.

Throughout the year, the Refugee Response Plan for Moldova has supported our collaborative efforts and the commitment of the Moldovan Government, alongside partners from civil society, international organizations, and hosting communities, in addressing the refugee crisis that emerged from the shadows of war.

To support those seeking refuge, our major efforts at the State Commission for the Coordination of Activities in the Field of Migration and Asylum were focused on setting government priorities and leading the response to the refugees' needs. Working together with Refugee Coordination Forum partners, we have provided support to thousands of refugees and succeeded in building a response that meets the expectations of both the refugees and the affected communities.

The report for the Refugee Response Plan for Moldova 2023, presented herein, reflects not just an overview of our joint response results, but also underlines the resilience and inclusivity of Moldovan society. It outlines our achievements in providing immediate relief to those in need and implementing long-term solutions that promote integration, economic empowerment, and social cohesion.

In our joint action, we affirmed a firm belief in the inherent dignity and potential of every individual, regardless of their circumstances. The contributions that refugees can make to society were recognized, and a commitment was made to building a future where no one is left behind.

Based on the results of the Refugee Response Plan in 2023, the Moldovan Government, in cooperation with partners, committed to implementing a mechanism for the phased integration of all foreigners, including displaced persons.

As we navigate the challenges that lie ahead, let us draw strength from the spirit of collaboration, compassion, and solidarity that has defined our response thus far. Together, let us forge a path toward a brighter, more inclusive future for all, where every voice is heard, and every person is valued.

Jana Costachi

State Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

President of the State Commission for the Coordination of Activities in the Field of Migration and Asylum

2023 Refugee Response Results in Figures

Data as of 31 Dec 2023

1,003,478 arrivals from Ukraine

since 11 March 2022*

129,753
Refugees and TCNs from Ukraine*

28,369
Temporary Protection Holders*

Ukrainians **120,693** (93.02%)

Girls 21%
25,433

Boys 23%
27,308

Women 38%
45,209

Men 18%
22,743

9,060 Third-Country Nationals from Ukraine in Moldova

159,091 people Reached by RCF Partner in 2023**

Girls 15%
24,016

Boys 13%
20,670

Women 50%
78,725

Men 22%
35,680

86,219
Number of unique refugees receiving MPCA during 2023

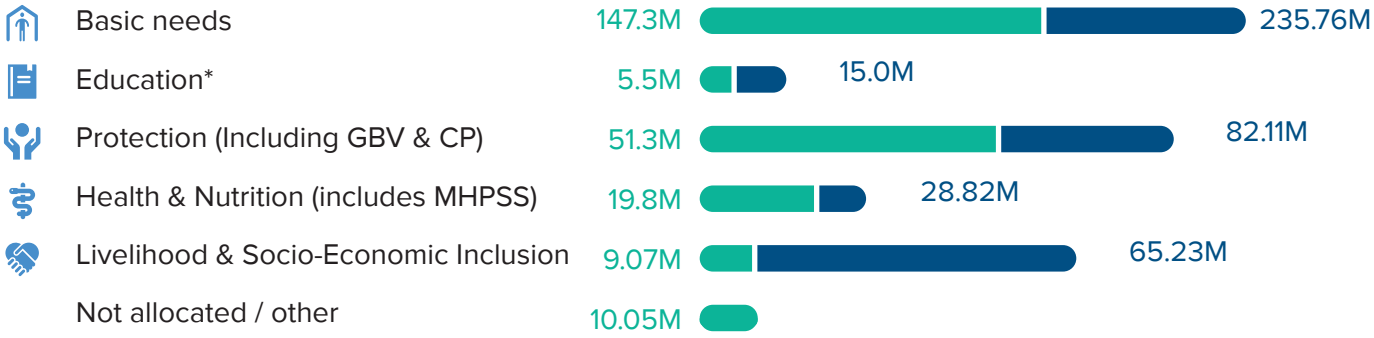
46,262
Number of unique hosting family members receiving MPCA

* Data Source: Government of the Republic of Moldova.
** The number of individuals reached is an estimate based on the highest number of individuals reached per activity, per sector and/or per region, to avoid double counting.

2023 funding level

Funds received **243.1M** (57%)

Total pledged **424.8M**



*Achievements in the Education sector are lower compared to Q2 and Q3 2023 due to the internal reallocation of funds of some RRP partners

Support to Government and Host Community

51,239
Number of people from the host community reached through direct assistance

376
Support to community infrastructure

5,045
Trained government officials

People Reached by Sector

Accommodation & Transportation
147,952

Education
100,353

Protection
98,157

Food Security
157,565

Health & Nutrition
95,695

Child protection
35,284

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene – WASH
111,327

Livelihoods & Socio-Economic Inclusion
14,894

Gender-based violence protection – GBV
39,983

Executive Summary

2023 Refugee Response Plan – National Overview

Since February 24, 2022, the Republic of Moldova (hereafter referred to as Moldova) has seen a total of 1,003,478 arrivals from Ukraine. As of end 2023, the number of individuals who arrived from Ukraine as well as Ukrainians who arrived over the air or from Romania and remained in Moldova totalled 129,753. Among these, 120,693 are Ukrainian refugees, accounting for 93 per cent of the total.

Most Ukrainian refugees are women and children, comprising 81 per cent of the refugee population (37 percent women, 21 percent girls, and 23 percent boys). By the end of December, out of the total population mentioned above, 36,802 people had applied for temporary protection (TP), of whom 28,369 received the status, including 8,515 chil-dren. In addition to TP holders, over 8,000 refugees from Ukraine have regularized their stay in Moldova either through the asylum system or by obtaining residence permits.

Despite the compounding crises affecting the country, Moldova has granted Ukrainian refugees access to a wide range of services and rights. These include the right to work, access to education, and emergency and primary health care, as well as a certain level of access to social protection services. This has been made possible through the activation of the TP regime, effective since March 2023.

In 2023, government efforts were supported by 73 RRP partners, including 24 national/local civil society organizations. The 2023 RRP successfully assisted over 159,000 individuals. These efforts were coordinated within the framework of the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), established in March 2022 by the Prime Minister's Office and UNHCR. In 2023, the RCF actively supported the State Commission for the Coordination of Activities in the Field of Migration and Asylum as an inclusive government-led platform for policy development and public consultation.

At the local level, the response was coordinated in close collaboration with local public authorities and partners through eight Local Refugee Coordination Forums, covering the main areas hosting refugees in Moldova.

In line with the Global Compact for Refugees, Moldova's response has been characterized by a whole-of-society approach, supported by strong international solidarity, as evidenced by the com-mitments made by the Government of Moldova at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum held in Geneva in the areas of socio-economic inclusion, social protection and child rights, inclusion in national statistical systems, protection from gender-based violence, education, documentation, and statelessness. The leadership of the Moldovan Government at all levels, together with strong support from partners and the international community, has laid the groundwork for important results, contributing not only to the protection and inclusion of refugees in the country but also to the 2030 Agenda and key development objectives set in national plans, including the Uni-ted Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Highlights and Achievements

In 2023, RRP partners reported reaching 159,910 individuals, of whom 50 per cent were women, 22 per cent men, 15 per cent girls, and 13 per cent boys. Of this total, 51,239 were members of the host community. Support included legal assistance for 68,068 individuals, Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) for 86,219 refugee individuals and 46,262 individual Moldovan hosting family members, assistance for 55,824 children and caregivers who accessed MHPSS services, including from Blue Dots and other child-friendly spaces, gender-based violence-related support for 39,983 individuals including through Orange Safe Spaces, and primary healthcare support for 37,838 individuals.

A significant milestone in 2023 was the activation of the TP regime, providing refugees and certain third-country nationals with a more stable and predictable legal status. Throughout the year, RRP partners engaged with the Government in advocacy to improve the TP legal framework on issues such as proof of residence, accessibility, and awareness of registration procedures and access to associated rights.

Another important achievement was the simplification of school enrolment procedures for Ukrainian children by the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) with the support of RRP partners. Revised instructions on enrolment procedures were released by MER clarifying that Ukrainian children, as well as other children from countries at wae, can enrol in Moldovan schools regardless of their legal status.

In health care, coordination with the National Health Insurance Company (NIHC) allowed for the review of the health financing and financial protection mechanisms to ensure equitable access to health care services for TP holders. This resulted in 37,838 primary health care consultations provided for refugees from Ukraine, including 31,944 for women and 2,961 for children. Additionally, 783 cancer patients received treatment, 63 dialysis sessions were provided, and anti-diabetes care was given to 675 refugees.

RRP partners collaborated closely with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection to offer refugees temporary accommodation and long-term housing solutions. They supported the operation of 44 Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs), providing shelter to more than 2,900 refugees, and supplied 157,000 meals to refugees (including at the border points) and vulnerable members of the host community. A key part of adapting the response to the evolving situation was the consolidation of the RACs and the recalibration of services in border areas. This strategy maximized resource utilization and enabled a reallocation of efforts to areas needing more support, including outreach in rural areas and initiatives focused on inclusion.

An important aspect of the 2023 refugee response was the continuation of the cash assistance programmes in close coordination with the Government of the Republic of Moldova. A winter support program provided 800 MDL (~ 45 USD) monthly to both refugees and vulnerable Moldovan households during the winter months. A comprehensive Market Assessment informed these efforts. To harmonize interventions, the Common Cash Facility Approach was adopted, introducing the Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS) for better collaboration and accountability, with 10 partners joining by year-end.

Gaps and challenges

Nine months after the implementation of the TP regime, 28,369 individuals had obtained this status by December 31, 2023, representing 23.5 per cent of Ukrainians residing in Moldova, while approximately 10,000 had obtained other forms of legal status, including residence permits (approximately 7,000), status through the asylum system (asylum-seeker, recognized refugees or persons granted humanitarian protection) or confirmation of Moldovan nationality (about 2,000). This accounts for approximately 55 per cent of the refugee population staying in Moldova for over 90 days (approximately 70,000), indicating that, at a minimum, the remaining 45 per cent are in the country without legal status.

In 2023, Moldova's child protection system faced challenges due to limited financial and human resources, impacting its ability to fully assist vulnerable households and children. While identifying and referring at-risk children at border crossings was largely successful, strengthening the identification process for children who become unaccompanied or separated within Moldova, especially in the Transnistrian region, is necessary.

Access to services for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) remains inconsistent. Challenges include service providers' capacity gaps in adhering to a survivor-centred approach and a lack of confidential entry points for survivors. Survivors' fear of retaliation, exposure, and stigmatization exacerbate these barriers. There is a pressing need for standardized GBV case management and an information system to safely collect data on GBV trends for informed programming.

Despite ongoing efforts to increase school enrolment, the rate of Ukrainian children enrolled in Moldovan schools remains low (about 6 per cent in total). Primary reasons for this include parental preference for the Ukrainian online curriculum and language barriers. Although it is believed many children are engaged in online learning, there is no system to track their attendance or learning outcomes.

Employment remains a major challenge for refugees. As of 31 December 2023, 1,283 people are officially employed according to the National Employment Agency. Employment barriers include structural issues like limited childcare, language barriers, and wage discrepancies. There is also a mismatch between refugees' job preferences and profiles, and the local labour market.

As to health care, one of the major issues is the lack of clarity regarding entitlements and procedures for accessing medical care, leading to delays and difficulties in receiving the necessary medical attention. The health services available to beneficiaries of TP are limited to emergency and primary care, with some specialized services. Expanding the scope of health services for both TP and non-TP holders is crucial to ensure comprehensive coverage and equitable access to essential medical care, including essential medicines.

Given Moldova's unique situation as a non-EU country with a significant poverty rate and limited resources, integrating refugees into government-granted social assistance programs will require medium to long-term support and close coordination between humanitarian and development actors. Despite these challenges, the Government remains committed to providing basic social protection to refugees. International solidarity, as demonstrated through the Moldova Support Platform, is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of the transition towards greater inclusion of refugees. This support will enable refugees to actively contribute to Moldova's development and the communities hosting them. It will also bolster Moldova's efforts in undergoing crucial reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and advancing socio-economic development.

Local Refugee Coordination Forums

© UNHCR/Hideaki Kojima
RRP local consultation workshop in Comrat

In 2023, 8 Local Refugee Coordination Forum (LRCF) continued to serve as a pathway for the national-level inter-agency efforts to reach out to local populations by disseminating critical information, conducting assessments, and providing trainings and workshops. It also served as an important meeting point for local service providers and local public authorities in each region to exchange information, flag region-specific challenges, and seek possible solutions.

In collaboration with the national-level Working Groups, LRCF partners participated in various workshops and trainings, which included child protection and identification of unaccompanied and separated children, identification and first response in case of Gender-Based Violence, prevention and response to trafficking in human beings, Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and feedback and complaint mechanisms, among others. Additionally, during the referral pathways workshops conducted jointly by UNHCR and IOM in Balti, Ungheni, and Tiraspol, LRCF partners played an active role in mapping service providers and public institutions equipped to provide assistance to the refugees and communities affected by refugee presence.

In November, LRCF partners contributed to the development of the Refugee Response Plan 2024 by providing input on challenges, gaps, and possible solutions in each region during the RRP local consultation workshops organized in eight locations across the country. Local aid providers and public authorities shared their concerns and identified the top challenges that need to be addressed in 2024. Refugee representatives were also present in the workshops and provided first-hand opinions. The input was compiled in the RRP Local Consultation Report and used by RRP partners and the government to plan activities in line with up-to-date needs and challenges in the regions.

Protection

WG Co-Chairs

Ombudsman Office and UNHCR

In 2023, **69** Partners reported **2058** activities in **37** regions

Partners reporting activities in 2023

Partners (51 organizations)

- ACTED
- ADRA Moldova
- Alliance of NGOs Active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection
- Amici Dei Bambini Moldova
- AO Biaz Gul
- AO Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor/ Law Center of Advocates
- AO Programul Educațional Pas cu Pas
- Asociația Psihologilor Tighina
- Casa Marioarei
- CASMED
- Center Resonance
- Centrul National pentru Educatie Timpurie si Informare a Familiei
- Centrul de ajutor social al femeii și familiei „Stimul”
- Centrul Național de Formare, Asistență, Consiliere și Educație din Moldova
- Charity Centre for Refugees
- Child and Family Empowerment Association “AVE Copiii”
- Child Community Family
- Child Rights Information Center Moldova
- Church World Service
- Communitas
- CONCORDIA Moldova
- Danish Refugee Council
- Dorcas
- Football Federation of the Republic of Moldova
- HEKS/EPER
- HelpAge International
- Helvetas
- Humanity and Inclusion
- International Organization for Migration
- INTERSOS
- IsraAID
- KeyStone Moldova
- la Asociatia Obsteasca Interaction
- La Strada
- Laolalta
- Lumos Foundation
- MOTIVATIE
- Non-Profit Partnership Center for Social and Legal Innovations “Women’s Initiatives”
- Norwegian Refugee Council
- Oxfam
- Parteneriate Pentru Fiecare Copil
- People In Need
- Solidarités International
- SPERANTA 87
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- The Ombudsman Office
- UN Women
- United Nations Development Programme
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- WeWorld
- World Vision International

Mandated Agencies (25 organizations)

- AAR Japan
- Austrian Development Agency
- Caritas Austria
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
- DRC
- EASPD/UNICEF
- HelpAge Deutschland
- Hope and Homes for Children
- IOM
- IRC
- IsraAid
- Jesuit Refugee Services
- Kerk in Actie + ADRA Netherlands
- Kindernothilfe
- Mercy Corps Global
- NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council
- OXFAM
- Peace Winds Japan
- People in Need
- Stitching Dorcas Aid International
- Strabag
- Terre des Homme Netherlands
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- UN WOMEN
- War Child

Key Achievements

In 2023, significant progress was made in enhancing the protection and well-being of Ukrainian refugees in Moldova. Approximately 98,000 individuals were informed about their rights and services, and 68,000 received individual legal assistance. Protection efforts emphasized the needs of marginalized and at-risk groups, including unaccompanied and separated children, persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities (such as Roma refugees), and LGBTQI+ refugees, with over 20,000 people with specific needs receiving targeted assistance and 15892 individuals receiving mental health and psychosocial support. The protection sector played a crucial role in supporting the government's implementation of the temporary protection regime, providing technical input, advocating for legal improvements, and facilitating refugee access to rights. TP enrolment fairs were organized throughout the country to encourage and support those eligible to obtain this legal status. Efforts to enhance referral pathways for service providers, refugees, and locals led to updated and localized referral packages, promoting social cohesion by adapting services to the needs of communities. These initiatives strengthened national protection systems, supported evidence-based responses, and ensured services were delivered with an age, gender, and diversity approach.

Challenges and Gaps

By the end of 2023, 36,802 Ukrainian refugees had pre-registered for temporary protection, with 28,369 obtaining identity cards. Around 10,000 others secured legal status, covering some 55% of the estimated refugee population in the country for more than 90 days (70,000). Despite these efforts, a significant portion remains without legal status. The government has pledged not to deport those lacking formal status, but affected individuals face ineligibility for services and fines, with protection partners reporting fines for Ukrainians leaving Moldova without legal status. Re-entry requires some to seek asylum, an option some are reluctant to pursue.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

Capacity-building sessions trained 765 government and local authorities on asylum, non-discrimination, refugee rights, disability identification, human trafficking prevention, resource mobilization, and partnership establishment. These efforts, crucial for refugee protection, service access, and integration, strengthened officials' understanding of key protection principles and operational challenges. The training enhanced cooperation between government and humanitarian actors, recognizing their important and distinct roles in supporting refugees.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

CSOs play a critical role in providing protection to refugees in Moldova. The protection sector has engaged Moldovan CSOs in different contexts. Local CSOs have supported a variety of community-based projects, bringing together both refugees and local Moldovans and facilitating social cohesion in the process. CSOs have also been critical partners in local refugee coordination forums and the elaboration of local referral pathways and solutions to protection challenges identified at the local level. Protection actors have worked with local CSOs on a range of protection issues, some specific to different profiles of refugees (e.g., children, persons with disabilities, older refugees, LGBTQI+ refugees) and others engaging with the refugee population and host communities as a whole. Various initiatives have been undertaken to strengthen the capacity of CSOs to ensure delivery and continuation of protection services at the local level and to increase their capacity to fundraise and advocate on issues of concern.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

In 2023, the protection sector engaged forcibly displaced individuals and local communities in initiatives to promote participation and social cohesion, reaching nearly 5,800 people through community-based projects and involving about 1,850 people in activities for peaceful coexistence between refugees and hosts. Emphasizing the role of refugee-led organizations and activists, efforts were focused on areas like temporary protection and community services. A key event was a June workshop by UNHCR and UNDP on social cohesion, aiming to build a common understanding and social cohesion, identify risks, and devise solutions. Additionally, a participatory assessment conducted in October with 41 focus groups and over 260 participants of various demographics across Moldova, facilitated by the AAP Task Force and refugee-led organizations, aimed to understand protection concerns, assess local capacities, and propose solutions, further emphasizing the collaborative approach in strengthening community ties and addressing refugee needs.

Spotlight History

Anatoli and his family put off leaving their home in Ukraine for a long time, until one evening they went out to the garden and heard shrapnel falling on the roofs of neighbouring homes. That night they packed their belongings and fled. The journey was difficult as both Anatoli and his wife have disabilities, and they were traveling as well with his wife's mother. They chose to come to Moldova as it was the closest country for them, both geographically and spiritually, and found a place to live at a Refugee Accommodation Centre (RAC) in the town of Grebelisti that houses refugees with disabilities and reduced mobility. Initially they hoped that their stay in Moldova would be short and that they would be able to return home soon, but then they would hear again that their hometown of Mykolaiv had been shelled. So, they decided to apply for temporary protection in the Republic of Moldova. In May 2023, the mobile registration team of the General Inspectorate for Migration (IGM) visited the RAC in Grebleşti to register 14 Ukrainian refugees with disabilities and reduced mobility, including Anatoli, for Temporary Protection. Protection partners pro-vided support. "It gives us a sense of peace and sta-bility and lessens the uncertainty of tomorrow," says Anatolii. Protection actors in Moldova have been ac-tive in ensuring that all refugees with specific needs are able to access temporary protection and related rights and services, working closely with IGM and other government agencies.

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Child-Protection

Sub-WG Co-Chairs

UNICEF and UNHCR

In 2023, **37** Partners reported **683** activities in **36** regions

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Moldova National Youth Council Rock Climbing Activity

Partners reporting activities in 2023

Partners (20 organizations)

- ADRA Moldova
- Alliance of NGOs Active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection
- Amici Dei Bambini Moldova
- AO Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor/ Law Center of Advocates
- Charity Centre for Refugees
- Child and Family Empowerment Association “AVE Copiii”
- Child Community Family
- CONCORDIA Moldova
- Dorcas
- Football Federation of the Republic of Moldova
- IsraAID
- KeyStone Moldova
- Laolalta
- Lumos Foundation
- Parteneriate Pentru Fiecare Copil
- People In Need
- Terre des hommes Moldova
- UN Women
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- WeWorld

Mandated Agencies (20 organizations)

- ADRA Australia
- Austrian Development Agency
- Caritas Austria
- Childhood Foundation
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
- EASPD/UNICEF
- Hope and Homes for Children
- IRC
- IsraAid
- Jesuit Refugee Services
- Kerk in Actie + ADRA Netherlands
- People in Need
- PLAN International
- SOS Ukraine
- Stitching Dorcas Aid International
- Terre des Homme Netherlands
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- War Child
- World Vision International (WVI)

Key Achievement Indicators

3,929
of refugee children (excluding UASC) provided with child protection services

857
of UASC provided with child protection services, disaggregated by gender and age

3,487
of people who participated in awareness raising sessions

35,284
of people who participated in PSS activities

Key Achievements

In 2023, the Child Protection Sub-Working Group (SWG) continued to support the identification and referral of children at risk, as well as activities to prevent violence against children. The 110 Blue Dot Hubs and Child and Adolescent friendly spaces provided protection and assistance to over 22,784 children and caregivers, including in the Transnistria region. Additionally, over 22,000 boys and 33,000 girls accessed MHPSS services, over 26,000 boys and girls received cash assistance, over 11,000 boys and 13,000 girls accessed government child protection services, and 443 foster families were supported. Over 4,000 training interactions on child protection took place with professionals, and six child protection referral pathways were updated.

Challenges and Gaps

In 2023, Moldova's child protection system, strained by multiple crises, struggled to fully assist vulnerable children due to resource limitations. Identification and referral of at-risk children at borders were systematic, yet identification of UASC within Moldova needs strengthening. Temporary Protection registration for such children in the Transnistrian region remains challenging. Continued information provision on Ukraine and Moldova's procedures for 16- and 17-year-olds is necessary.

Violence, including child marriage, continues to pose risks. Early identification of at-risk children through various entry points, such as schools and health services, needs improvement, as does multidisciplinary case management. Engaging refugee children, particularly those with disabilities, in host communities is challenging, with many not participating in local schools or activities. Online violence against women and girls has increased.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

Technical and financial support to local and national authorities as part of the refugee response significantly contributed to strengthening the Child Protection system, reaching Moldovan and Ukrainian children and families affected by the Ukraine war. There is a need to prioritize system strengthening, as it is key to long-term, sustainable progress towards gender-responsive institutions, prevention, and a robust child protection system. The EU accession process offers an opportunity for sustainable care reform that bolsters the child protection system. In 2023, over 3,000 government authorities, including those from the Guardianship Authority, police, teachers, health workers, Border Police, and mayors, received training on child protection and best interest procedures. Local authorities nationwide also participated in various trainings and capacity-building activities.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

Working with child protection CSOs and grassroots organizations and strengthening their capacities is a key factor to access the most vulnerable children, adolescents, and their caregivers. CSO staff, both within and outside the child protection sector, received a variety of trainings and capacity building opportunities on child protection. Topics focused on the identification and referral of children at risk, child friendly communication and interviewing skills, conducting focus group discussions with children, and more.

Sector partners provided a wide range of services to refugee children and their families, including initial identification and referral (including to the Guardianship Authority), provision of child specific NFIs, MHPSS, alternative care, recreational and social cohesion activities, and activities to raise awareness about, and prevent, violence against children.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

In 2023, child protection interventions worked to bridge the continued need for humanitarian interventions with longer-term development of a shock-responsive social and child protection system, targeting both refugee and vulnerable Moldovan communities to ensure no one is left behind, and to promote social cohesion.

Peer-to-peer approaches had a strong impact on social cohesion among adolescents and young people and contributed to the prevention of bullying and violence, including GBV. Refugee perspectives, including those of children and adolescents, were collected through various assessments and focus group discussions conducted by sector partners, including through the Multi Sector Needs Assessment.

Spotlight History

Alexandru was 17 when the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022. After one of his brothers died in the war, his parents, fearing for his safety, put him on a bus to Moldova. When he arrived at the Palanca border, unaccompanied, he was assisted first by Blue Dot staff, then by child protection authorities. The authorities identified a foster family for Alexandru. "I was a little shy in the beginning because it was a foreign country, but soon I felt at home. They were all so nice and it felt like living with relatives," he said. Doyna, his foster mother says, "I could sense the anxiety on his face when he arrived. We talked for a little bit and then I called his mother and told her that her son was safe with me." Throughout 2023, child protection sector partners have supported other children like Alexandru as well, with alternative care arrangements, psychosocial support, recreational activities, and more. More photos and information on this story available here:

Foster families in Moldova provide safety and protection for children fleeing conflict from Ukraine | UNICEF

© UNICEF/2022/Moldova/Ion
Alexandru with his foster mother, Doyna

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Sub-WG Co-Chairs

UNHCR and UNFPA

In 2023, **40** Partners reported **1,226** activities in **37** regions

© UNHCR/Salahaldeen Abdulrahman
Anti-violence Café in Ungheni engaging refugee and Moldovan women in conversations about GBV and its roots.

Key Achievement Indicators

39,983
of individuals provided with GBV services

3,852
of individuals participating in activities promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities

16,854
of individuals that received information on rights and available services related to sectoral activities

854
of individuals benefitting from sector related trainings and/or other capacity building activities

Partners reporting activities in 2023

Partners (36 organizations)

- Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim)
- ADRA Moldova
- Alliance of NGOs Active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection
- AO Artemida
- AO Biaz Gul
- AO Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor/ Law Center of Advocates
- AO Programul Educațional Pas cu Pas
- Asociația pentru Drepturile Omului Lex XXI
- Asociația Psihologilor Tighina
- Casa Marioarei
- Center Resonance
- Centrul de ajutor social al femeii și familiei „Stimul”
- Centrul Național de Formare, Asistență, Consiliere și Educație din Moldova
- Charity Centre for Refugees
- Church World Service
- Gender Center
- HEKS/EPER
- HelpAge International
- Home Care
- IFIS
- International Organization for Migration
- INTERSOS
- la Asociatia Obsteasca Interaction
- La Strada
- Millenium
- Non-Profit Partnership Center for Social and Legal Innovations “Women’s Initiatives”
- Oxfam
- Pro Didactica
- SPERANTA 87
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- The Ombudsman Office
- UN Women
- United Nations Development Programme
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- and United Nations Population Fund

Mandated Agencies (11 organizations)

- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
- IOM
- IRC
- Kerk in Actie + ADRA Netherlands
- Mercy Corps
- Norwegian Church Aid
- UNESCO
- UNFPA
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- UN WOMEN
- World Vision International

Key Achievements

The GBV Sub-Working Group (GBV SWG) trained 4,737 individuals on GBV, including core concepts, principles, monitoring, evaluation, and minimum standards. Several initiatives were undertaken to mitigate GBV risks across sectors, including workshops and sessions for organizations. A GBV Safety Audit was conducted, involving focus group discussions with refugees and host community members at heightened risk of GBV. Over 42,570 individuals were reached with peaceful coexistence and group MHPSS programs, and 22,460 received GBV information. GBV service provision remained a priority, with 49,470 individuals, including GBV survivors, accessing services like case management, psychosocial support, health and legal aid. Cash assistance was integral to GBV case management, and 13,672 dignity kits were distributed to at-risk women and adolescents. To support government GBV priorities, the GBV SWG and Woman-Led Organization Gender Center mapped several GBV services nationwide in Moldova.

Challenges and Gaps

GBV survivors’ consistent access to services is challenged by service providers’ capacity gaps, lack of diverse, confidential entry-points, and survivors’ fear of retaliation and stigmatization. A standardized GBV case management process and information system are needed for ethical, safe data collection on GBV trends. Comprehensive trainings can enhance the skills of GBV specialists and non-specialists, addressing bottlenecks. Active participation of organizations in coordination spaces can avoid duplication, optimize resources, ensure coordinated service provision and coverage, and enhance survivors’ access.

Government Strengthening

The government's National Programme to Prevent and Combat Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2023-2027) includes refugees, including those from marginalized and at-risk groups. The GBV SWG conducted a national-wide mapping of several GBV services which is supporting the government to identify priorities to address gaps in GBV service provision and capacity enhancement. The GBV SWG has trained 4,737 frontline workers, including government and local civil society staff, contributing to the government's approach to collaborate with Women-Led Organizations to prevent and reduce risks of GBV, and to provide services and refer GBV survivors in line with international standards. The GBV SWG has also drafted a GBV Risk Mitigation checklist to be part of the Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) Consolidation Strategy, ensuring that GBV risks related to the closure of the RACs are proactively identified and that existing GBV cases and new disclosures are safely managed and referred.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

The GBV SWG has actively engaged with Women-Led Organizations (WLO) in 2023. WLO were at the forefront of the response of the refugee influx and continue to play a leading role in implementing GBV prevention activities and projects aiming at long-term shifts in gender inequitable norms, in providing quality specialized GBV services, and in supporting other sectors to reduce GBV risks and safely refer GBV survivors to services. The co-chairs of the GBV SWG co-funded the mapping of services to respond to GBV in Moldova, led by the WLO Gender Center, in collaboration with the Government of Moldova. A study to identify and analyse potential barriers for the disclosure of GBV and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) in Moldova is also being conducted by WLO National Coalition Life Without Violence and is expected to inform the improvement of service provision and tailored capacity enhancement.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

GBV SWG partners have consistently engaged with refugee and host community members to tailor and adjust projects to adapt to their needs and views as the context of the response in Moldova evolves. The GBV SWG held and coordinated several exercises in consultation with refugee and host community, including the GBV Safety Audit, which encompassed the participation of approximately 295 persons from different at-risk groups, the mapping of GBV services, which is informing the improvement of government and civil society GBV specialized services, and a study by the National Coalition Life Without Violence on barriers for the disclosure of GBV in Moldova. GBV projects implemented by sector partners have a strong peaceful coexistence component and have been essential to rebuild community ties. Some partners indicated that because of the trust fostered, Ukrainian women have supported Moldovan women survivors of intimate partner violence to safely access GBV services.

Spotlight History

Activities from sector partners include not only provision of life-saving GBV services, but also initiatives that provide refugee women with opportunities to locally integrate and contribute to reducing GBV risks. As part of its project, Casa Marioarei has employed Ukrainian women as facilitators and local coordinators of activities that benefit other refugee and host community women. This has contributed significantly to the impact and sustainability of the project, as well as to foster relations of trust between host community and refugees, who have been actively raising awareness about GBV and supporting GBV survivors tgo access services. In Balti, partner UORN and UNAIDS have ensured access to HIV and TB prevention and harm-reduction services and have linked refugees at high risk of GBV and marginalization, including LGBTIQ+ people and people who engage in the sale and exchange of sex, to tailored services. Through safe spaces, partner Help Age has provided psychosocial support, health referrals and specialized services for GBV survivors, including older persons.

© UORN
Group Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) activity conducted with refugees and Moldovans in Balti

Basic Needs

WG Co-Chairs

MLSP and UNHCR/Acted | WASH Sub-WG UNICEF | Food Security Sub-WG WFP

In 2023, **51** Partners reported **2,351** activities in **37** regions

Partners reporting activities in 2023

Partners (42 organizations)

- ACTED
- Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim)
- ADRA Moldova
- Alliance of NGOs Active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection
- AO Green City Lab
- AO Primaria Mea
- CASMED
- Catholic Relief Services
- Charity Centre for Refugees
- Child Community Family
- Church World Service
- CONCORDIA Moldova
- Danish Refugee Council
- Dorcas
- EzzyLink
- FoodBank
- Gender Center
- HEKS/EPER
- HelpAge International
- Helvetas
- Home Care
- Institutum Virtues Civilis
- International Federation of the Red Cross
- International Organization for Migration
- INTERSOS
- IsraAID
- KeyStone Moldova
- Laolalta
- Lumos Foundation
- MOTIVATIE
- National Congress of Ukrainians in Moldova
- Norwegian Refugee Council
- Peace Winds Japan
- People In Need
- Solidarités International
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- UN Women
- United Nations Children's Fund
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- WeWorld
- World Food Programme
- World Vision International

Mandated Agencies (28 organizations)

- AAR Japan
- ACT Alliance
- Austrian Development Agency
- Caritas Austria
- ChildFund Korea
- CRS
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
- HelpAge Deutschland
- Hope and Homes for Children
- IOM
- IRC
- IsraAid
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Kerk in Actie + ADRA Netherlands
- Kindernothilfe
- Mercy Corps Global
- Nachbar in Not
- Peace Winds Japan
- People in Need
- Stitching Dorcas Aid International
- Strabag
- Terre des Homme Netherlands
- UNFPA
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- UN WOMEN
- War Child
- INTESA

Key Achievement Indicators

245
of collective sites improved to provide adequate conditions

7,348
of individuals placed in individual accommodation (host, rental or social housing)

168,376
of individuals who received food assistance

88,848
of individuals accessing safe and appropriate sanitation facilities (outside RACs)

Key Achievements

In 2023, the Basic Needs Working Group (BNWG), alongside the government and 40 partners, supported 88,400 refugees and vulnerable Moldovans through various activities, including distribution of hot meals, provision of sanitation, shelter, rental aid, and awareness raising sessions on various topics. A highlight was supporting 44 refugee accommodation centers, sheltering over 2,900 refugees, including marginalized groups. The year saw a significant focus on improving infrastructure, particularly in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and accessibility for persons with disabilities. Partners maintained WASH services at border crossings and improved facilities in Chisinau's Temporary Accommodation Centre. Efforts extended to mid-to-long term housing solutions, with 1,400 individuals receiving rental assistance and housing repairs, enhancing living conditions. Additionally, the rehabilitation of community infrastructures contributed to social cohesion and integration, improving service delivery in education, child protection, and awareness on gender-based violence.

Challenges and Gaps

In 2023, the BNWG supported the Moldovan government in consolidating refugee accommodation centers (RACs), facing initial communication issues among stakeholders, including RAC managers and refugees. To address this situation, a technical working group was formed in collaboration with the Protection WG for improved coordination and communication on the consolidation process. Regulatory updates by the MLSP on RAC guidelines are pending, leaving RACs with outdated management regulations. Efforts to include refugees in social housing were hindered by current regulations, with challenges in identifying affordable rental options.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

The MLSP, co-chairing the working group, significantly contributes to discussions on refugee housing, transport, non-food items, WASH, and Food Security during regular meetings. Earlier in the year, MLSP called for two assessments to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of RACs which were key to developing the RAC consolidation strategy. The BNWG partners have shown strong support by funding the maintenance of RACs, especially during the difficult winter months. The Food Security sub-group has been focusing on enhancing the government's capacity by providing energy-efficient kitchen equipment to two RACs and three social canteens. This not only helps integrate refugees into society but also strengthens the national system's ability to face future crises and respond more effectively to unexpected challenges. Similarly, the WASH sub-group partners have taken steps to blend humanitarian and development efforts, assisting Local Public Authorities in improving water supply systems in Palanca and Otaci.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

BNWG partners closely collaborate with local CSOs, providing grants and technical training to bolster their operational capacity. These CSOs have become crucial in executing activities such as distributing non-food items, improving community infrastructure, and running social canteens. Their involvement significantly enhances service delivery, particularly in hard-to-reach areas, by filling service gaps and fostering strong connections among refugees, local communities, and authorities. An important achievement of this partnership is in food provision, where CSOs' expertise ensures the supply of hot meals to refugees in accommodation centers. This collaboration between international and local entities exemplifies the synergy crucial for effective refugee support and community integration.

Spotlight History

Raed, a 49-year-old medical doctor, has resettled in the village of Cărpineni, Moldova, with his wife and two children, fleeing the conflict in the Gaza Strip. Seeking refuge at the Cărpineni refugee accommodation center, supported by the project "Emergency Food Support to Populations Affected by Conflict in Ukraine in Moldova," executed by HelpAge International and funded by the World Food Program (WFP), Raed and his family receive three daily meals. Despite his professional background, Raed's decision to leave Gaza was driven by the escalating dangers in his homeland. Grateful for the warm reception in Moldova, Raed acknowledges the support provided, including shelter, heating, and nutritious meals that cater to their dietary preferences. Expressing distress over ongoing events in Gaza, Raed aspires to contribute his expertise to Moldova, hoping for a swift resolution to the conflict. Despite uncertainties, he appreciates the temporary respite in Moldova and contemplates future contributions to the country that has offered refuge. In his own words, "Thanks to those who help us. We have a roof over our heads, heating, and food. The food is varied and balanced. We are grateful that you consider our dietary

© WFP
Raed with his wife and daughter

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

The BNWG prioritizes involving refugees in decision-making by integrating refugee-led organizations into strategic planning, such as setting RRP priorities and winter response activities. Feedback from these organizations informs the group's decisions, enhancing accountability and service quality in Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs) through established feedback mechanisms. Efforts to promote inclusion and social cohesion include facilitating access to cultural events and addressing food concerns via focus group discussions. Engaging community representatives, especially within the Roma community, helps prevent conflicts and encourages cooperative planning. Additionally, the Food Security Sub-Working Group's events aim to improve intercultural understanding and offer skill development opportunities, further emphasizing the commitment to refugee inclusion and participation.

Spotlight History

Victoriya is a 42-year-old psychologist, therapist, and behavioural analyst who came to Chisinau, Moldova, from Odesa, Ukraine, almost a year ago. Upon her arrival, she lived with her sister, who moved to Moldova immediately after the start of the full-scale war, while she was looking for the apartment in which she now lives with her two sons. Victoriya learned about Acted's cash for rent assistance program, she applied and received approval, which was a big surprise for her – due to financial difficulties, she was thinking of returning to Ukraine even though shelling at home was more frequent. "It is a very significant help for a person who has only recently moved to a new city and as a specialist who has to look for new clients." Victoriya describes her work with warmth – she has been working with children with special needs and with children on the autistic spectrum for more than eight years. In Odesa, she had her own office and a large client base, compared to Chisinau where it is more difficult to find a job because of the language barrier. One of her immediate professional plans is to make her office in her three–room apartment.

© ACTED
Victoriya in the kitchen at her home

Education

WG Co-Chairs

Ministry of Education | Culture and Research | UNICEF and UNHCR

In 2023, **41** Partners treported **637** activities in **29** regions

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Two children from Ungheni, Moldova, participate in an educational activity in a preschool supported by UNICEF.

Partners reporting activities in 2023

Partners (40 organizations)

- ADRA Moldova
- Alliance of NGOs Active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection
- Amici Dei Bambini Moldova
- AO Asociatia pentru Dezvoltarea Tehnologiilor Informationale EDUCAT
- AO Programul Educațional Pas cu Pas
- Asociația pentru Drepturile Omului Lex XXI
- Association of Intellectual Games
- Catholic Relief Services
- Centrul National pentru Educatie Timpurie si Informare a Familiei
- Centrul de Informare și Resurse "PRO BONO"
- Charity Centre for Refugees
- Child and Family Empowerment Association "AVE Copiii"
- Child Community Family
- CONCORDIA Moldova
- Danish Refugee Council
- Dorcas
- Family Federation for World Peace and Unification from Moldova
- Football Federation of the Republic of Moldova
- Fundatia "Don Bosco"
- Gender Center
- HEKS/EPER
- Helvetas
- International Rescue Committee
- IsraAID
- KeyStone Moldova
- Lumos Foundation
- MOTIVATIE
- Norwegian Refugee Council
- Peace Winds Japan
- People In Need
- Plan International
- Pro Didactica
- Solidarités International
- SPERANTA 87
- The Moldovan Association of ICT Companies
- UN Women
- United Nations Children's Fund
- United Nations Development Programme
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- World Vision International

Mandated Agencies (20 organizations)

- ADRA Australia
- Austrian Development Agency
- Catholic Relief Services
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
- DRC
- IsraAID
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Mercy Corps Global
- Oxfam
- People in Need
- Plan International
- SOS Ukraine
- Stitching Dorcas Aid International
- Terre des Homme Netherlands
- UNESCO
- UNFPA
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- UN Women
- World Vision International (WVI)

Key Achievement Indicators

52,385

of children accessing non-formal education, including early learning

9,565

of individuals benefiting from sector related trainings and/or other capacity building activities

36,938

of children receiving individual learning materials

100,900

of individuals that received information on rights and available services related to sectoral activities

Key Achievements

The Education Working Group, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and Research (MER), made major progress on simplifying school enrollment procedures for Ukrainian children. Revised Instructions on school enrollment procedures were released by MER in early September and in November. Importantly, the Instructions clarify that Ukrainian children, as well as other children from a "country at war," can enroll in Moldovan schools regardless of their legal status. Additionally, to increase enrollment rates of Ukrainian children in Moldovan schools, a Back-to-School campaign was carried out. The campaign reached 22,900 people (50% female) with offline messages and 222,960 people were reached with online keys messages on enrollment procedures in Moldovan schools.

As of November 2023, MER reported that there was a total of 2,237 students (1,126 girls and 1,111 boys) enrolled in Moldovan schools. Of these, 885 Ukrainian and vulnerable Moldovan children received hot meals in their schools. Additionally, around 80,000 children, both Ukrainian and Moldovan, were reached in non-formal education through language classes, IT skills trainings, catch up and remedial classes. Also, around 9,565 teachers and school staff (73% women, 27% men) were trained on inclusive education, child-centered methodology, child protection and GBV risk mitigation and referrals within the schools.

In cooperation with REACH, the Education Working Group completed an education assessment that sought to understand the education experiences and learning conditions of Ukrainian children aged 6-17 years old following Ukrainian online schooling and in-person schooling in Moldova, from the perspectives of children, caregivers, and teachers, and provide insight and future consideration for the education system.

Finally, the Education Working Group conducted a mapping for refugee children with disabilities to identify their individual learning needs and assess the requested assistive technologies.

Challenges and Gaps

Despite multifaceted efforts to increase school enrollment, the main challenge in the education Working Group continues to be the relatively low enrollment of Ukrainian children in Moldovan schools (6% in total). The main reasons for this low enrollment include parental preferences for the Ukrainian online curriculum and language barriers. While it is believed that most school aged children who are not enrolled in Moldovan schools are studying online, there is no tracking system to monitor students' attendance or learning outcomes.

For children studying online, interruption of their online classes due to bombings or electricity cuts in Ukraine, as well as access to reliable internet and appropriate learning devices continue to be challenges for some students. Additionally, the social-emotional impact of prolonged online learning on children and the lack of physical interaction with their peers continue to be concerns.

Additionally, funding gaps and teacher shortages also pose a challenge to ensure the enrollment of all Ukrainian school-age children residing in Moldova in Moldovan schools.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

The Refugee Education Working Group, meeting monthly, enhances coordination and exchanges technical expertise. The co-chairs support the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) in leading the group and in planning and policy making for Education in Emergencies. At MER's request, the co-chairs are deploying consultants to strengthen MER's capacity and ensure refugee children's inclusion in Moldova's education system. This effort aims to bridge the Humanitarian-Development Nexus and facilitate refugee children's access to education. A draft roadmap has been developed, outlining steps for the full inclusion of refugee children in Moldova's education system, both short and long-term. This roadmap, supported by humanitarian and development partners and donors, will guide the MER towards achieving this objective.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

Throughout 2023,the Education Working Group continued to support and guide CSOs, ensuring their participation in coordination spaces and active role in decision-making. CSO partners support diverse activities, including assessments, teacher trainings, and provision of school kits. They also conducted outreach activities to discuss simplified enrollment procedures, encouraging Ukrainian children's enrollment in Moldovan schools. The Education Working Group also developed a guidance note for the EduTech Labs to guide the partners in establishing and operationalizing the EduTech Labs inside targeted schools. The EduTech labs aim to promote and facilitate the inclusion of Ukrainian children in formal school settings. Several partners were engaged in these interventions and ensured close coordination with the Education Working Group, reaching, so far, a total of 94 EduTech labs.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

A series of information sessions and community discussions have been facilitated by Education Working Group partners at the community and school levels with parents, to share the revised MER school enrolment procedures, the importance of physically enrolling children in schools and its impact on children's social and emotional development as well as to discuss any remaining challenges or concerns families have in enrolling their children in Moldovan schools. In addition, several social cohesion activities bringing Moldovan and Ukrainian children and parents together were organized by the partners including summer camps, activities within youth centers, joint field trips to learn about Moldova's history and culture, joint sports events, art and music workshops as well as reading and storytelling activities organized with the support of local libraries.

Spotlight History

Ten-year-old Dasha fled the war in Ukraine with her 16-year-old brother and grandparents. For a year and a half, she and her brother have been separated from their parents, who had to remain in Odesa, Ukraine. In their absence, Dasha's grandmother managed to register her to participate in non-formal education activities organized at the Puppet Theater 'Licurici' in Chisinau, as part of one of several similar projects implemented by the Education Working Group partners. Dasha and 91 other children from Ukraine are studying school subjects like math, Romanian, English, and science, among many others. Moreover, they participate in creative and recreational activities, which help them develop their imagination and overcome the traumas of war. "She started to learn Romanian through non-formal education activities and continues to do so in school. As a result, she successfully passed the Romanian language exam," says Aliona, her grandmother.

For Dasha, this is her second school year in a Moldovan school. Last year, she left her online studies in Ukraine to enroll at the 'Dacia' Theoretical High School in Chisinau, where 30 other refugee children also study. According to the MER, all Ukrainian children can be enrolled in Moldovan schools and have access to all educational services, as do Moldovan children.

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Health and Nutrition

WG Co-Chairs

Ministry of Health and WHO

In 2023, **29** Partners that reported **802** activities in **35** regions

Key Achievement Indicators

1,908
of individuals, disaggregated by gender and age, benefitting from sector related trainings and/ or other capacity building activities (HN)

12,092
of refugees whose medical services were covered (non-cash)

30,066
of individuals that received information on rights and available services related to sectoral activities

2,516
of health care workers, disaggregated by gender and age, trained on clinical management, IPC and MHPSS

292,366
of procured items

Partners reporting activities in 2023

Partners (24 organizations)

- Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim)
- Alliance of NGOs Active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection
- Amici Dei Bambini Moldova
- Casa Marioarei
- Charity Centre for Refugees
- Church World Service
- CONCORDIA Moldova
- Danish Refugee Council
- Doctors with Africa CUAMM
- Dorcas
- Health for Youth Association
- HelpAge International
- Home Care
- International Organization for Migration
- INTERSOS
- KeyStone Moldova
- MOTIVATIE
- People In Need
- Project HOPE
- Solidarités International
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- UN Women
- United Nations Population Fund
- World Health Organization

Mandated Agencies (19 organizations)

- AAR Japan
- ACT Alliance
- Austrian Development Agency
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
- HelpAge Deutschland
- IOM
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Kindernothilfe
- Mercy Corps Global
- Oxfam
- Peace Winds Japan
- People in Need
- Stitching Dorcas Aid International
- UNFPA
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- UN Women
- WHO
- World Vision International (WVI)

Key Achievements

In 2023, the Health and Nutrition WG reinforced government-led efforts to provide essential health services, focusing on refugee integration into the national healthcare system, financial support for institutions providing health care for refugees, and capacity building. The MHPSS workstream expanded, providing services to refugees and training national response partners. In coordination with the NIHC, health financing mechanisms and basic health benefit packages were revised for equitable healthcare access for Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection status. Needs assessments allowed evidence-based decision-making for public health interventions. Over 3,500 healthcare workers received training in various areas contributing to improvement of quality of care through adherence to evidence-based clinical practices. Priority medical devices and equipment were procured and delivered. A total of 37,838 primary health care consultations were provided, including treatment for 783 cancer patients and diabetes care for 675 refugees. MHPSS teams provided counselling for over 45,000 individuals. Information materials on various health topic in multiple languages were developed and disseminated.

Challenges and Gaps

Ukrainian refugees in Moldova face challenges accessing healthcare due to unclear entitlements and procedures. The current health package, primarily limited to emergency, primary, and some elements of specialized care, needs expansion to guarantee a continuum of care and access to essential medicines. While the MoH is actively working to broaden the package, additional external funding is crucial to enable refugees' access to a wider scope of healthcare services. Moldova's healthcare system, still recovering from recent public health emergencies, requires further investment to strengthen its stewardship function, health information systems, healthcare workforce management and training, and to enable safe and quality care through the provision of modern equipment and medical supplies. Refugees with disabilities and older refugees face additional challenges in accessing specialized care, assistive equipment, and social services. A comprehensive approach that addresses these specific needs is necessary.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

Health interventions for Ukrainian refugees in Moldova are coordinated with the Government and Ministry of Health, aligning with national health system frameworks and emergency preparedness and response strategies. Health partners contribute direct budget support, reducing system vulnerability and financial hardship for refugees. Coordination capacities are reinforced by the secretariat of the Interagency Health and Nutrition Working Group. International health expertise is mobilized for emergency response coordination, needs assessment, public health, medical services provision, capacity building, and risk communication. On-site study visits and mentoring activities to rationalize organization of care conducted across healthcare facilities in Moldova, including Chisinau's Emergency Medicine Institute. A holistic intervention improved access to quality and safe emergency, trauma, and

critical care for refugees and host populations. The initiative involved developing patient pathways, evidence-based guidelines, and SOPs; designing and rolling out 29 simulation-based trainings (on emergency, critical, surgical, and trauma care) for over 600 healthcare workers and hospital managers; providing clinical mentorship to utilize newly acquired skills; and supplying critical resources and conducting operational research (behavioural insights) to assess the intervention's impact. During implementation, Moldova hosted other countries and trained national trainers who are now being deployed to support neighbouring countries in establishing quality emergency and critical care services, mitigating health emergency risks. Local immunization plans were approved, with coordinators trained on the Immunization Logistic Information System. The project "Mainstreaming a Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Response to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis" integrated the needs of persons with disabilities into the Contingency Plan for the management of a crisis in the event of an increased influx of foreigners (amendment to GD no.1146/2017).

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

CSOs collaborate with government institutions, UN agencies, and NGOs to address refugee healthcare needs in Moldova. The Mental Health Fair, attended by 17 organizations and approximately 1000 attendees, promoted mental health and psychosocial support. Keystone Moldova provided support to 1959 persons with disabilities and chronic diseases with medicines, medical equipment, assistive devises, rehabilitation services, special nutrition, and hygienic items. The Young Diabetes Association provided diabetes treatment to over 450 refugees, offering insulin, blood glucose tests, and glucometers. The Breastfeeding Mom Association, a CSO of breastfeeding consultants, offers free lactation consultations nationwide. They partner with the Ministry of Health, UN agencies, and NGOs to build healthcare workers' capacity and educate communities, arranging breastfeeding education events for refugee and host families.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

Comprehensive assessments were conducted to ensure refugee participation in decision-making. Throughout 2023, health partners and national authorities conducted several sociological research to identify barriers to accessing healthcare among various groups of refugees. The 2024 Health Sector Refugee Response Plan addresses refugee needs based on the 2023 Multi Sector Needs Assessment and addresses priority health needs of refugees and vulnerable host community members. Information, Education and Communication activities facilitated refugee inclusion and social cohesion, providing refugees with information about their rights and services, and raising host community awareness about refugee challenges. National campaigns and health promotion activities raised awareness about health issues like immunization, breast cancer detection, breastfeeding, nutrition, MHPSS, and GBV. Communication materials in Romanian, Ukrainian, and Russian were distributed nationwide, providing information on healthcare services available to refugees.

Spotlight History

Valentina Ponicarciuc and her youngest daughter, Mirtoslava, 1.5 months old, in Cobila village, Soldanesti district, photo taken during Breastfeeding Caravan

Valentina Ponicarciuc is a mother of three children who had to flee her home with them when the war broke out. They came to Moldova and had been living in Cobilea village, Soldanesti district, ever since. Despite facing many challenges and hardships, Valentina remained determined to provide the best care for her children.

Valentina participated in the "Breastfeeding Caravan" campaign, where she received valuable recommendations for breastfeeding, along with dozens of other women from Moldova. The campaign aimed to educate women about the importance of breastfeeding and support those struggling.

Valentina strongly believes that breastfeeding and vaccination are crucial for children, especially during war. Her youngest daughter, Miroslava, who is 1.5 months old, is still breastfed, along with complementary feeding. All of her children have received the necessary vaccinations according to the vaccination calendar in Moldova. They also have access to primary health care services.

As a refugee in Moldova, Valentina states that she receives all the necessary health help, support, and counselling that help her to provide the best possible care for her children, ensuring that they can grow up healthy, happy, and safe.

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Livelihoods and Socio-Economic Inclusion

WG Co-Chairs

State Chancellery and UNDP

In 2023, **24** Partners that reported **616** activities in **33** regions

© UNDP Moldova

Project Robota implemented by NCUM and AO Platforma with support from UNHCR and DRC, provided job counselling to refugees and locals visiting the job fair organized by NEA and the Municipality of Chișinău, in collaboration with UNDP, with the financial support of Switzerland, Japan, the UN Trust Fund for Human Security, and in partnership with the IOM and HEKS/EPER.

Key Achievement Indicators

3,442

of individuals supported to access livelihoods and job opportunities, disaggregated by gender and age

2,757

of individuals benefiting from vocational education and training, language and other (re)skilling support to access livelihood and job opportunities

2,659

of individual benefitting from support for entrepreneurship, business creation, and financial inclusion

11

of municipalities hosting refugees implementing activities to improve infrastructure and service delivery that enhance livelihoods and inclusion

Partners reporting activities in 2023

Partners (26 organizations)

- ADRA Moldova
- Alliance of NGOs Active in the field of Child and Family Social Protection
- AO Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor/ Law Center of Advocates
- CASMED
- Charity Centre for Refugees
- Child Community Family
- Church World Service
- CONCORDIA Moldova
- Danish Refugee Council
- Dorcas
- Gender Center
- HEKS/EPER
- HelpAge International
- Home Care
- International Organization for Migration
- KeyStone Moldova
- Laolalta
- Lumos Foundation
- MOTIVATIE
- National Youth Council of Moldova
- People In Need
- Project HOPE
- Solidarités International
- The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- UN Women
- United Nations Development Programme

Mandated Agencies (18 organizations)

- Austrian Development Agency
- Christian Aid
- Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH)
- IOM
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Kerk in Actie + ADRA Netherlands
- Kindermissionswerk „Die Sternsinger" e.V.
- Kindernothilfe\
- Mercy Corps Global
- People in Need
- Stitching Dorcas Aid International
- Strabag
- Terre des Homme Netherlands
- UNDP
- UNFPA
- UNHCR
- UN WOMEN
- World Vision International

Key Achievements

In 2023, more sector partners actively engaged in providing sector-specific support for accelerating refugees' access to the labour market and entrepreneurship opportunities. Activities were expanded, while a closer coordination with key government authorities took place both bilaterally and through the Livelihoods and Inclusion Working Group (LIWG). Thus, in 2023, 6,199 refugees and members of the host communities, out of whom 1,889 women, benefitted from various types of support. Job matching support enabled refugees and members of the host communities to get informed about existing vacancies. In Chisinau, the National Employment Agency (NEA) and several partners organized a job fair that brought together over 50 top employers from the food service, sales, banking and finance, accounting, IT, real estate, public sector and other industries. They presented more than 2,000 jobs, with more than 2,000 visitors, including refugees from Ukraine. Leadership and business

development training enabled *Galina, a woman refugee from Ukraine*, to open a children's centre, covering a gap in childcare services. As one of the key barrier to socio-economic integration, enhanced Romanian language skills have *enabled Zinaida, a woman refugee living in Balti*, to live more confidently and integrate in the Moldovan society. Small grants were also given to local businesses to expand production and create job opportunities for both refugees and host community members.

Furthermore, sector partners also continued to support municipalities hosting refugees to improve infrastructure and service delivery, with the aim of facilitating the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and maintaining the social cohesion in the local communities. Works conducted in 2023 included renovations and energy efficiency improvements at key institutions and public and private community spaces.

Spotlight History

The "Concordia" Social Centre in Tudora, providing services to refugees and host community members, becomes more energy resilient, thanks to the support provided by UNDP and its partners - French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Government of Moldova, local public administrations, locals, and diaspora.

"Concordia" Social Centre, located in Tudora village, Ștefan Vodă district, provides services to about 600 people monthly, including to refugees from Ukraine. With the support of *one of the sector's partners*, the Centre was equipped with solar panels with a power capacity of 13 KW, leading to a 37% reduction in electricity costs during winter months.

"Solar panels are a huge help to us, as we use electricity a lot: we cook, we wash, provide multiple services to vulnerable people. They can take showers, wash their clothes," says Veronica Mocan, manager at the center. "Our energy consumption is always high because life in our Centre is very diverse and intense. We conduct activities for children and refuges from Ukraine, such as educational and arts & crafts activities, sessions with psychologists," explains Veronica.

Besides beneficiaries, the 13 employees of the Centre enjoy better working conditions, as the savings from electricity expenses can now be redirected to cover other needs.

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Challenges and Gaps

In 2023, discussions with NGOs highlighted obstacles to refugee employment, such as childcare shortages, limited job opportunities, low wages, and language barriers. Many Ukrainian refugees, preferring flexible work, faced legal hurdles to self-employment. Efforts by the LIWG and others aim to address these issues, enhancing legal frameworks to support self-employment and prevent informal work. While refugees are currently excluded from NEA's initiatives, the MLSP and NEA are open to collaboration if funded by the international community, facilitating integration into employment schemes. A joint UNHCR and UNDP socio-economic assessment aims to identify solutions for faster inclusion, with results expected in 2024.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

Through the LIWG, coordination with the MLSP and NEA has improved, focusing on job access, employment protection, and childcare for refugees. LIWG meetings align sector initiatives with national programs to promote refugee inclusion. Locally, NEA offices participate in forums and workshops, enhancing responses to refugee needs. LIWG also advocates for reducing legal barriers to refugee self-employment, holding discussions with ministries and the General Inspectorate for Migration. A resolution on easing self-employment restrictions is anticipated in 2024, demonstrating a concerted effort to integrate refugees into the labor market and support their autonomy.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

In 2023, sector partners continued to work closely with the civil society in Moldova, acknowledging their in-depth knowledge of the local context and good understanding of the needs of the communities they are active in. Local NGOs have been at the forefront of the sectors' refugee response, in partnership with the international community. For instance, LWIG partners have partnered with several NGOs to provide trainings and activities to support entrepreneurship and employment opportunities, as well as activities on awareness raising, promoting social cohesion and support enabling environment for economic inclusion. NGOs in Balti have been also engaged in Local Refugee Coordination Forum meetings to discuss existing challenges to refugee employment and identify synergies between the NGOs working on livelihoods and inclusion.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

In 2023, sector partners conducted various activities aimed at fostering dialogue and collaboration between refugees and host community members, and thus strengthen the social cohesion. At the same time, the sector views social cohesion as an integral part and critical element for the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in Moldova. In this sense, sector partners worked with national authorities to include refugees in national schemes, such as the Government's energy compensation programme for the cold season (Energy Vulnerability Reduction Fund), or the entrepreneurship's certificate option (ongoing activity). At the local level, partners supported local public authorities in enhancing the provision of local public services to both locals and refugees.

Together with the Protection Working Group, the LIWG organized a workshop on social cohesion, which brought together over 30 participants from 22 UN Agencies and international and local NGOs, as well as representatives of refugees and central and local Government. Participants discussed the state of social cohesion in refugee host communities and identified potential risk factors of weakened social cohesion.

Cash Assistance

WG Co-Chairs

Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and UNHCR

Key Achievement Indicators

86,219

of refugees who benefited from Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance

44,262

of Moldovans benefiting from Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance

Key Achievements

In 2023, over 30 partners in the Cash Working Group (CWG) coordinated with the Government of Moldova to deliver cash-based interventions to refugees and Moldovans. Focused on Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) for refugees' basic needs and support for households hosting refugees, these programs reached over 86,000 refugees and 9,500 Moldovan families. Additional efforts included winter support with 800 MDL monthly transfers from November to March, and cash assistance targeting 67,000 vulnerable Moldovan households.

A comprehensive Market Assessment informed these initiatives, ensuring they were based on current market dynamics. To streamline efforts, the CWG introduced the Refugee Assistance Information System (RAIS), enhancing stakeholder collaboration and accountability.

Challenges and Gaps

The CWG implementation of the RAIS faced delays, with the Data Sharing Agreement signing extend-ing beyond the expected timeframe due to part-ners' internal processes. Operational by December 2023, RAIS's deployment was slower than planned. Throughout the year, in close coordination with government authorities, particularly the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, partners were repeatedly called upon to provide information on their plans for 2023. However, the dynamic funding situation led to frequent changes in planned activities making it challenging to establish concrete planning figures. Moldova's status as a non-EU country with limited resources and a high poverty rate hindered the integration of refugees into government social assistance programs, making immediate inclusion unfeasible. A more defined integration strategy is anticipated in 2024, aiming for a better understanding of how refugees can be incorporated into government services.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

The MLSP, co-chair of the CWG, played a crucial role in implementing cash programs alongside the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Their active involvement streamlined decision-making, especially in winterization planning. The endorsed guidance note harmonized winter support. For 2024, sectorial consultations involved both MoLSP and MoI leadership. Government priorities were shared with partners to complement refugee response. UN partners expanded social protection for vulnerable Moldovans, fostering social cohesion. Notably, temporary protection holders now receive childcare benefits, enhancing refugee inclusion in social assistance

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

In 2024, national civil society organizations' active engagement in the Cash Working Group (CWG) has grown, enriching the CWG's capacity through diverse exchanges. CWG partners' assessments have improved CSOs' needs assessment capabilities by actively engaging them in these exercises, while providing evidence for enhanced planning. The financial service provider mapping exercise provided crucial information for new partners, aiding in selecting suitable delivery modalities. Updates on CBI programs enhance referral pathways and strengthen collective response capacities. CWG partners often provide technical support to new partners implementing cash programs, contributing to a more informed implementation of cash-based interventions.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

CWG partners routinely conduct Post-Distribution Monitoring as part of their commitment to be accountable to the affected population. The findings from these exercises are shared within the CWG, leading to necessary adjustments in the programs to ensure an effective response. In addition to monitoring efforts, complaint and feedback mechanisms serve as transparent channels for ensuring refugees' access to information and provision of feedbacks to the programs they benefit from.

Refugee-led organizations play a crucial role in the decision-making process, enhancing refugees' participation. Some partners implement participatory assessments in the planning of their programs, ensuring social cohesion among refugees. The cash programs in Moldova serve as a regional exemplar. Given Moldova's unique circumstances and the substantial needs of the host community, partners implement cash programs for Moldovans affected by the crisis. This not only fosters social cohesion between refugees and host communities but also mitigates social tensions in the country.

Accountability to Affected People

Task Force Co-Chairs

UNHCR and National Congress of Ukrainians of Moldova

Key Achievement Indicators

51,138

of feedback, reports and complaints received monthly and acted upon according to the established collective procedure

Key Achievements

In 2023, the AAP Task Force engaged 77 partners, and providing over 90,000 refugees with information on rights and services, including access to temporary protection and associated rights. This was achieved through collaborative information campaigns with key partners and the Refugee Green Line, which provided over 60,000 consultations.

Social Listening initiatives were implemented to track sentiments and opinions among Ukrainian refugees in Moldova monitoring more than 25 media channels and monthly and quarterly reports produced and presented to the AAP TF partners. This facilitated the identification of challenges and needs addressed timely by the humanitarian stakeholders. These also contributed to a *Quick Assessment on the Implementation of Temporary Protection* in March 2023.

During November 2023 in collaboration with CDAC Network, 14 members of the AAP TF attended a 2-days Training of Trainers on AAP and Community Engagement to then provide follow-up training to more than 100 humanitarian actors across the country. This established a sustainable pool of trainers for future capacity building.

Challenges and Gaps

Enhancing collaboration remained an area of focus for the AAP Task Force. While significant progress was made in engaging governmental representatives and fostering collaborative efforts, establishing a designated focal point within each partner organization would further streamline communication and ensure consistent participation.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

The AAP Task Force actively partnered with the government in its consultation and communication efforts throughout 2023. Partners provided close support for the development and distribution of information materials on temporary protection. Additionally, the Task Force facilitated regular consultations with refugees to gather their views and opinions on accessing temporary protection and associated rights. This input informed policy development and adjustments.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

The AAP Task Force partnered with NGOs, including refugee-led organizations like the National Congress of Ukrainians of Moldova (NCUM), fostering a collaborative environment where CSOs shared experiences and informed decision-making. This included NCUM co-chairing the Task Force and representing it at the Global Refugee Forum, highlighting Moldova's refugee response and the crucial role of civil society. By actively engaging CSOs, the Task Force not only recognized their contributions but also amplified their voice on the global stage, promoting a more inclusive approach to refugee support.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

The AAP Task Force prioritizes meaningful refugee participation through its information campaigns and Social Listening initiatives, having engaged with over 90,000 refugees throughout the year. IAAP Task Force partners actively contributed to conducting social cohesion events, organizing initiatives such as Cultural Dialogue events: Ukrainian Day in Moldova, Vyshyvanka Day, and community events within Community Center 151, fostering a sense of community among refugees. These initiatives not only provided platforms for cultural exchange but also promoted social cohesion.

Disability and Age

Task Force Co-Chairs

UNHCR, Keystone Moldova (KHS) and Help Age

Key Achievements

2023 witnessed significant steps towards inclusive humanitarian action in Moldova. OPDs actively participated in the Refugee Coordination Forum, shaping the 2024 RRP and disability-focused initiatives. The DATF trained over 600 stakeholders, integrating disability and age considerations into operations.

Mainstreaming was evident across working groups: accessible communication materials for Temporary Protection, RAC accessibility assessments influencing relocation strategies, and strengthened referral pathways for vulnerable individuals.

Public-private partnerships provided crucial services like eye care to over 800 refugees. DATF's comprehensive support reached more than 6,000 persons with disabilities, of which 1900 children with specific needs, encompassing food, hygiene kits, medicine, rehabilitation, accessible transportation, participation in social cohesion activities, support to find jobs, PSS counselling, and more, demonstrating a holistic approach to inclusion within the refugee response.

Challenges and Gaps

Despite efforts, specialized services for refugees with disabilities and older refugees remain limited, particularly in smaller communities. Access to primary care is available, but travel and financial barriers persist. Lack of consistent and reliable data disaggregated by age, gender, and disability hinders targeted support. Continued government collaboration is crucial to address these gaps,

Support to Civil Society

DAFT co-leads partnered with OPDs and CSOs, building their capacity to participate in the Refugee Coordination Forum. This ensured inclusion and informed OPD input in the 2024 Refugee Response Plan. Keystone Moldova further extended their disability hotline to support refugees, providing crucial information and referral pathways. In December, a Dialogue on Inclusion convened by DATF and UNHCR fostered discussion on enhancing refugee participation and strengthening OPD involvement in the response.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

DATF actively engages older refugees and those with disabilities, incorporating their needs into the 2024 Refugee Response Plan. A December workshop validated OHCHR assessment findings with refugees and caregivers. DATF also supports AAP Task Force in building accessible feedback mechanisms for refugees with disabilities.

Celebrating World Mental Health Day, DATF co-organized a fair featuring side event where 20 Ukrainian older refugees and a Moldovan representative shared traditions and songs, bridging cultures and fostering inclusion.

Gender in Humanitarian Action

Task Force Co-Chairs

UN Women & Platform for Gender Equality

Key Achievement Indicators

6
Coordination meetings held

233
of frontliners trained on Gender in Humanitarian Action

1
Gender Assessment produced

1
Gender Accountability Framework Report produced

© UN Women

Key Achievements

In Moldova, the Regional Refugee Response has actively promoted and prioritized the voices and needs of women and girls, under the auspices of the *Gender Task Force* (GTF). The GTF's work in advancing gender-responsive programming, financing, and coordination involved close collaboration with UN agencies, operational partners, women's organizations, and other stakeholders to address the gender dynamics of the refugee crisis. This collaboration focused on enhancing gender equality through coordination meetings, capacity building, and advocacy for the use of Sex, Age, and Disability Disaggregated Data (SADDD). Importantly, the GTF facilitated the inclusion of women and girls' perspectives in the refugee response, *organizing consultations with 45 local women's organizations to ensure their voices were heard*.

The GTF provided technical support to increase the gender sensitivity of the Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) planning tools and assessments, producing essential gender knowledge products. These efforts included socio-economic assessments, monitoring of Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs), educational assessments, and multiple sector needs assessments, among others.

Capacity building was a key focus, with 233 humanitarian actors (195 women, 37 men, 1 intersex) receiving training to deepen their understanding of gender equality, intersectionality, and sector-specific gender-sensitive responses. The collection of gender sensitive data, and development of *gender analysis* helped inform the development of the RRP and working group plans, integrating gender-specific needs.

Additionally, in collaboration with the Refugee Coordination Forum Secretariat, the GTF produced a localized *Gender in Humanitarian Action Accountability Framework Report*. This initiative aimed to strengthen the accountability for integrating gender equality into the refugee response, informing the 2024 planning efforts, contributing to global monitoring, and offering recommendations for improvements.

Challenges and Gaps

The Gender Task Force encountered several challenges during its activities, which includes limited intersectional and diversity analysis to complement the gender lens and inform programming, limited reporting and/or analysis of Sex, Age and Disability Disaggregated Data (SADDD), lack of data on funding trends for gender mainstreaming and dedicated funding for women's organizations, lack of gender capacity across sectors, agencies and organizations with sufficient funding, time and expertise, limited inclusion of gender and diversity as standing agenda in sector and sub-sector working groups, and lack of set criteria for gender mainstreaming in funding applications and requirement of Gender and Age Marker.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

In 2023, the Gender Task Force established partnerships with public authorities across various levels to enhance the capabilities of government officials in integrating gender equality in humanitarian action. This collaboration aimed to ensure gender inclusivity within the government-led initiatives for responding to refugee crises, significantly contributing to a more equitable and sensitive approach to humanitarian action.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

The Gender Task Force, co-chaired by the Platform for Gender Equality, focused on promoting localization, enhancing local ownership, and building capacities to include local women's organizations in the refugee response. It provided space for dialogue and trainings on gender equality in humanitarian action to local organizations' representatives and regularly disseminated information about training opportunities in PSEA, GBV, protection, and other relevant sectors.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

Three refugee women coordinators were contracted in Balti (North region), Cahul (South region) and Ungheni (West region) to support local CSOs and refugee communities in their regions, to ensure that the needs of refugee women and girls are addressed comprehensively and effectively, as well as to participate in the Local Refugee Coordination Forums to represent refugee women's issues and provide their gender-sensitive perspectives on priorities and gaps in the refugee response. They have been attending these forums and also feed into meetings of the Gender Task Force at the national level. This model may be considered promising for inclusion of refugee women in response planning, as well as for providing tailored job opportunities for refugee women, supporting the ecosystem of CSOs in Moldova, ensuring effective refugee and host community outreach, enhancing coordination of refugee response and promoting peace by strengthening social cohesion and integration of refugees in local communities.

Spotlight History

Olga Dymova is one of the women refugees who were working as local women refugee coordinator. She decided to join the UNV program to help other refugees. "My motivation was to help people. It is something I have liked to do since childhood. I like to see smiles on people's faces. I get great spiritual pleasure when I see that I bring people benefit and at least a little joy in such difficult days of our current life", she says. Olga has been working as local coordinator at the civil society organization (CSO) AFINA in Balti.

Throughout the year, Olga also became a voice for refugee women in Moldova, through for example speaking at some high-level events to shed light on the lived experience of refugee women, including the International Conference "Women Lead the Way: Strengthening a Localized and Gender Responsive Approach to Refugee Response and Peacebuilding" in Moldova, and at the side event "Forced Displacement through a Gender Lens" at the Global Refugee Forum in Switzerland. Olga calls for continued support and projects involving refugee volunteers, emphasizing their essential role in the ongoing humanitarian response. She represents the strength, courage, and empathy of refugee women, and proofs that together they are a powerful force contributing to a better and fairer response in crisis.

Link to the full article of Olga and the other UN Volunteers:

https://moldova.unwomen.org/en/stories/comunicat-de-presa/2023/04/femeile-refugiate-din-ucraina-isi-ofera-sprijin-reciproc-prin-intermediul-programului-de-voluntariat-al-onu

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Mental Health and Psychological Support

Technical Reference Group Co-Chairs

WHO, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification in Moldova, and MENSANA

Key Achievement Indicators

45,933
of people who participated in PSS activities

15,892
of consultations provided for Specialized MHPSS services

2,496
of workers involved with MHPSS interventions who are trained in MHPSS (online and in-person)

8,200
of people who participated in awareness-raising

© WHO Moldova
At a Self-Care Workshop conducted for the MHPSS TRG on July 21, partners were reminded that they must take care of themselves before they can take care of others.

Key Achievements

The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Technical Reference Group (MHPSS TRG) and partners made impressive strides in 2023. Through collaboration, they implemented a capacity-building plan, leading to 19 workshops benefitting over 370 MHPSS workers. Regular meetings, retreats, and a community Mental Health Fair in Chisinau (attended by over 1,000 individuals) fostered engagement and awareness.

Individual partners also made significant contributions. Family Federation offered family-based support, while World Vision International, in collaboration with WHO and the Moldovan-Swiss project Mensana, conducted the first Problem Management Plus (PM+) training in Moldova. PM+ equips individuals with essential coping skills to manage stress and improve well-being. IOM provided specialized support and shelter to refugees with more complex mental health needs. The National Center for Child Abuse Prevention ran the innovative "12 Plus" platform for teenagers, and AO SOS Autism delivered Applied Behavior Analysis therapy to children, enhancing their daily living skills.

Challenges and Gaps

2023 presented unique MHPSS challenges in Moldova. Refugee stigma fueled fear of seeking services, especially specialized care. However, community-based activities saw increased refugee engagement. Limited MHPSS capacity and high staff turnover was tackled through scalable interventions like PFA, mhGAP, and PM+. Access for refugees with disabilities and in remote areas remained a challenge, despite innovative approaches like online platforms and mobile teams. Addressing these accessibility gaps requires continued focus in 2024.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

2023 saw several initiatives to bolster MHPSS capacity within government institutions. MENSANA, building on its existing program, trained over 2,000 healthcare workers and social workers on suicide prevention and response using the mhGAP framework. The Society of Psychiatrists organized an international congress, bringing together experts from 23 countries to share best practices for refugee MHPSS. Notably, World Vision International collaborated with MENSANA to train teachers in government schools on Psychological First Aid, a scalable intervention promoting peer support mechanisms. Moving forward, the TRG aims to further enhance government involvement, particularly the Ministry of Health, in leading and strengthening MHPSS efforts across Moldova.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

In 2023, the TRG largely focused on building capacity, improving communication, and strengthening capacity. This was accomplished through regular MHPSS TRG coordination meetings, ad hoc meetings, and other networking events. Moldova's mental health system, undergoing reform, faced gaps further exacerbated by the refugee influx. CSOs stepped in, offering diverse MHPSS activities across various modalities and locations. While many remain, improved coordination was crucial for timely referrals. TRG's networking and mapping activities addressed this by fostering relationships and knowledge sharing amongst partners. The Fair, attended by 15 MHPSS partners (mostly CSOs), amplified advocacy and awareness, while promoting collaboration and learning. Finally, joint capacity building initiatives empowered CSOs to support each other through shared knowledge and skills. These efforts laid a strong foundation for continued progress in 2024.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

Recognizing the need for inclusivity, MHPSS partners in Moldova worked to integrate both Moldovans and refugees in activities. This fostered shared learning, friendships, and cultural exchange. Initiatives like Romanian language classes by IOM further aided communication and integration. Activities like puppet shows and community arts brought people together around shared goals, promoting social cohesion through shared experiences. Promoting inclusion, MHPSS partners ran 11 focus groups to directly gather refugee voices and understand their mental health needs and perspectives. This participatory approach prioritized their experiences over assumptions, informing future programming with evidence-based recommendations.

Spotlight History

When it comes to MHPSS, it is not always easy to see "success" as mental health is not a concrete entity like food or shelter. Nonetheless, MHPSS partners in 2023 reported a number of heart-warming stories that demonstrate that it is possible to dramatically improve life quality and satisfaction through quality MHPSS:

- Family Federation Overcoming Stigma as a Barrier to Mental Health: Maria's Story. "Maria", a young mother of a 6-year-old son, held the common belief that psychological counseling was reserved for those with severe mental disorders, and this prevented her from seeking support. However, as she began regularly attending Family Federation's "Parents' Club", her perspective began to shift. In the club's supportive atmosphere and with a trained psychologist, she began opening up about the stress of parenting and struggles of adapting to life in a new country. Week by week, she listened to other parents share similar concerns, and she gradually realized that these sessions were a source of strength, not a mark of weakness. This realization allowed her to seek individual counseling for her anxiety where she learned new coping strategies that greatly improved her well-being and her relationship with her son. Her story is a testament to the power of community in breaking down mental health stigma, and the profound impact that accessible psychological support can have on individuals who may otherwise never seek help.
- People in Need (PIN) shared the story of "Adela", a 21-year-old female who was suffering from depression and suicidal thoughts. Adela began seeing a psychologist; after 9 sessions, her mood and presentation have improved significantly, and she reports that her suicidal thoughts have subsided. She was so inspired by these changes that she now strongly advocates for counseling to her friends and family.
- MdM told the story of "Viktoria", a 35 y.o. Ukrainian woman who was affected by panic attacks, anxiety, and extreme fear to such an extent she had difficulty completing her daily living activities. She enrolled in 1:1 counseling where she learned how to challenge harmful and limiting cognitions, deep breathing, and mindfulness exercises. She now reports that she feels much more centered and her relationship with her family has significantly improved.

Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

Network Co-Chairs

UNHCR and WHO (PSEA Task Force)

Key Achievement Indicators

1,354

of individuals who participated on capacity building activities on PSEA disaggregated by gender and age

962	2	389	0
Women	Girls	Men	Boys

15,557

of individuals who received PSEA related information disaggregated by gender and age

2,356	6,395	2,919	3,007
Women	Girls	Men	Boys

Key Achievements

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) has been a priority in the context of the refugee response in Moldova. Joint coordination between the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) allowed Moldova to establish an effective system wide PSEA coordination mechanism encompassing both development and humanitarian programming, with an inter-agency action plan funded at 100%. In 2023, the PSEA Network achieved significant milestones and expanded its membership to include 84 participating organizations. These include 14 UN agencies, 30 local CSOs, and 40 INGOs, represented by 133 appointed PSEA Focal Points, who support PSEA activities across Moldova.

The network's flagship initiative in 2023 was the Inter-Agency SEA Risk Assessment analysis ranked Moldova as having a risk of 3.9 out of a 10-point scale. The methodology, combineding analysis of secondary data, legal frameworks, and primary data collection, informed the development of the 2024 PSEA Action Plan, ensuring an evidence-based approach to PSEA programming.

Investing in awareness and capacity building, the PSEA Network delivered PSEA trainings to over 1,350 aid workers government officials and volunteers, and trained 15 investigators via the Investigator Qualification Training Scheme Tier 2 training. The network also delivered 2 Training of Trainers in Romanian. Additionally, PSEA trainings were delivered to Roma mediators to support culturally sensitive GBV/SEA programming. In 2023, partners engaged with 15,557 individuals to raise awareness on PSEA.

Furthermore, the PSEA Network delivered several PSEA trainings for Green Line workers, as well as provided safe referrals, psychological first aid, and stress management trainings with the support of the GBV Sub-Working Group and the MHPSS TRG. By December 2023, Green Line personnel had processed more than 4,596 feedback (89%) and complaints (11%).

Challenges and Gaps

The 2023 Inter-Agency SEA Risk Assessment (SEA RA) flagged key areas requiring further engagement from the PSEA Network. Restricted participation of women and girls, particularly from marginalized groups like Roma, disabled, LGBTIQ+, and older individuals, hinders robust policies and practices safeguarding their protection needs, while legal requirements for mandatory reporting to the police for sexual violence survivors, and legislation on sex work may prevent survivors from accessing services and consequently discourage reporting. Furthermore, the SEA RA revealed limited capacity of national NGOs to investigate allegations, coupled with inadequate reference checks and vetting procedures. Refugees and host communities have limited awareness regarding reporting channels and support services.

Although no formal SEA complaints were received in 2023, the existence of rumors and anecdotal evidence indicates a risk of underreporting.

Government Strengthening and Engagement

In 2023, approximately 100 law enforcement officers of the Republic of Moldova were trained on PSEA principles and standards of conduct. The training aimed at strengthening participants' abilities to protect refugees and other members of the affected population from SEA and to promote a survivor-centered and "do-no-harm" approach in responding to potential SEA allegations. The trainings also opened for more dialogue with local authorities on PSEA, a topic which remains sensitive in the Republic of Moldova. Lastly, participants became equipped with PSEA standards of conduct aimed to be later implemented in their interaction with refugees. In addition, in the context of the SEA Risk Assessment, a safety assessment of Accredited Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs) was conducted to evaluate PSEA compliance standards. Findings have supported the prioritization of the closure of RACs in the context of the RAC Consolidation Process. Finally, trainings on PSEA have been delivered to staff of the Office of the Ombudsman, opening an opportunity for further engagement, especially vis-à-vis the role of this institution in receiving and processing complaints of SEA against government officials.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

Throughout 2023, the PSEA Network focused on enhancing the PSEA capacities of national and local CSOs through support initiatives, including capacity-building activities and the IP PSEA Capacity Assessment by the UN, leading to the development and execution of Capacity Strengthening Implementation Plans. The network also organized its first Romanian-language PSEA Training of Trainers, utilizing the IASC Learning Package on "Saying No to Sexual Misconduct". The learning package was translated to Romanian by the PSEA Network and is now available in the IASC platform. This training aimed to deepen local NGO representatives' understanding of PSEA and equip them with the skills to conduct the training themselves, focusing on effective communication and facilitation techniques. Furthermore, from spring to autumn, Moldova saw the rollout of Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the CHS Investigator Qualification Training Scheme to address the lack of resources among local CSOs for thorough SEA investigations. Following the training, 15 individuals from local CSOs strengthened their skills in investigating allegations of SEA. To further expand the pool of qualified investigators, Tier 3 training is planned for 2024, alongside additional cohorts for Tiers 1 and 2. Ultimately, this program aims to create a pool of independent SEA investigators in Moldova, readily available to support local CSOs whenever needed.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

The Moldova Inter-Agency SEA Risk Assessment adopted a strong people-centered approach, giving voice to refugees, the host community, their organized groups, and associations. This aimed to understand the multiple enabling factors and barriers influencing access to information, reporting channels, services, and the aid community's capacity to disseminate messages and gain trust. Over 150 refugees and Moldovans were consulted through face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions, ensuring participation from diverse age and gender groups, individuals with disabilities, and those of Roma ethnicity. The findings of the Risk assessment will be presented to affected people in 2024. New PSEA awareness materials were developed with refugee input on effective communication of key messages. An information assessment conducted with the AAP Task Force included extensive consultation with refugees and Moldovans to understand reporting barriers. Their views informed the 2024 PSEA Action Plan, but further engagement to promote their participation in implementing PSEA activities, including peer sensitization, is an area to be explored.

Spotlight History

Ana, a 33-year-old woman from Ukraine, fled the war to the Republic of Moldova. With a background in medicine and experience working with children of various ages and diagnoses. Her child, Matvei, is a 4-year-old diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. Currently, he has well-developed self-care skills, verbal communication, and active interaction with peers, thanks to the therapies.

Keystone encountered Ana in November 2022 during a visit to their partner of the DATF, SOS Autism, in Chisinau. Since then, Ana has worked as a family consultant for Keystone. Ana's role includes:

- Identifying children with disabilities from Ukraine in need of support by providing peer-to-peer assistance.
- Providing counselling to parents to promote care according to identified needs.
- Providing information to families to facilitate access to available services offered by Keystone and DATF partners.
- Collaborating with educational institutions to support the integration of children into kindergartens.

Ana has supported 27 refugee families monthly, helping to understand the early signs of autism, emphasizing the importance of early identification and teaching parents how to interact healthily with their children.

Keystone Moldova identified resources that allowed Ana's child to attend three rehabilitation courses at the SOS Autism Center, receive free specialized medical services, and access necessary medications.

Roma

Task Force Co-Chairs

Intersos and Coalitia Vocea Romilor

Key Achievements

In 2023, the Roma Task Force made significant progress in supporting the Roma refugee community in Moldova. The TF and partners advocated for and supported the integration of refugee children from Roma ethnicity into the formal educational system, while also encouraging additional enrollments in non-formal educational activities within Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs). A comprehensive Roma Mapping conducted in June-July provided updated information about the displaced population's numbers, locations, and primary concerns. The Task Force also led over 20 awareness-raising events between April 1-8, collaborating with 25 partners across 10 districts. These events enhanced public understanding of Roma culture and traditions, reaching more than 1,500 individuals directly and many more online. Furthermore, the Task Force facilitated the registration of all eligible Roma refugees in formal RACs for Temporary Protection by organizing information sessions and workshops and providing individual legal support for document-related issues. Health promotion initiatives, including sessions on Sexual and Reproductive Health and menstrual hygiene, were also organized.

Challenges and Gaps

Protection monitoring in Moldova in 2023 revealed that while Roma refugees share common needs with other Ukrainian refugees, such as financial aid, clothing, healthcare, and education, they face unique challenges due to persistent negative stigma, discrimination, low literacy rates, difficulties in securing private accommodation, limited employment opportunities, and significant protection risks including gender-based violence and child protection issues. These concerns were exacerbated for Roma women and children, who are at increased risk of trafficking owing to socioeconomic vulnerabilities and the risk of statelessness due to documentation issues.

The Roma Task Force meetings throughout the year addressed these challenges, highlighting the need for catch-up education and specialized support to facilitate integration into traditional schooling and improve employment prospects. The high rate of Roma refugees living in RACs underscored the difficulties related to ethnicity-based discrimination in finding housing.

However, the effectiveness of the Task Force was limited by several internal challenges, including the absence of a dedicated government liaison, the need for enhanced cooperation among members, and a lack of comprehensive service mapping and referral pathways among task force partners. Addressing these gaps remains crucial to providing timely and impactful support to the Roma refugee community in Moldova, ensuring their protection and inclusion.

National and Local Civil Society Engagement and Support

The work with the local Roma CSOs is crucial in the provision of services to the members of the Roma community, where persists a level of mistrust towards authorities and people from outside the community. In this sense, all protection, health, and advocacy activities required the involvement of members of the Roma community to act as mediators between the service providers and beneficiaries, to ensure trust and access.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

The Roma Task Force throughout 2023 has acted to improve the inclusion of Roma people in the society, both refugees, but also locals. Particularly, the advocacy activities organized throughout the year have had the objective to increase the understanding of history and culture of the community and improve the level of inclusion of its members. Specifically important in this matter has been the organization of events bringing together both the local and refugee Roma, and the general population, such as the Amare Amala: Roma Culture Week, the Commemoration of the Roma Holocaust.

Spotlight History

Olga Ruda, a 34-year-old Roma refugee, arrived in Moldova with her nine children and her husband seeking safety. Illiterate but determined, the family embraced Moldova's opportunities. Receiving accommodations, the family expressed gratitude for the reception in the country that they received. Seven children, motivated by their parents, are currently enrolled in literacy classes at the Refugee Accommodation Center (RAC). The children - Alexei, Veaceslav, Mikola, Ilona, Sofia, Artur, and Arsen - have not only learned to read and write in Romanian but have also been actively engaged in class discussions. Two of the children are also accessing online classes from Ukraine. The children's education progress at the RAC has been significant — perfect attendance, happiness with their classes, and a shift from digital devices to literacy pursuits. They have also become catalysts for change, urging their parents to learn Romanian as well, breaking the cycle of family illiteracy. Crucially, the Ruda children feel safe and integrated in Moldova. Their literacy success not only signifies academic progress for them but also stands as hope for all refugee children in Moldova.

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Children of Olga attending a Romanian class

Anti-Trafficking Task Force

Co-Chairs

National Committee on Combating Trafficking in Person and IOM

Key Achievements

1. Coordination and Collaboration: The Task Force held four meetings to coordinate efforts, share challenges, and discuss solutions.
2. Specialized Services: All specialized services were strengthened, with a particular focus on the Centers for Assistance and Protection under MLSP. Support was provided to all presumed and identified victims.
3. Action Plan Implementation: The Action Plan on preventing and combating human trafficking was implemented from July 1, 2022, to July 1, 2023, in response to the situation in Ukraine.
4. National Program Integration: Actions related to addressing human trafficking in the context of refugee response were integrated into the new National Program regarding the prevention and combating Trafficking in Human Beings for 2024-2028 and its action plan.
5. Awareness Campaign: An information and awareness campaign was carried out by "La Strada" with the support of IOM, involving over 650 persons in 12 offline activities and distributing over 70,000 flyers and posters in Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian.
6. Proactive Monitoring: National authorities proactively monitored information platforms that present an increased risk for the recruitment of Ukrainians, identifying suspicious ads and initiating a criminal investigation in one case.
7. Training Courses: Training courses were conducted for frontline specialists.

Challenges and Gaps

1. Specific Groups' Needs: With the Republic of Moldova facing a high number of refugees for the first time, it was challenging to establish the needs of each person and find the necessary human and financial resources to satisfy them.
2. Contingency Planning: The impact of a large flow of refugees on counter-trafficking response was a concern, particularly as the state-managed assistance and protection centers have a limited number of places.
3. Destination Country Challenges: The Republic of Moldova becoming a country of destination implies new actions from the authorities, additional training needs for specialists, and additional services for foreign victims.

Government Strengthening

Trainings were carried out for frontline specialists, contributing to strengthening the capacities in identifying victims of human trafficking among refugees and providing appropriate assistance according to needs. Expert support was provided to the Permanent Secretariat of the National Committee on Combating Trafficking in Persons and to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The Task Force, with operational support from IOM, continued to support the development and implementation of the National Referral Mechanism for Assistance of Victims of Crime (NRMV), which is a national program designed to assist victims of all violent crimes (including victims of trafficking) and which was open for the refugees and migrants. State shelters were supported to provide tailored assistance to vulnerable refugees, including potential victims of trafficking.

Support to Civil Society

NGOs specialized in prevention and assistance to victims of trafficking received grants to assist presumed victims and at-risk population reaching out rural areas outside Chisinau. The Task Force supported the operation of two anti-trafficking hotlines, one of which is managed by “La Strada’’ and the Interaction NGO. It also supported NGOs to conduct information and awareness-raising activities about the risks of trafficking, including with a special focus on Ukrainian refugees. NGOs in Moldova contribute and complement the effort of the state to provide support to victims and potential victims of trafficking and play a major role in awareness-raising activities. NGOs supporting the Anti-Trafficking Task Force activities in 2023 included Artemida, CNFACEM, Tighina Psychologist Association, STIMUL, Jenskie Initsiativy, Rosnance and Interaction.

Refugee Participation and Social Cohesion

Regular info-sessions are conducted within the vulnerable and refugee population, also targeting the community mediators, leaders, and host communities throughout the entire country on Trafficking in Person (TiP) and GBV prevention. The mobile teams and NGOs conducting such activities are trained on victim identification and make referrals on a case-by-case basis. A new TiP awareness-raising campaign, tailored for Roma communities, is underway. Feedback from the Roma community is collected regularly to ensure a greater efficiency and outreach of the overall messages of the campaign.