

2023 Refugee Response Plan Local Consultations

Moldova | October 2022



LOCAL CONSULTATIONS

With the objective to improve the humanitarian response by having reliable information for key decision-making in the context of the 2023 Refugee Response Plan Planning Process, local consultations were held across Moldova in the context of the Local Refugee Coordination Forums.

The participatory sessions gathered a diverse group of actors in order to listen to their overall feedback regarding the ongoing response, identify their needs, challenges, and proposed solutions to inform the planning process.

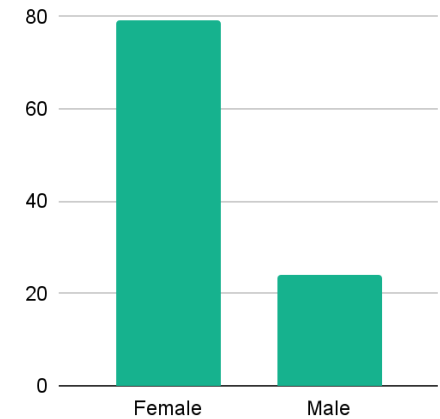
Over 100 persons from public institutions, international organizations, national and local NGOs, refugees and host communities participated in ten local consultations in nine cities of Moldova: Chişinău, Ocniţa, Otaci, Donduşeni, Bălţi, Comrat, Cahul, Căuşeni and Ştefan Vodă. The locations were selected due to the significant presence of refugees living in those areas according to information collected through the delivery of cash assistance. A specific consultation with Roma refugees was convened.

The consultations covered a large range of topics relevant to the refugee response in Moldova, such as protection, basic needs, access to services (health, education, connectivity, etc.), social cohesion and other topics of interest for the community.

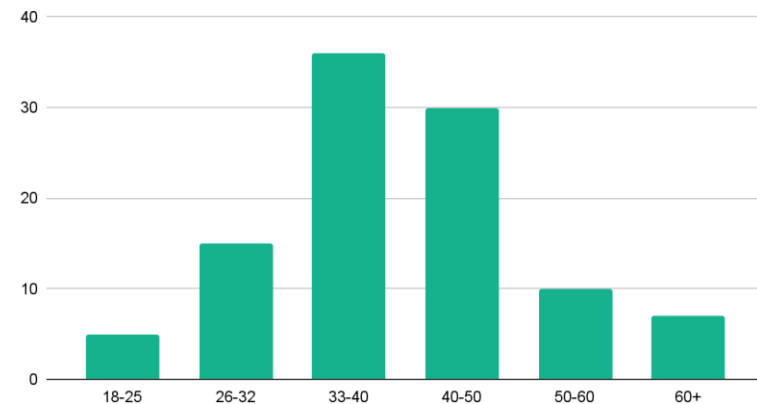
NATIONALITY



GENDER



AGE

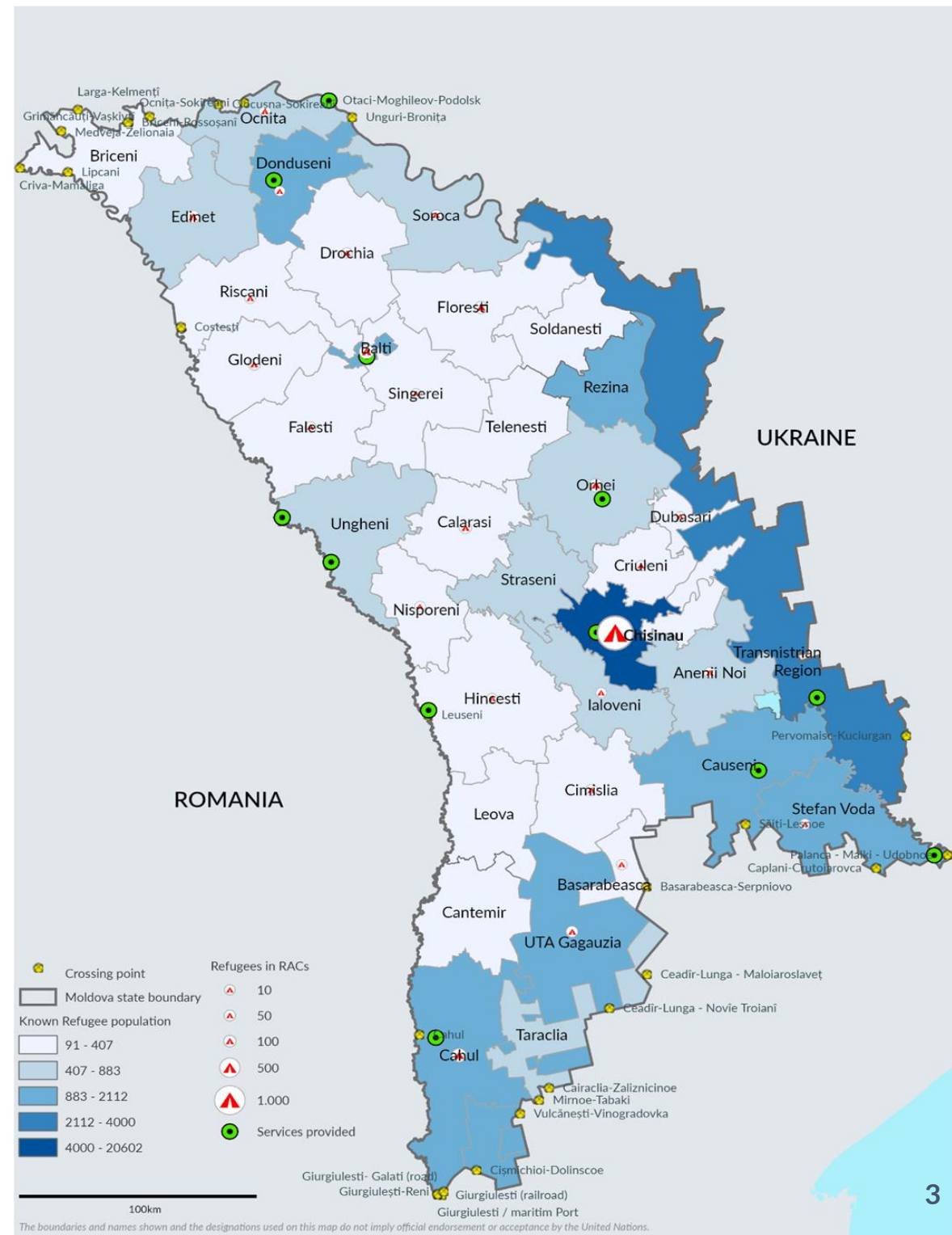


KEY FINDINGS

In most of the regions, public services, and humanitarian assistance is available. People are grateful for the support. However, three main challenges were identified. One is directly related to the service provision itself, which does not cover the needs of its beneficiaries, as many of them have limited resources to operate, or are a one-time service with no possibility of follow up.

In addition, the consultation included a mapping exercise that showed where refugees are living, also evidenced how services are concentrated in some areas, while others are not being properly covered. While there are several services in the main cities, and within the RACs, many of them are not accessible to certain profiles and to refugees living in rural areas. Moreover, there are regions like Găgăuzia, or Ocnîța which have limited presence from international or national organizations, despite having a large number of refugees registered. In cities like Chișinău, which has a high concentration of services, people are staying in Sculeanca, Buiucani, Ciocana, Botanica and Bulboaca, far from the places where humanitarian services are located and where they can access assistance.

The third challenge is related to the lack of information regarding available services in the country.



“There is no assistance in our region, we are doing our best, but it is not easy and it is not sustainable.”

KEY FINDINGS

- While some challenges regarding RACs were addressed during the consultations, people have their basic needs covered in the accommodation centres. The most immediate concerns are related to winter, and the dynamics within the space. The pressing need in relation to accommodation concerns the importance of identifying mid-to-long term solutions.
- Connectivity is a barrier for access to education, information, and inclusion into the labour market. The lack of devices and suitable spaces, and not having Wi-Fi or a deficient network, make it difficult for children to attend online classes, to take language lessons, to seek job opportunities, to work remotely or being informed. The latter considering that most information is shared through digital means.
- Participants recognized job seeking is not easy in the country, and there are significant differences in salaries and the type of experience required; however, there was a common agreement in the need to have integration programmes and guidance for refugees to be employed.
- While refugees are grateful to Moldova for their hospitality and unconditional support, unfortunately the participants acknowledged that tensions in the community are rising. There is a general perception of refugees receiving more than Moldovans, in addition to language and cultural differences that strain relations; and the uneven distribution of aid across the country, including limited availability of support outside urban centres.
- Mental health is among the major needs identified, in particular for young adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers, and older persons.



PROTECTION

> Children and youth

Identified needs and challenges

- Youth (12 – 17 years old) is being highly impacted by the displacement, and the changes in their living conditions. There are no safe spaces for them, nor dedicated accommodation or programmes. People fear isolation and the lack of social activities has consequences in their mental health.
- It was mentioned that children are receiving support and assistance, however, there are limited dedicated spaces for recreational activities. There is a perception that more psychosocial wellbeing, and integration spaces and activities are needed. Children are strictly involved in school curriculum activities without activities that promote their development.
- In some locations, actors reported that separated or unaccompanied children are not immediately supported. The process they have to go through when accessing the territory can be complex, with various actors involved and without a clear pathway. Under this circumstances, children do not receive clear information on next steps, which negatively impact their wellbeing and right to participate.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Leisure centre for children and youth for extracurricular activities, psychosocial activities, communication with their peers, among others. In many locations there are identified spaces for this purpose, but they need support to prepare and then activate the space.
- Child friendly spaces in RACs and the vicinity. Both outdoor and indoor spaces should be considered.
- Youth employment programmes, where they can be supported access employment opportunities both online and in person, leadership programmes, promote exchange between peers and youth clubs, sport activities and where they can be properly informed about their opportunities and the situation, including human trafficking prevention.
- The solutions should be inclusive, to promote the exchange between Moldovan and Ukrainian children and adolescents.

PROTECTION

> Older persons

Identified needs and challenges

- There are many services for older persons; however, access to these services is hindered due to mobility restrictions or limited access to information.
- Donduşeni has an orange space dedicated to the elderly. Older persons can socialize, receive medical and psychosocial attention. This kind of spaces were identified by other regions as needed.
- Older persons often struggle to meet their basic needs, and while some of them are interested in seeking additional means to achieve self-reliance, there are no opportunities.
- The cash assistance is one of the incentives for older persons to receive refugees and become hosting families. While there are many successful stories where both parts are benefited by this accommodation model, the elderly can be subject to abuse.



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Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

More spaces for the elderly, peer support networks, targeted inclusion activities and direct outreach to them and financial support.

PROTECTION

> Gender based violence, human trafficking and security

Identified needs and challenges

- High risk of abuse of women and girls in rural areas, as there are no proper vetting processes for many of the jobs and accommodation offers made in RACs, or official websites. In addition, there is the need to commute within the territory, that it is commonly arranged through unregistered transport.
- Authorities need to be provided with capacity building to understand the rights and obligations of refugees in their regions.
- Many Ukrainian men do not have documents and are not eligible for support under the criteria of many humanitarian programmes. Due to limited support, in some areas there has been an increase on the number of Ukrainian men in street situation.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Gender violence prevention through workshops for men.
- Accessible training for volunteers and other relevant actors (e.g. Volunteer Academy, training for police and border authorities) in issues related to GBV, rights and obligations, prevention of human trafficking.
- Sustain and replicate Căușeni's Community coffee meetings. Local and refugee women meet to share their experiences, their practices, and they help each other to better integrate into society. Last time there was a discussion on GBV.

> People with disabilities

Identified needs and challenges

- There is limited availability of specialized services for persons with disabilities, including for children. There is a need to improve access to assistive technology to both PwD and older persons.
- Accessibility remains an issue across several sectors, including accommodation and transport. Reasonable adjustments are needed to ensure PwD are not disadvantaged and marginalized while accessing humanitarian assistance and locally integrating. This situation affects the wellbeing of individuals, including their mental health, and it leads to isolation.
- Heavy burden of caregivers, who in most cases are women.
- Many services for this group that were initially available at the onset of the emergency are now closed. They had an important element of social cohesion, as they also supported host community members.

"We don't need nor want you (humanitarians) to do everything, we want to learn too".

PROTECTION

> Protection and legal aid

Identified needs and challenges

- Uncertainty regarding their legal status and for how long they will be able to stay in the country.
- Lack of clarity on the different protection mechanisms, and the rights and obligations within each of them.
- Legal assistance is available across the territory, and although the service has been qualified as good, some gaps remain.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Training for local authorities, including the BMA, police and border authorities regarding international protection.
- Capacity building for frontliners (humanitarian workers, local NGOs, RAC managers, social workers, the Volunteer Academy, etc.) in a great diversity of topics related to protection, communication with refugees, management and security measures.

Participants said their preferred channels to receive information are: social media, websites and in-person communication.

> Access to information

Identified needs and challenges

- People fleeing from Ukraine do not have up to date information on available services. It is not clear which services are being offered, who can access them, and which organization is responsible. There are also many organizations with similar programmes, which makes it more complicated.
- It is difficult to identify reliable sources.
- Everything is digital and highly centralized, people from the villages, without connectivity or outside RACs have no access to information.
- No information available at the border crossing.
- Older persons and those without connectivity cannot access information.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Amplify the distribution of information, ensuring people fleeing from Ukraine have access to reliable websites and offline resources.
- Consolidation of communications channels, while ensuring site-specific information.
- Information sessions and active in-person outreach to refugees.
- Monthly/Bi-weekly briefs to public authorities and local organizations, so they, as front liners can have reliable information.

PROTECTION

> Social cohesion

Identified needs and challenges

- Aid is concentrated in urban centres, while villages and rural areas with a high concentration of refugees not properly covered.
- The inclusion of the refugees into the local community has been successful, however, tensions are rising as host community members perceive an unfair availability of assistance and support between refugees and their host.
- Some participants reported that there is a lack of understanding by some host community members about the challenges faced by refugees to locally integrate and join the labour market. While refugees do face barriers to work, some communities believe they are not willing to work, increasing tensions.
- The community members have been supporting each other. But discrimination is starting to manifest itself, especially in Russian speaking areas.
- There are concerns regarding transparency on how resources are being allocated to the refugee response.
- Refugees should be involved in local activities, supporting their local integration.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Community centres to concentrate the available aid for both refugees and the hosting families, and that serves as a communal space for gatherings and social events. Most locations have identified spaces. Such initiatives must be established in close collaboration and consultation with both refugee and host communities.
- Launch an advocacy campaign in Moldova to promote peaceful coexistence between the local population and refugees. It should include information on who is a refugee, their rights, and obligations; as well as activities that fight stereotypes and promote social cohesion like cooking, dancing and theatre performances to engage in cultural exchange; or films, live FAQs and other inclusive events that entertain and inform the whole community.



"I'm extremely grateful to Moldova for the hospitality, and we wish that we could help more".

PROTECTION

> Roma

“Illiterate Roma are being kept in the dark.”

Identified needs and challenges

- There are many challenges to access information, such as language (Romani), illiteracy, trust and channels that are not accessible to members of the Roma community.
- Legal assistance needs to be tailored to their specific needs such as documentation issuance, statelessness status, birth certificates, rental agreements, among others. They are aware that the lack of documents increases vulnerability.
- Cooking and providing for their families, make them feel comfortable and staying together is a top priority, as this is a key element of their community life.
- Participants perceive a different negative attitude towards them when accessing humanitarian assistance, which is likely further marginalizing them due to discriminatory practices.
- Follow up treatments and medicines are too expensive and hard to acquire, while there are perceived barriers when accessing health services. The psychological support received at the RAC in Chişinău was praised.
- Participants highlighted discriminatory practices in schools against Roma children, which affects willingness of children and their families to access education, and which also cause low performance and eventually lead to drop-out. Some community members reported not seeing education as a priority for their children, which may also impact access to education.
- Consulted participants highlighted their willingness to access employment opportunities, but the pathway to seek a job is unclear; some do not have the documents to do so, and they do not know their rights and obligations as employees. Not having an income reduces their opportunities to look for independent housing and create a comfortable situation for their families.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Monthly information session, as well as communication tools in Romani and audio format. Strengthen the role and benefits of Roma mediators across the response by building capacity and including them in coordination and relevant spaces.
- Learning friendly spaces where children and adults can learn to read and write, support those who need to catch up on a particular language, provide language lessons and digital education, as well as cultural exchange. In addition to school supplies, there is a need to support access to electronic devices for online learning and communication.
- Training and guidance for job seeking, linked to transitional housing programmes.

BASIC NEEDS

> Accommodation and protection-sensitive site support, transportation, food security, WASH and core relief items.

Identified needs and challenges

- Many RACs do not comply with protection standards, while others are non-registered RACs, limiting the assistance received by them.
- Concerns about the stability of the RACs and the living conditions, considering the insufficiency of services within some RACs, the differences of standards across them, the upcoming winter season, the lack of rules and clear processes both for the refugees and the managers, the lack of home appliances and utensils, and staff working for the RACs with poor labour conditions. In addition, it is believed that the RACs are not promoting people to be self-sufficient.
- Cooking and providing food for their families, is a top priority for refugees. The meal schedules at the RACs do not make allowances for their activities; for example, breakfast is served at 9 a.m. but children go to school at 7 a.m.
- Cities are experiencing a significant increase of refuse, mainly from the disposable dishes and utensils used to serve meals at the RACs, and they have a limited waste management capacity.
- Participants reported that in some areas there is neither available housing for renting nor RACs; the only accommodation option possible is through host families. Families have managed to coexist, but they know it is not sustainable in the long term.
- With the increase of prices, refugee and host communities have reported challenges to meet their basic needs.
- In rural settings, with limited services, refugees need to commute to access them. Transportation within regions is expensive and the routes are limited. This is a challenge, for example, during registration and verification for cash assistance, especially for large families.

“There is no incentive to live outside of the RAC, why to worry about the bills when I have everything for free”.

BASIC NEEDS

➤ Accommodation and protection-sensitive site support, transportation, food security, WASH and core relief items.



- Access to water is limited in most rural areas, consequently hygiene is a challenge as dwellings are reported to not have proper WASH facilities.
- Participants reported lack of clarity regarding access to core relief items. There are gaps on information on where to access them, and there is uneven distribution among RACs and between rural and urban areas.
- While gaps on coverage have been reported, there is duplication on distribution of core relief items in certain areas and RACs.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Transitional housing programme.
- Improvement of existing housing capacity in communities for social housing purposes.
- Strengthen information sharing on available public transportation.
- Cash assistance is the preferred modality of assistance, and should be preferred over in-kind distribution.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Identified needs and challenges

- While access to primary health care services is available, access to secondary or tertiary care remains a challenge. Moreover, access to specific treatments and medicines are not affordable.
- Differences on vaccination schemes between Ukraine and Moldova has been reported as challenge, especially when it comes to requirements for accessing education in Moldova.
- Participants highlighted the importance on providing information for refugees on how to ensure children access health services, especially during the winter season.
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) was mentioned as a priority. Participants reported limited availability of specialized MHPSS services in location where consultations were conducted, and challenges to access treatments for mental diseases.
- Medical treatments are more expensive in Moldova than Ukraine, as a consequence many families decide to be separated.
- Health services are usually provided for everyone, without distinction. However, some refugees reported feeling discriminated against in the process. Moreover, participants reported that in some cases doctors are a bit reluctant to give any references to the refugees for further treatment, as they are not officially registered under the supervision of that specific doctor.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- First-aid training for humanitarian workers, and anyone interested in the locality, particularly young mothers.
- Local hospitals should consider creating a special programme to hire Ukrainian medical staff living in the area.

EDUCATION



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Identified needs and challenges

- There is a perceived lack of places supporting online learning, which is among the main interests of refugees. Due to the uncertainty and auditing status of the students, many are following the Ukrainian educational system or both. The latter implies that costs are doubled for the family, and the development of children who study all day without recreational time.
- Not enough kindergartens, and daycare facilities.

- Basic education is provided to anyone interested in joining, and many schools have received support for their maintenance. Refugees mentioned that the children enjoy going to school and their integration has been smooth.
- Some people mentioned that online education is not a solution, and that refugee children should attend school and socialize with Moldovan children. While others suggest that it is better to have schools following the Ukrainian system
- Connectivity and insufficient equipment are barriers for children enrolled in online education.
- Children living outside the urban centres have difficulty accessing the schools located in the main cities.
- More attention should be brought to children for their educational development. Children are strictly involved in school curriculum activities without complementary activities that promote their integral development.

Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Dedicated spaces where refugee children can follow the Ukrainian educational system, socialize, and receive support.
- “School Hubs for Ukrainians”, a proposal from Cahul to have spaces within the schools for refugees who are attending online classes. The spaces promote socialization and interaction between peers, and prevent isolation and the development of antisocial behaviours.
- Support refugee children enrollment and inclusion on national education system.
- Assistance with school supplies, electronic devices and connectivity.
- Language classes.

LIVELIHOODS AND INCLUSION

Identified needs and challenges

- Access to the labour market is challenging due to the instability of the situation, but also due to limited opportunities in some regions. Most refugees want to work, but they may not have documents, or face additional challenges due to the lack of a predictable and stable legal status. Low salaries, cultural difference and lack of employment programmes were also mentioned as barriers.
- People from Ukraine are professionals with high experience in many fields, and they can actively contribute with the economies and the development of the communities where they leave, and of Moldova at large.
- Refugees should have more integration opportunities by means of employment and by participating in other activities from the community; but they lack of information or guidance to do so.
- Language is a topic discussed in every consultation, while some maintain that Russian is a common language that can be used by both nationalities, others believe learning Romanian should be a priority due to respect to Moldova's hospitality and the advantages vis a vis local integration. Furthermore many refugees from Ukraine refuse to communicate in Russian.



Proposed solutions and suggestions by the community

- Strengthen the labour department at municipalities, so they can offer training and support in relation to employment for refugees.
- Support in the integration process, that can provide generic guidance and case by case support. The programme could address language classes, technical skills, legal aid and entrepreneurship and seed capital. This could be open to anyone interested, and both Moldovans and Ukrainians could benefit from each other.
- Aligned with the previous point, refugees could be further considered for positions in the context of the refugee response.
- Language classes.