

# Stale information, fresh constraints

Despite sharing a language with responders, Ukrainians who fled to Moldova must navigate complex, generic and unreliable information to answer critical questions

## Summary: what you absolutely need to know

Responding organizations and language service providers (LSPs) can take advantage of Russian, which almost all Moldovans use as a second language, to support people fleeing the war in Ukraine. But gaps remain for service users needing to communicate in Ukrainian and marginalized languages. Even when content is in the right language, people struggle to verify information to help them make decisions about their stay in Moldova.

- **People in Moldova fleeing the war in Ukraine overall face fewer language barriers than in other host countries.** Most of the roughly 700,000 Ukrainians who crossed into Moldova after February 2022 are first- or second-language Russian speakers, who fled to Moldova precisely because Russian is widely spoken there. As a result, responding organizations have needed less professional language support than in Poland and Romania, the other countries included in this study.
- **Responding organizations are largely unequipped to support communication in other languages.** Organizations recognize the need to cater for speakers of other languages, but lack capacity to do so. Substantial communication gaps remain, especially for members of the Roma community<sup>1</sup>, who are largely reliant on verbal communication and have few opportunities to verify information.
- **Written information presents challenges regardless of a person's first language.** Most information sources are outdated and unreliable. Specific information is either lacking, buried in a mass of irrelevant detail, or expressed in terms that are hard to understand. Instead, people trust in-person communication and human hotline operators to provide the specific information they need.
- **Language service providers are largely working in isolation and at personal cost.** Existing professional language support capacity could help overcome many communication challenges - as long as LSPs are adequately supported. LSPs are largely unfamiliar with the structures and terminology of international humanitarian action. Most are providing translation and interpreting support either for

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<sup>1</sup> Some participants from Roma communities expressed a preference for the term cygany ("gypsies") rather than "Roma", although "gypsies" is often used in a derogatory way by members of other communities. The stigmatization of the Roma community is deeply rooted in the words both they and others use about them. For consistency, we use the term "Roma" throughout this report unless quoting an interviewee directly.

free or at discounted rates, and those working with traumatized individuals or accounts of traumatic events rarely receive support or training to manage the psychological impact. Meanwhile, smaller civil society organizations lack access to professional language support. Around a third of responders say they try to get by without interpreters when they don't speak the language of a service user from Ukraine.

## Recommendations to responding organizations

Better integration of language services into the response, building on the efforts of individual organizations, and a more user-centered information strategy could help address the problems faced on all sides. This will become especially urgent if the war in Ukraine forces more people to flee to Moldova. These recommendations can help responding organizations and authorities to better meet the needs of those who have already fled, and prepare to meet the needs of new arrivals:

- **Apply plain-language principles as standard in all communication**, Use common words in place of technical terminology, keep sentences short and direct, focus on what the audience needs to know to the exclusion of non-essential information, and structure content to make the key messages clear.
- **Plan and budget for language support** in a wider range of languages.
- **Provide a better basis for effective language services through training and support**: for language professionals this includes guidance on the humanitarian system and structures, and for both them and informal translators and interpreters it includes terminology support. Dedicating and briefing a staff member to lead engagement with LSPs would help make efficient use of language services.
- **Collect information on language preferences** as a basis for better provision.
- **Develop a more user-centered information strategy** across the response, with a mix of in-person, hotline and online channels providing verified, regularly updated information better tailored to people's needs and in the relevant languages.
- **Recognize the often painful sensitivities around the use of Russian and Ukrainian**, by ensuring that at least basic communication happens in Ukrainian to acknowledge people's national identity, offering service users an environment where they can communicate in the language they prefer, and sharing information on the languages they cater for, so people know where to go and other organizations can refer them appropriately.

Language and communication are critical to effective humanitarian action in the Ukraine response, as in other emergencies. Understanding the communication needs and challenges of people fleeing the war and those supporting them is the first step to finding solutions. Overcoming the associated language barriers calls for an understanding of the capacity and constraints of existing language support.

To establish a clearer picture of communication gaps and capacity, CLEAR Global heard from people fleeing the war, responding organizations, and language service providers in Moldova, Poland and Romania. For the Moldova component of the research, we conducted three focus groups with 22 affected people in Chişinău, and surveyed 44 representatives of civil society and humanitarian organizations, and 22 language service providers.

The difficulties facing people fleeing Ukraine exist despite considerable resources being mobilized specifically to support them. People who have fled war, persecution and poverty in other countries for whom this provision is not available will often face still greater difficulty getting the support and information they need.

### **A note on “refugees”**

Some research participants and colleagues from Ukraine have told us they and others affected by the war object to the term “refugee”. They feel it does not describe their situation, which they perceive as a temporary absence from their normal place of residence. As a result, they are uncomfortable, even offended, when this label is applied to them.

In this report, and our wider communication on the humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine, we aim to avoid the term “refugee”. Instead we use more general expressions like a “person fleeing the war” (переселенець / переселенка з України in Ukrainian, переселенец / переселенка из Украины in Russian).

This also challenges us - as CLEAR Global and as a sector - to find out how people affected by emergencies in other contexts want to be referred to.

# A shared language eases communication, but Russian is not the only relevant language

## Widespread capacity in Russian makes services accessible for most

Focus group participants were largely first-language Russian speakers, coming mainly from the southern oblasts of Ukraine where Russian is dominant, especially in cities. Around a third arrived recently and three participants said they had returned to Moldova after finding the language barriers in other countries (Poland and Germany) too hard to navigate. Many chose Moldova because they could speak Russian there. Unlike in the other countries where we conducted this research, all participants said they would feel more comfortable if the moderator spoke Russian. Participants themselves mostly spoke Russian, sometimes switching to the distinctive Russian-Ukrainian mix known as Surzhyk<sup>2</sup>, or using occasional phrases in Ukrainian.

Participants who didn't speak Russian as their first language were still fluent Russian speakers. These were members of minority groups for whom Russian has traditionally been the language of interethnic communication. Many participants were from the Odesa area and emphasized the city's multiethnic culture, home to several dozen nationalities that have long communicated with each other in Russian. They stressed that speaking Russian doesn't make them less Ukrainian, and emphasized that the Odesa dialect is different from the Russian spoken in Russia. :

*People are very friendly in Odesa, very respectful of each other. And to understand each other we have somehow worked out that we all speak Russian.*

**- Focus group participant, Chişinău**

Because almost all Moldovans speak at least some Russian, most of our largely Russian-speaking focus group participants said they didn't face particular language barriers to making themselves understood or accessing services. They also told us a written translation from Ukrainian to Romanian was only required for official documents. In most other situations, a translation from Russian to Romanian was sufficient.

This matched the experience of responding organizations we surveyed: over 90% say Russian is the main language of people using their services, and 98% say their staff and volunteers speak good enough Russian to communicate with them.

<sup>2</sup> *Surzhyk* commonly refers to a mix of Ukrainian and Russian, but is also used to describe any mix of two or more languages. In different areas of Ukraine the language combination differs.

**Figure 1: Responding organizations have capacity in some key languages, but struggle to meet communication needs in others** (sub-sample of 43 responders indicating language capacity)

Responders' assessment of language needs and capacity (% of responses)	Romanian	Ukrainian	Russian	English	Other
Main working language	67%	0%	14%	14%	5% <sup>3</sup>
Other languages staff can use	74%	26%	98%	77%	19%, inc. Czech, Gagauz, Greek, Slovak
Main language of affected population	0%	9%	91%	0%	0%
Other languages of affected population	35%	81%	58%	42%	40% (inc. Romani (21%) and Armenian (7%))
Most challenging language for responders	2%	50%	7%	5%	21% (19% Romani)

(Due to rounding, some totals may not equal 100%. For certain questions, organizations could select multiple answers.)

As a result, where services are provided by Moldovans, participants said communication was not a problem. This was the case even for medical care, where a combination of technical terminology and emotional distress can present challenges.

*I had an operation: there were no problems. Everyone knows Russian. They also know Ukrainian. They come in, [speak] in Moldovan at first, and I say: may I speak Russian? And they start speaking Russian.*

**- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău**

Professional language service providers also had capacity to support in Russian. English to Russian is the main language pair language professionals surveyed report working in, with Russian to English and Romanian to Russian the next most common combination.

<sup>3</sup> One organization answered that they work equally in English, Russian and Romanian, and one answered Moldovan.

## Despite this ease of communication, Russian can be source of tension

Speaking Russian was not without its sensitivity in a context where the language is associated with the other side in the war in Ukraine - an issue service providers need to be aware of. Some participants said they had tried to switch to using Ukrainian at least for some communication, rather than be seen as a supporter of the Russian side in the war. But others voiced resentment at Russia's "appropriation" of the Russian language, and the idea that it was unpatriotic to use it:

*I am not ashamed to speak Russian because I feel it is our language, a language of Ukraine.*

**- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău**

The use of Russian can also be a source of tension with host community members. Some focus group members described Moldovans refusing to answer them in Russian.

*I asked how to get off, where to get off - and [a trolleybus passenger] told me in Moldovan. Even the conductor didn't want to talk to me. I almost cried. [...] I told her: please tell me in Russian, but she answered in Moldovan again.*

**- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău**

Participants observed that the dialect of Russian spoken in southern Ukraine is similar to that spoken in Moldova, making it hard to tell where a person is from. They felt that as a result, Moldovans who reacted negatively to their use of Russian probably assumed they were Moldovans. The warmth with which people fleeing the war have been welcomed is accompanied by widespread resistance to Russian as a language of Moldova. As a result, participants said that as soon as Moldovans know they are from Ukraine, they willingly switch to Russian.

*We asked for the address [...]. [The man] understood that we were from Ukraine. He started speaking Moldovan, [but then] I said: "Glory to Ukraine - Glory to our heroes." And he started speaking in Russian and told us everything [we needed to know].*

**- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău**

## Language support is available to improve capacity in Ukrainian

Only nine percent of responding organizations surveyed said their service users' main language was Ukrainian. Yet 50% said Ukrainian was the most challenging language for them to work in, and only 26% had any internal staff capacity to communicate with service users in Ukrainian. While participants in Moldova expressed fewer sensitivities around using Russian than in Romania and Poland, some are switching to using Ukrainian in public. For some this is a challenge: most participants received their secondary education in Soviet times and are not used to using Ukrainian in their daily life. Taking steps to close the capacity gap in Ukrainian will help organizations effectively respond to the sensitivities around using Russian and support those who are switching to Ukrainian. This need may become more prominent if more people are forced to flee the war in Ukraine.

*I think in Russian, translate it into Ukrainian and speak, but it's difficult. We are not used to speaking Ukrainian.*

**- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău**

Professional language support in Ukrainian is already relevant for wider humanitarian communication in Moldova. Forty-five percent of language service providers surveyed do most of their work for the Ukraine response from English into Ukrainian. Thirty-six percent work mainly from Romanian into Ukrainian, and 9% from Ukrainian into Romanian.

## Though responders are aware of communication needs, services rarely cater for marginalized languages

The accounts of both service providers and service users suggest people fleeing to Moldova are more linguistically diverse than those fleeing to Poland and Romania. Responding organizations report that their service users speak a range of minority and marginalized languages, including Romani, Armenian, Bulgarian, Hebrew and Gagauz. A substantial number of focus group participants were also from ethnic minorities; some spoke Romani, Turkish, Azeri and Bulgarian at home, others German and English.

Responding organizations surveyed offer a range of services for which accurate and appropriate communication is essential. The top three categories of service provided by survey respondents' organizations were psychosocial and psychological support, social integration, and legal services. Though Russian is an important language of communication for many, some marginalized language speakers may prefer to access certain services in their own language or Ukrainian. Other members of minority groups may not be able to speak a second language at all.

Yet the range of languages responders communicate in, or hire language support for, is narrow. Organizations' staff and volunteers have the capacity to communicate in Russian (98%), English (77%) and Romanian (74%). Language service providers surveyed provide translation and interpreting mainly between English and either Russian, Ukrainian or Romanian. The information flow is largely from English into the other languages and from Russian into English.

After Ukrainian, responders find Romani (19%) the most challenging language to work with in the Ukraine response, yet none had Romani language capacity among their staff or volunteers. Some also named Armenian, Greek, German and Polish as challenging. No responder mentioned either needing or having communication capacity in any sign language, and just one language service company provided sign language interpreting support. This suggests information support to non-Russian speakers, and listening to speakers of other languages who aren't proficient in Russian, English or Romanian, is getting less attention.

Language gaps in services are only visible if information is available on the languages needed and catered for: a coordination function at sector and intersector level. This information is largely unavailable for Moldova, although REACH's 2022 multisector needs assessment provides data on respondents' main language. The child protection referral pathway also includes the languages catered for in service mapping, but most services don't list their language availability. Systematic data collection on language preferences would offer a basis for planning support for marginalized languages.

## Romani language support is available but little used

Most Romani-speaking participants spoke several languages, including Ukrainian, Russian, and sometimes even Romanian. This allows them to communicate with responders and local people. Yet they still face challenges accessing written communication. Since Romani is a mostly spoken language, Romani-speaking participants preferred to receive written information in Russian or Ukrainian. Those who can speak Romanian still find it hard to read. They are familiar with the Cyrillic alphabet, but after independence Moldova adopted the Latin alphabet.

*The Romanian here is not really Moldovan, but more [the Romanian of Romania]: there are some words we don't understand. We understand the language, but not the alphabet: I can't read a single letter.*

- Roma focus group participant (male), Chişinău

Though our Roma focus group participants all knew at least two languages, [other sources](#) indicate that some Romani speakers cannot use a second language well enough to communicate with responders or access services. Two LSPs surveyed said they mainly worked from Romani to English, and one from English to Romani. Integrating this capacity into services would help responding organizations cater for Roma who are not comfortable or proficient in a second language.

## Despite a common language, Ukrainians face barriers accessing credible, relevant information

Despite the widespread use of Russian, focus group participants described accessing information as a major challenge. They were typically looking for information on one of three topics:

- **legal issues**, including how to legalize their stay in Moldova, what documents are needed to move to another country, and how to get married, register the birth of a child or get duplicates of lost documents
- **humanitarian aid in Moldova** - a growing information need over time as the volume of assistance has fallen, despite continuing need
- **options for moving to other countries**, including the availability of assistance, accommodation and other services and related legal and travel issues

Yet participants say written information on these topics is typically out of date, too generic to be of use, and often incorrect. Some documents also use complex language that makes them hard to understand, particularly official communications and material from humanitarian and civil society organizations.

*[It's] very often stale information: things change.*

- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău



Many participants criticized print materials as the worst communication channel: they're easy to lose, contain a lot of unnecessary information, and any useful information quickly becomes irrelevant. As in the other countries studied, television is not a popular information source.

Participants do search for information online: this was how they found out about where to go when they left Ukraine, and it remains their main channel for news about events back home. They mostly Google their questions directly to find answers, but we heard a lot of skepticism about how reliable online information is.

*The thing is that the internet is a very unreliable source. [If] you just Google some news, there are a lot of untruths, you need to double-check, you need [to look on] official websites.*

- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău

## People trust in-person information sources most

Participants in all three focus groups in Moldova said they feel much more comfortable talking to someone in person to find out about opportunities or to get answers to questions. Some stressed that in-person communication allows them to find out specific information for their situation that they struggle to get from general materials. They also trust information received by word of mouth because they find the speaker's personal experience more convincing than anonymous text found on the internet.

As a result, research participants in Moldova rely mainly on personal communication with others from Ukraine to get information. Perhaps because participants here were already closely connected with humanitarian organizations, volunteers and staff were also an important information source. This personal communication was especially important when people first arrived at the border, where most received their first information about onward travel, along with a SIM card, food and accommodation from a volunteer. Since almost all volunteers and humanitarian workers in Moldova are fluent in Russian, and some speak Ukrainian, research participants had no problems communicating with them. In fact some were still in touch with individual volunteers and sometimes call them for information.

*In the beginning, when you are helpless, when you don't know anything at all, volunteers are a great help.*

- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău

When they reached Chişinău, the staff of civil society and humanitarian organizations became a key information source, particularly for practical advice and contact details to access medical assistance and help with onward travel. Again language is not generally a barrier when communicating with Moldovan staff, and when international staff visit the accommodation centers they typically bring professional interpreters for support.

Hotlines are another means of verbal communication and source of answers to specific questions, and are much more popular among research participants in Moldova than in Poland and Romania. Typically new arrivals to Moldova will call the hotline and be put in touch with the services and individuals who can help them.

*We call the hotline - the green line - and they give us the address. We call, they ask what kind of help do you need, after a while you get a call and they say there are places here on such and such a street, come along.*

**- Focus group participant (female), Chişinău**

## Romani speakers face particular difficulties accessing the information they need

Romani speakers face far greater challenges accessing information. Though many are fluent in Ukrainian or Russian and Romanian, many are unable to read, or read confidently. Those who do read prefer written information in a second language - they don't typically read content on rights, entitlements and procedures in their own language.

Difficulties digesting written information makes them reliant on verbal communication, particularly from humanitarian staff visiting the RACs where they stay. It also significantly complicates making decisions about their stay in Moldova. And since they have difficulty checking what they are told against other sources, or checking their recall against a written reference, they are easily misinformed - sometimes with grave consequences.

### **Some Romani speakers pay a high price for poor information access**

One Roma participant had come to Moldova with his son's partner and children but left his son behind in Ukraine to join the army. This was based on the mistaken belief that under Ukrainian law men with three or more children could avoid mobilization into the army only if the couple were married.

In discussion with the focus group moderator, the participant was horrified to learn that no such condition applied, and that through lack of accurate information his son had lost out on his right to accompany his family to safety abroad.

*My son has five children. The state hasn't given me [any] help to bring them up [...] Now they are drafting him into the army, and why I don't know. I don't know why my son has to go to war and give his life when he has five children.*

**- Roma focus group participant (male), Chişinău**

Participants in both an all-Roma and a mixed focus group said they would prefer to have someone come regularly to answer questions. They said this service could be in either Russian or Ukrainian, but the information should cover the full range of services available to them in Moldova, and to those planning to continue their journey.

*For example, if someone was to come once a week, collect information at the weekend and share it with everyone so they know, that would be much easier and better than written information.*

**- Focus group participant (male), Chişinău**

## Different understandings of aid risk confusion

Focus group participants expressed difficulty understanding humanitarian terminology and the humanitarian aid system. They tended to associate free assistance with state aid, not international donors or humanitarian organizations. This view, especially marked among Roma participants, may stem from the worldview of the Soviet era.

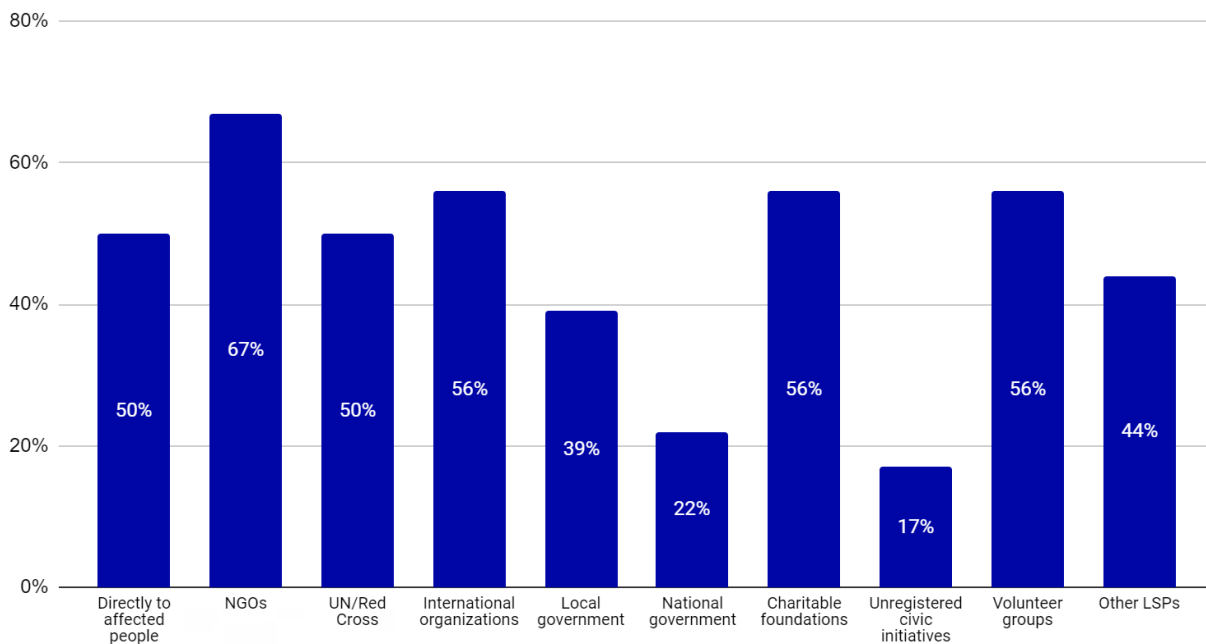
As a result, several participants found the humanitarian aid system confusing - in particular, who is a “donor”, where the funds come from, and what humanitarian organizations do in general. Some respondents were unsure of the distinction between volunteers and commercial service providers. Addressing these misunderstandings would help service users and local responding organizations who may be less familiar with the international aid system to communicate clearly about what assistance is available.

## Language services are already part of the response, but need support to be more effective

Though responders face few fundamental capacity gaps communicating with affected people, professional language service providers (LSPs) are present across the response, as in Romania and Poland. Translation is the most common service LSPs provide (94%), but over 40% indicated providing further support such as interpreting at border crossings or in court, accompanying individuals to the doctor, or helping them fill out forms.

**Figure 2: LSPs in Moldova are largely providing language support to NGOs, international organizations, and voluntary groups** (sub-sample of 18 LSPs who specified which entities they work with)

**Entities LSPs are providing with language support in the Ukraine response in Moldova**



LSPs surveyed work with formal and informal entities, and many also assist individuals directly. Yet while 68% of responding organizations surveyed say they have access to professional translators and interpreters if they need them, smaller organizations have much lower overall access. All but one of the smallest organizations, with fewer than 10 employees, said they lack access to professional language services altogether.

## Despite lower language barriers, responders still see a place for professional language support

Responders who answered our survey mostly represented smaller civil society organizations and NGOs with fewer than 30 employees, providing assistance in refugee accommodation centers. Despite offering communication-intensive services such as psychosocial support, respondents overall reported fewer language support needs than those surveyed in Poland and Romania. Only two respondents felt language barriers make communication with people who have fled the war in Ukraine more difficult.

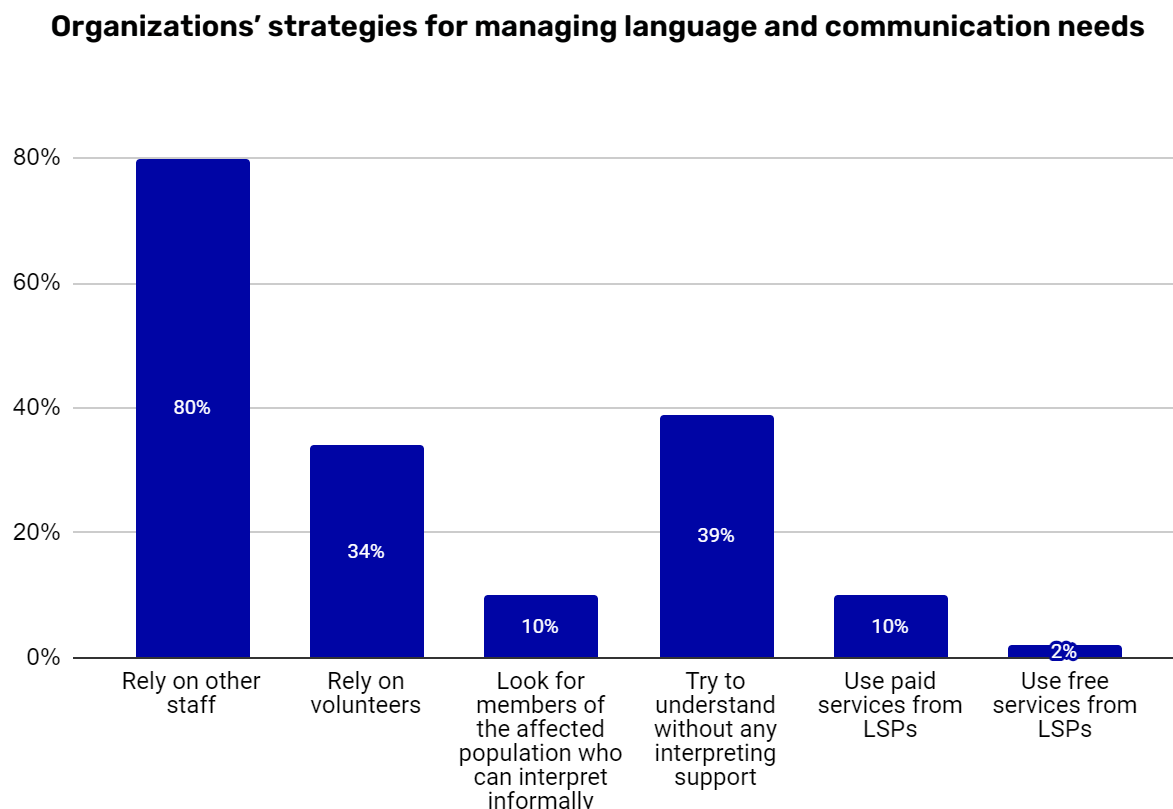
Nonetheless, many responding organizations do occasionally need professional language support, and 63% had called on professional translators, interpreters, and providers of certification and other legal services. For most, these needs occur several times a month or less; just one respondent reported needing such support every day. This represents markedly less demand for language support than in the other countries studied. Yet when it is needed, organizations feel that professional support makes a difference: 55% strongly agree or agree that access to professional language services could significantly improve the effectiveness of their work with affected people from Ukraine.

Eighty percent of organizations surveyed rely on staff to communicate with and translate and interpret for service users, and 34% on volunteers. Twenty-six percent of respondents reported asking staff to translate or interpret although that is not part of their job description; however, in all but one case the individuals concerned received training for their role. Less reassuringly, 39% of respondents said they try to understand service users without interpreting support, and one described using online translation tools like Google Translate. Others said they relied on the closeness of Ukrainian to Russian:

*We don't know [Ukrainian], but we understand it when it is spoken because we know Russian.*

**- Staff member of a responding organization**

**Figure 3: Responding organizations' strategies for managing communication needs mostly rely on staff members' individual language capacity** (sub-sample of 41 responding organizations which specified strategies)



Though 77% of responders surveyed were confident their organizations' staff and volunteers can meet their translation and interpreting needs, some saw a place for professional language support in other important daily tasks. These include public communication (20%) and communicating with authorities (16%), partner organizations (14%) and donors (7%).

## Linguists often work at personal and financial cost without support to adapt to humanitarian contexts

Our survey of LSPs suggests many are motivated by a desire to help those fleeing the war in Ukraine. More than half offer their services for free or at discounted rates, and 33% had also donated money. Over half of respondents were based in Moldova or Romania, with a further 14% inside Ukraine.

Many respondents were freelance or volunteer linguists with no previous experience of translating or interpreting for people affected by conflict and in need of humanitarian assistance. The majority said their work brings them into contact with survivors of violence and other traumatic events (56%), or with the accounts of such events (72%).

*There were difficulties in the first periods of communication with refugees, when they were in a state of shock and unable to respond to questions and engage in conversation. We had to reassure them, offer them tea and make them feel comfortable to talk further.*

**- Volunteer linguist, Chişinău**

Yet they receive very little support to manage this type of work. Just two out of 18 LSPs surveyed who have provided services since February 2022 said specific training was available to help them deal with the psychological impact, and only three had access to post-trauma counseling. Unsurprisingly, 44% identified professional burnout as an area where they most need support; one volunteer described having to take breaks from work to recover. Other support needs included training or guidance on communicating with traumatized individuals, secondary trauma, and context sensitivity. More than half said they could do more if language services were better funded.

The individuals and companies providing language services are doing so largely in isolation. Only three respondents exchange information with other organizations involved in the response, and several would find it helpful to have some forum for discussing language services to the Ukraine response. They also felt they could be more effective in their work if other responders understood language services better, and if only trained specialists dealt with language and translation.

## **Humanitarian terminology and structures present communication challenges for linguists and service users**

Professional linguists surveyed were largely unfamiliar with humanitarian terminology, which was the most common issue (61%) for LSPs who indicated specific challenges working in a humanitarian context. Just two language service companies have extensive experience in specialist humanitarian terminology, while some others have learned informally. None of the individual linguists surveyed had received specific training on humanitarian action or terminology. LSPs said a better understanding of humanitarian terminology and structures and of operating in armed conflict would help them work more effectively.

One responding organization also noted that humanitarian terminology and documentation present challenges because very little has been translated into Ukrainian and Russian before now. They regretted the lack of capacity in Moldova to translate resources into those languages to support the response. Supporting LSPs to adapt to a humanitarian context would help responders address this gap.

## How CLEAR Global can help

CLEAR Global's mission is to help people get vital information and be heard, whatever language they speak. We help our partner organizations to listen to and communicate effectively with the communities they serve. We translate messages and documents into local languages, support audio translations and pictorial information, train staff and volunteers, and advise on two-way communication. We also work with partners to field test and revise materials to improve comprehension and impact. This work is informed by research, language mapping and assessments of target populations' communication needs. We also develop language technology solutions for community engagement.

Existing resources to support effective two-way communication between people affected by the war in Ukraine and those aiming to support them are available on our website:

- How to work with interpreters and translators
- Practical tips for community interpreters
- Plain language tipsheet
- Interactive language map of Ukraine
- Language data platform
- Training to support effective humanitarian communication (topics include humanitarian interpreting, communication in emergencies, and plain language)

For more information visit our [website](#) or contact us at [info@clearglobal.org](mailto:info@clearglobal.org).

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## Annex: Methodology

This study was conducted in October 2022 with a total sample of 88 participants. We used a mixed methods approach including semi-structured focus group discussions in Chişinău with Ukrainians, and two online surveys with responders and language service providers.

A total of 22 Ukrainians took part in focus group discussions. The sampling design included a few basic principles to ensure fairly equitable distribution based on demographics and experience. One focus group was composed entirely of Romani speakers. Given the significant restrictions on men's departure from Ukraine, the majority of participants across all focus groups (82%) were women. Participants were predominantly from the Odesa, Kherson and Mykolaiv Oblasts near the Moldovan border, and 50% had lived in major cities like Odesa and Mykolaiv before the war. In Moldova, participants were staying mostly in temporary or permanent refugee accommodation centers.

We sent an online survey in Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, and English to responders to assess language challenges and the use of and demand for language services. We received 44 valid answers from members of volunteer organizations, national and international NGOs, UN agencies, and government bodies. We sent a second online survey to language service providers in Moldova, receiving 22 valid answers. Most respondents from this sample were working as freelancers.

The findings of the study take into account the diverse experiences of people who fled from different parts of Ukraine, and of linguists and responders from different types of organization. However, they cannot be considered representative but rather provide insights into the main language challenges faced by participants. In particular, the focus groups in Moldova did not include any people living with disabilities or sign language users. Another limitation of this study is the urban sample. This reflects challenges faced by Ukrainians staying in Chişinău, but these might be different from those experienced by Ukrainians in rural areas.