

# OLDER REFUGEES BRIEFING NOTE

Disability & Age Task Force  
Refugee Coordination Forum Moldova

The **Disability & Age Task Force (DATF)** was established in March 2022 with the support of the Refugee Coordination Forum and under the **Protection Working Group**. The Task Force is composed of humanitarian actors including Government authorities, United Nations Agencies, International and National NGOs, and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), providing specific services for people with disabilities and older people. Its objective is to improve the inclusion of older persons and persons with disabilities in the Ukrainian Refugee Response in the Republic of Moldova, ensuring access to mainstream services as well as guaranteeing the availability of specific services to respond to needs.

## BACKGROUND

Almost three years have passed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, forcing millions of Ukrainians to flee the country in search of safety. Moldova in its turn is the country that has received **the largest numbers of refugees per capita** of the population of **2,4 million**. As of end December 2024, about 135,000 refugees from Ukraine still remained sheltered in Moldova, with about 76,000 having received asylum, temporary protection, or residence status

in Moldova to enable their continued legal stay in the country and access to services. The refugees in Moldova are primarily arriving from the Southern and Southwestern parts of Ukraine, including from the city of Odessa.

The demographic composition of those crossing the border is made up primarily of women travelling with dependents (infants, children and older persons), with a large proportion of them becoming single caregivers as a consequence of family separation forced by the conflict.





In terms of **family composition**, **58% are women and girls**, **42% men and boys**, while **6% are people with disabilities** and **17% are older people**. Among older people around 50% are persons with disabilities which exacerbate the risks that this category of refugees faces.

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

From the **Socio-Economic Insights Survey**<sup>1</sup> (SEIS) conducted by the IMPACT Initiative in August 2024, the following **four main areas** were identified as significantly impacting **older refugees** compared to other groups:



**Access to Information:** Older refugees face significant challenges in accessing information compared to other refugee groups. Many lack the necessary devices to connect online, and the available information is often not presented in formats that accommodate their needs.



**Healthcare Access:** Access to healthcare and to medicines emerged as urgent priorities for older refugees, with a significantly higher proportion identifying these needs as compared to younger refugee groups.



**Support Channels:** Refugees aged 75 and above are less likely to have access to secure and private channels for seeking support, or reporting concerns, including sensitive community issues (only 75% reported access compared to an average of 95% of other age groups).




**Social Assistance:** Seventy percent (70%) of refugees aged 75 and above reported the need to have better access to social assistance services to improve their socio-economic situation in Moldova as compared to the other age groups which is less than 50%.

# KEY RESULTS 2024

Since the beginning of the refugee response humanitarian actors have supported older refugees through different programs and activities, as reported to the Refugee Coordination Forum. Among the key results in 2024, from January to September the organizations involved in the response reported the following results:



Individuals receiving cash assistance (MPCA, Winter Cash, GBV response)	12.748	6.425	926
Individuals receiving medical support (procurement of health commodities, medical referral, financial support for medical services)	121	61	15
Individuals participating in MHPSS services and activities (including level 4 of IASC pyramid)	1.225	210	2
Persons with Specific Needs provided with targeted protection assistance	671	228	103
Individuals receiving hygiene kits, including first aid kits	986	540	162
Individuals provided with individual legal assistance	548	209	
 <b>Total older people supported in 2024</b>	<b>17.153</b>	<b>7.994</b>	<b>1.208</b>



# GAPS AND NEEDS



**Healthcare Access:** Older refugees face barriers to secondary healthcare due to physical accessibility issues, high costs, and inconsistent application of Temporary Protection (TP) status rights by service providers.



**Housing Challenges:** Closure of Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs) creates uncertainty for older refugees, especially those with limited finances or mobility which need essential services which are near RACs.



**Financial Instability:** Rising living costs leave older refugees financially insecure, relying on pensions, savings, or aid, often leading to reduced spending on food or healthcare.



**Employment Barriers:** Language, ageism, and health issues prevent older refugees from working, while cash assistance for rent often excludes those unable to find employment.



**Social Isolation:** Separation from family, limited mobility, and lack of tailored social activities exacerbate isolation among older refugees, highlighting a need for age-appropriate community initiatives.



**Information Access:** Limited digital skills and lack of in-person information sharing, hinder older refugees' access to essential information, updates, and registration for benefits like TP.



**Data Disaggregation and Targeted Assistance:** Insufficient data on the specific needs of older refugees hinders targeted support by humanitarian organizations.

# RECOMANDATIONS

For the **Government of Moldova:**

- Improve communication to all refugees, including older ones, about rights and services under TP status.
- Continue improving accessibility and adaptation for people with limited mobility.

For the **Humanitarian Community:**

- Improve disaggregated data collection and analysis to better target support for vulnerable groups, including older persons.
- Continue to promote psychosocial support services to reduce isolation and improve mental health.
- Review cash-for-rent criteria to better include older persons and secure funding to address their particular rental vulnerabilities.
- Expand access to assistive products tailored to older refugees' specific needs.

# STORIES FROM REFUGEES

*"I had heard about this sport, but I didn't know what Nordic walking was until now. After today's workout, I think it's great for keeping fit, especially for older people. It involves the whole body, from legs to hands."*

Tatiana, a 61-year-old refugee from Odessa, arrived in Sîngerei, Moldova, in March 2023, leaving behind her husband and son. *"I feel safe here; we're supported in every way, and it feels like home,"* she told us.

On the day we met her, Tatiana, along with other refugees and volunteers at the Safe Community Space, practised Nordic walking with a professional trainer. The group bonded quickly and decided to make it a daily activity with the walking sticks provided. In Sîngerei, where refugees stay with local families, they rarely have opportunities to connect. Activities like these help them socialise, feel supported, and become part of the community. Tatiana believes that through these gatherings, they feel useful, valued, and integrated into local life.



## CONTACTS

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