



SEEKING SAFETY: ROMA REFUGEES IN MOLDOVA

Challenges and humanitarian needs



OXFAM

The war in Ukraine has displaced millions of people to neighbouring countries – but some groups who already face poverty and discrimination in society, including Roma people, are facing particular challenges accessing the safety they need.

This paper outlines the results of Oxfam’s rapid assessment of Roma refugees in Moldova in July 2022, highlighting the challenges that Roma refugees face when trying to access assistance, and some key humanitarian needs of these refugees. It aims to help amplify the voice of Roma refugees and to inform a humanitarian response – from the Moldovan government, United Nations (UN) agencies, and non-government organizations (NGOs) – that is more inclusive of Roma refugees, and more responsive to their particular needs.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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Cover photo: The courtyard of a rural Refugee Accommodation Centre (RAC) in Moldova, which hosts almost exclusively Roma refugees. Credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

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SUMMARY

In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, concerns have been raised across the region that displaced Roma people are facing differential treatment or are not able to access the assistance they need. In Moldova, as in other countries, it has been observed that Roma refugees are facing particular challenges, including unequal access to accommodation and other reception services. As a result, Roma people are experiencing greater humanitarian needs than non-Roma people.

The Moldovan government and partnering humanitarian agencies have made efforts to address these concerns, however the voice of the Roma community has not been sufficiently reflected in the conversation. In light of this – and in order to improve the humanitarian response by Oxfam, its partners, the Moldovan government, and the wider humanitarian community – in July 2022 Oxfam undertook a rapid assessment among Roma refugee communities to get a better understanding of their experiences, perceptions and priorities.

The main challenges to accessing humanitarian assistance for Roma refugees in Moldova were identified by interviewees as:

- Segregation and discrimination in housing services. Refugees and Roma activists we spoke to told us of a segregated approach to housing Roma refugees, with Roma people being denied humanitarian assistance at certain Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) and instead directed to other RACs of lower quality. Roma refugees also reported suffering discrimination by workers at RACs and having trouble finding private accommodation, with landlords often unwilling to rent to them.
- Lack of information, communication channels and complaints mechanisms. Roma people were not informed of their rights or how to access services and humanitarian assistance. Roma refugees and experts also reported a lack of consultation in the design of relevant reception policies, leading Roma refugees to feel their voices were going unheard.
- Lack of documentation. Many Roma people from Ukraine lack documentation, which creates a range of challenges for Roma refugees, including movement restrictions and difficulties accessing humanitarian services. The cost of obtaining documentation is often prohibitive for Roma families, and many lack the information about how they can obtain, and why they need, the required documents.

Discussions with Roma refugees also highlighted key humanitarian needs which need to be urgently addressed for communities of Roma refugees in Moldova:

- Adequate shelter, including winterization and improved WASH facilities. The RACs and some private accommodation available to Roma refugees which Oxfam visited were in urgent need of improvements, particularly winterization and improved water and sanitation (WASH) facilities.
- Assistance with costs and meeting basic needs. Roma refugees reported that the quality and quantity of basic items provided to them is not sufficient, and together with limited income opportunities, this means that many Roma refugees are struggling to cover their basic needs, such as food, clothing, medicines, and hygiene items.
- Access to services in practice: healthcare and education. While Moldova has taken positive steps to include Ukrainian refugees in healthcare and education services,

many Roma refugees were not sufficiently accessing these services in practice. Barriers to access include lack of information and outreach, lack of documentation, and transport costs.

- Recognizing and addressing gender specific needs. The rapid assessment revealed particular needs and concerns for Roma men and women, reinforcing the need for a gender sensitive approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address the urgent needs of Roma refugees in the short term, the Moldovan government together with other humanitarian actors, should:

- Provide improved and adequate accommodation for Roma refugees. This requires making improvements to RACs hosting Roma refugees, including winterization and improved WASH facilities, as well as facilitating a consultative discussion on what the best housing options are for individual Roma people and communities. This discussion needs to be based on the real needs and preferences of Roma refugees and not assumptions or stereotypes about Roma people.
- Support access to diversified and quality dietary choices, and required basic non-food items. Roma refugees need to be supported to meet their basic needs, including food, clothing, and medicines, in a sustainable and empowering way. This may involve facilitating greater and more accessible cash assistance, and/or providing more support for income-generating opportunities for Roma refugees.
- Improve Roma refugees' access to healthcare services in practice. This could include tackling logistical barriers, like transport costs, and providing improved outreach to Roma people.
- Support initiatives for adequate educational opportunities for children and adolescents. This could involve a range of solutions including supporting the enrolment of Roma children in Moldovan school systems, providing equipment for adolescents to follow online classes from Ukraine, working with non-government organizations (NGOs) to provide classes in relevant language(s), or other solutions.

In order to build a better response in the long term, all humanitarian actors should take the following steps to improve their approach to Roma refugees:

- Ensure Roma people are consulted and involved in decision making to address their needs. Roma communities and experts need to be more included in decision-making processes that affect their interests. Consultative groups could be established by different actors to provide advice on Roma issues.
- Support Roma representation at RACs and improve communications, access to information, and complaints mechanisms. Roma refugees need to have access to information in languages they understand, and communications channels and complaints mechanisms at ground level, to ensure their concerns are heard.
- Promote a better understanding of the current situation of Roma refugees concerning documentation. To remove current obstacles to obtaining documentation it is important to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the situation and different families' needs, remove the different administrative and financial difficulties, and work on awareness raising with the refugee Roma community concerning the importance of acquiring personal documents.

- Fight prejudice and promote trust building and understanding between Roma people and non-Roma people in both refugee and host populations. It is important to fight discrimination and misconceptions at every level of the response and within not only the government but also humanitarian agencies and NGOs. This must include the promotion of knowledge building on Roma refugees through collection of disaggregated data and accurate information and promoting trust and understanding between and amongst Roma refugees, their hosts and humanitarian providers.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONCERNS FOR ROMA REFUGEES IN MOLDOVA AND THE REGION

After eight years of armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, the Russian Federation military offensive on 24 February 2022 led to a full-scale war in the country, having a devastating impact on civilians. Nearly a third of Ukrainians – 14 million people – have been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of the war, with over 7.5 million of them seeking safety in other countries in Europe.¹

By October 2022, roughly 640,000 people have fled over the border to Moldova, with over 90,000 of them remaining in the country – a significant number of people to be hosted by a small country of only 2.6 million people.² Sixty-five percent of people fleeing from Ukraine to Moldova have been women, raising specific protection concerns.

In response to the Ukraine crisis, Oxfam has teamed up with local organisations in affected countries, including Moldova, to support people fleeing the war. In our response, we aim to pay special attention to people who face particular challenges accessing the protection and humanitarian assistance they need. As always, we find that the groups in society that already face poverty and discrimination are also among the most vulnerable within the refugee community. These groups can include minority ethnic groups, unaccompanied children, people with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ refugees, among others.

MARGINALISATION OF ROMA PEOPLE IN THE REGION: BEFORE AND SINCE THE CRISIS

One marginalised group among refugees from Ukraine are people of Roma ethnicity. Roma people live throughout the region, and there are many Roma sub-groups who have distinct languages, culture and social networks. As a minority ethnic group, they have faced discrimination for centuries – including persecution during the Holocaust – and issues of exclusion, discrimination and violence towards Roma people have been reported in many countries across Europe,³ including Ukraine.⁴ Roma people also often experience high levels of statelessness, educational exclusion, and poverty.⁵ The World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples records that ‘the Roma population as a whole are believed to be the most marginalized minority group in [Ukraine]’.⁶

Reliable data on Roma people is minimal, and Roma people have often been undercounted, however estimates suggest that between 200,000 and 400,000 Roma people were living in Ukraine before the war began, with the most numerous Roma communities in the Zakarpattia, Odesa and Kharkiv regions.⁷ It has been estimated that as many as 100,000 Roma people may have been forced to flee Ukraine since the escalation of the war.⁸ The total number of Roma refugees in Moldova is unclear and most of the information available is not disaggregated by ethnicity.

In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, concerns have been raised across the region that displaced Roma people have faced differential treatment or are not able to access the assistance they need.⁹ They may be facing differential treatment due to a range of factors including prejudice, as well as specific needs related to their distinct language and socio-cultural systems, beliefs and traditions.

REPORTS OF A SEGREGATED RESPONSE: ROMA REFUGEES IN MOLDOVA

In Moldova, as in other countries, Oxfam staff and local organisations that Oxfam partners with have observed challenges for Roma refugees, which are leading to inequality in accessing reception services. Reports by Human Rights Watch¹⁰ and the Moldovan Ombudsperson,¹¹ also highlighted cases of a segregated response to Roma refugees in Moldova, documenting that Roma people were being directed to different reception centres, which often offered lower standards of service.

Efforts to address these concerns have been made since these issues were first raised – however the voice of the Roma community themselves, highlighting their priority concerns and specific needs at ground level, has not been sufficiently reflected in the conversation. In light of this – and in order to improve the humanitarian response by Oxfam, its partners, the Moldovan government, and the wider humanitarian community – in July 2022 Oxfam undertook a rapid assessment among Roma refugee communities to get a better understanding of their experiences, perceptions and priorities.

Although every national context has specific issues, displaced Roma communities throughout Europe are likely to face similar challenges. As such, a secondary objective of this assessment is to contribute to a wider pool of knowledge on displaced Roma communities' concerns and their recommendations on how to address them. This can contribute to enhancing a more adequate response by humanitarian organisations and authorities that aim to protect and support them.

1.2 A SNAPSHOT OF THE REFUGEE RESPONSE IN MOLDOVA

The Moldovan government, together with partners including the United Nations (UN), international non-government organizations (INGOs) and local NGOs, has responded to the influx of people coming from the Ukraine to support safe and dignified reception of refugees. Relevant government ministries involved in the response include the Ministry of Internal affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Research, Moldova Border Police, and local authorities.

A range of services for refugees are being provided; for instance, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in coordination with the Moldovan government, has a cash assistance program for refugees of roughly 120 USD per month.¹² Other services include legal assistance, psychosocial support, information and connectivity services and transport.¹³ Unfortunately, there is limited information available as to how well these services are reaching Roma refugees.

ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS FOR REFUGEES FROM UKRAINE

Shelter options for refugees in Moldova include private accommodation hosted by volunteers, government refugee accommodation centres (RACs), or privately rented accommodation. The number of RACs in Moldova has fluctuated depending on demand: as of September 2022, there were 65 RACs operating in Moldova (down from a peak of almost 100 in March), with a capacity of 5,083 available places, of which 2,781 were occupied.¹⁴ The average length of stay in the RACs for most people (64%) is over three months.¹⁵ However, in August it was estimated that roughly 65% of refugees in Moldova were staying in hosted or rented private accommodation, in contrast to only 28% in transit/reception centres and 4% in RACs.¹⁶

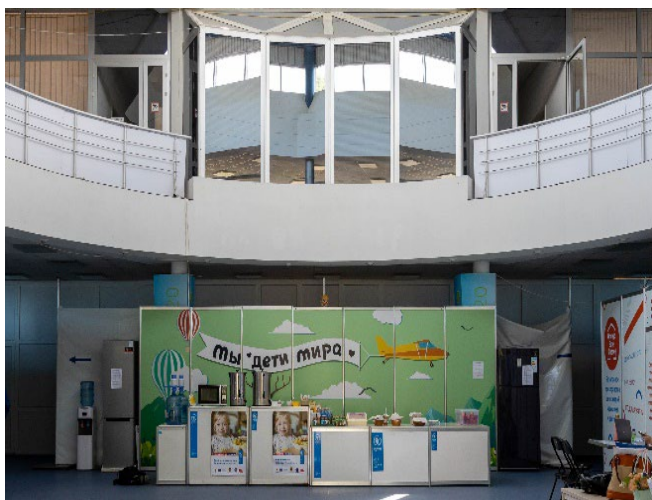
To provide a snapshot of accommodation options available to Roma refugees in Moldova, Oxfam visited two RACs hosting only or predominantly Roma refugees as part of the rapid assessment in July:

- A RAC located in a previously abandoned university building in Chişinău. The number of people living in the RAC at the time of visit was 107 (36 women, 28 men and 43 children). The majority of people housed in the RAC were Roma (77), while other residents included a mix of non-Roma Ukrainians (20), Azerbaijani (9), Lebanese (1), and Russian (1).
- A RAC located in a rural area in the northwest of Moldova. At this RAC, roughly 60 refugees were accommodated at an abandoned school building.

By way of comparison, the rapid assessment team also informally visited MoldExpo, Moldova's largest RAC, located in Chişinău. This RAC offers Ukrainian refugees information and support for their most urgent needs, however accommodates few Roma families.

There is limited information about the many Roma refugees who are living in privately-owned or family accommodation in Moldova. Oxfam visited two locations where Roma refugees were living privately:

- A house in a small village rented by a family of six.
- A summer holiday camp roughly half an hour outside of Chişinău, privately rented by a community of refugee families. At the time of visiting, the RAC hosted 30 families, each with 4–7 children.



MoldExpo RAC main hall



Chişinău RAC exterior



Rural RAC exterior



Privately rented summer camp. Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

IMPROVING THE RESPONSE FOR ROMA REFUGEES: STEPS SO FAR

There have been positive steps to specifically address the challenges facing Roma refugees in the country. The Government of Moldova has set up a Joint Crisis Management Centre with UNHCR and, since 1 June 2002, a Roma community mediator has been included as part of this Crisis Centre to improve the emergency response to Roma people. A Roma Task Force co-chaired by UNHCR and *Coalition Roma Voices* was also established to coordinate the humanitarian response and address existing concerns of Roma refugees in Moldova. The Roma Task Force meets twice a month, with the participation of different local, national and international organizations, as well as the UN and the Government of Moldova.

The Roma experts Oxfam spoke to welcomed these positive steps, however there are concerns that the involvement of Roma representatives remains very surface level and that discussions need to lead to more concrete actions.

2. CONTEXT: ROMA REFUGEES IN MOLDOVA AND THEIR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The Roma people Oxfam spoke to were mostly women travelling with children and elderly family members, as most men between 18 and 60 are required to stay in Ukraine to assist with military efforts – although some men had come to Moldova accompanying their wives and children. Families we spoke to were of between 4 and 15 people (with between 1 and 7 children per family). We spoke to people ranging from 14 to 70 years old.

Most interviewees came from the Odesa and Kherson regions in Ukraine, and we spoke to people from three different Roma sub-groups, two of which were identified (Serbi and Kotlyari). They arrived in Moldova by both public and private transportation, through both formal and informal border crossing points.

Roma families reported fleeing from Ukraine to Moldova in order to seek safety from the conflict. They described leaving their homes to escape ‘bombs, and rockets, and shooting’. One family told us they had spent several months living in bomb shelters before finally making the decision to leave. Some Roma refugees mentioned that they had also needed to leave Ukraine to get the medical treatment they needed, which had become unavailable in Ukraine since the war escalated.

“We didn’t have time to take any memories. I didn’t take anything. I just wanted to save my kids.”

Roma woman, private summer camp

The future plans of Roma refugees we spoke to were diverse. Refugees coming to Moldova from Ukraine can currently live and work in the country under the conditions of a state of emergency that has been in place since 24 February 2022. This arrangement is temporary in nature and the state of emergency has been extended several times since it began in increments of 60 days,¹⁷ meaning that there is significant uncertainty for refugees looking to stay in the country.

To receive legal status in the longer term, refugees can claim asylum or apply to be recognized as stateless. According to local Oxfam partner *Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor* (CDA), the Roma refugees they work with largely want to be able to stay legally in the country but were wary or unsure of applying for asylum as they wish to ultimately return to Ukraine and do not wish to be attached to a fixed place.

For many of the Roma refugee families we interviewed, Moldova’s proximity to Ukraine was important as it allowed them to go back to visit their families or homes. Many Roma refugee women said they do not have specific plans for the future and want to return to Ukraine when they are able. Some women still have their husbands, children and families there, and want to be reunited – either to stay in Ukraine or try to travel elsewhere as a family.

“Of course, here it is safe, there are no bombs and nobody is shooting.

But my family is there, in Ukraine. I want to go back to my house, to see my husband, my kids, and go to Europe.”

Roma woman, rural RAC

For those who do want to return home, it is unclear when that will be a safe option – and what will be left when they get there. Fighting continues, and homes and infrastructure across much of Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed.

Others shared their intentions to try to move on from Moldova to other European countries – particularly Germany. They expressed their hope that they would find greater refugee assistance, more employment opportunities and better medical care there.

3. MAIN CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

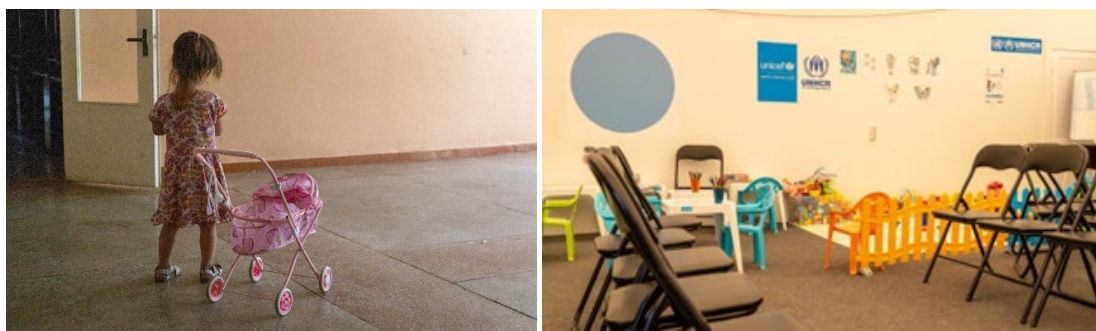
3.1 SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING SERVICES

Roma refugees shared their frustration regarding events of discrimination and segregation they have been exposed to. They shared personal stories of being denied humanitarian assistance, especially when arriving at the MoldExpo RAC, and of being transferred to accommodation for Roma people only.

“When we arrived at different [refugee accommodation] centres they just said no place is available. By phone they give the greenlight, saying there is room, but when we arrive they refuse us.”

MoldExpo is a large RAC in Chişinău – accommodating at one point more than 1,200 refugees, and still housing roughly 350 refugees by the time of Oxfam’s interviews in July – but there were few Roma families accommodated there. According to the discussions with Roma people and organizations working with them, Roma families arriving at MoldExpo are turned away, and are instead redirected to other refugee accommodation centres. The practice of refusing Roma refugees accommodation at MoldExpo has also been reported by Human Rights Watch.¹⁸

Roma women’s focus group, rural RAC



Roma refugees expressed concerns about the lack of safe spaces for children to play at the RACs for Roma refugees, as the only available spaces were dusty outdoor courtyards or the sparse foyers indoors (below top). On the other hand, at MoldExpo UN agencies and NGOs provide activities for children and children’s play areas.

Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

These reports of segregation are particularly concerning as the conditions we observed at the RACs housing Roma people were significantly worse than at MoldExpo, where housing and services seem to be of relatively high quality. The RACs visited by Oxfam that accommodated Roma people were as a whole crowded, unsafe and unhealthy, and there was little to no presence of NGO or government services (e.g. activities for children, information points, legal assistance). By contrast, MoldExpo was clean and well-

organized, with most organizations assisting Ukrainian refugees represented and offering essential services within the building.

Roma people also shared their frustration due to what they felt to be institutional racism in the RACs. Roma women reported being treated with disrespect and feeling humiliated in interactions with staff at the RACs. At one RAC, women told us that they felt they were not being provided with necessary items – sheets, pillows, washing powder – in sufficient quality or quantity, despite more or better-quality items being available in stock rooms. Some said that they felt uncomfortable asking for items due to the attitudes of staff, who would respond negatively (e.g. ‘why are you asking? You shouldn’t ask.’). One woman reported that a RAC worker complains when he hears them speak in Romany, saying ‘don’t talk in your language’.

Discrimination may also be a barrier for Roma families seeking private rental accommodation. Roma interviewees and key informants told us that as Roma people they faced discrimination trying to find places to rent, claiming that some landlords wouldn’t consider them as tenants. One woman in private accommodation told us that her family only managed to secure their current house through a personal contact.

3.2 LACK OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

A constant issue across different needs areas for the Roma refugees we spoke to was a lack of communication channels, limited information about their rights and how to get humanitarian assistance, and an absence of mechanisms by which they could make complaints about problems or abuse. In particular, interviewees said they had no experience of being consulted about their needs or participating in decisions affecting them.

LACK OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Roma people mentioned that often they were not informed of their rights or how to access services and humanitarian assistance. Unlike at MoldExpo, there is minimal presence of informational services at the RACs where Roma refugees were staying.

It should also be noted that Roma people have their own distinct languages – which can differ between Roma subgroups – and not all Roma refugees know Ukrainian, Russian or Romanian, which are the languages generally used when information is shared with refugees. This language barrier can further restrict their access to the information they need.

Most interviewees said they got most information from face-to-face communications, particularly through contacting key Roma focal points or Roma organizations. Roma women also mentioned that they access information through the internet. Mobile telephones have become an essential item for families, despite many individuals having low levels of literacy.

THE NEED FOR CONSULTATION, FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

At the RACs visited, the Roma refugees reported feeling like their voices were going unheard. Many were afraid to speak about their concerns and their dissatisfaction with the assistance provided. For instance, one Roma woman told us that when trying to raise a complaint with security personnel she was not given an avenue to resolve the complaint but instead told, 'You know what, if you do not like it, you just take your stuff and you are free to go.' This leaves those refugees who have had negative or humiliating interactions with staff feeling like they are without a means of redress.

"We do not have any platform, where we can call or write our complaints."

Roma women's focus group, Chişinău RAC

This kind of environment, where Roma people don't feel like they are being consulted or listened to, exacerbates tensions and reinforces a lack of trust between Roma and non-Roma people.

During the focus group discussions, one suggestion to help improve this situation was for RACs to engage a Roma focal point, who could speak Romany dialect(s) and would be available for residents to ask questions, highlight their needs or discuss their complaints.

3.3 LACK OF DOCUMENTATION

Roma refugees Oxfam spoke to mentioned lack of identity documents – either their own, or of a family member – as a barrier to their plans, whether they planned to try to move on to other countries or stay in Moldova.

Some estimates suggest that 10-20% of Roma people in Ukraine lack identity documents and/or are at risk of statelessness.¹⁹ One key informant Oxfam spoke to put the estimate of Roma people in Moldova without documents at 30-40%, compared to 10% of non-Roma Ukrainian refugees. Local Oxfam partner CDA also noted that many Roma individuals had only old documents, from the time of the Soviet Union, or no documents at all. There can be a range of reasons why Roma people are undocumented, with key informants noting that historically Roma people have been disinclined to seek documents due to fears of persecution or an unwillingness to be linked to a specific place.

Moldova allows undocumented people to enter the country from Ukraine, an important step in allowing people to access safety. However, lack of documentation is creating barriers for Roma refugees trying to access certain services in Moldova (including cash assistance and healthcare) or wishing to move on to other European countries (where documents are required for entry).

Roma refugees and key informants both raised the point that the process of acquiring documentation is very lengthy, complicated, and costly for Roma families. They shared their experiences and frustration concerning administrative and financial obstacles that are impeding them being issued identification documents in Moldova, especially passports. Costs are increased for those living far from services, as they need to pay for transportation to and from the relevant offices. Many Roma refugees also lack information

about what is required for the process and what the consequences would be of applying for certain documents or legal status. Additionally, the uncertainty about the future concerning the conflict makes it difficult for Roma refugees to decide whether or not they should acquire new documents, from either Moldovan or Ukrainian officials.



'My son is 4 years old in August. He doesn't even have a birth certificate. He just has one document from the hospital from when I gave birth to him.' Ana* tells us. She says she's been in touch with the Ukrainian embassy and has been told she can get a birth certificate, but it's expensive. 'I need money for that.'

*Names in this report have been changed to protect the identities of interviewees.
Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

4. HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

4.1 ADEQUATE SHELTER, INCLUDING WINTERIZATION AND IMPROVED WASH FACILITIES

In interviews and focus group discussions, Roma refugees told us about their concerns with the quality of their accommodations in the RACs – concerns reinforced by the conditions observed by Oxfam staff in site visits. Shelters were often inadequate to meet refugees’ basic needs, unsafe, or unsuitable for long-term housing (especially in winter).



Damaged windows at a rural RAC



Outdoor sanitation block at a Chişinău RAC
Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

Concerns raised by interviewees around the adequacy of shelter in RACs and private accommodations available include:

- **Heating:** During the focus group discussions, Roma refugees were very concerned about the heating of the buildings in preparation for the upcoming winter, as they are not adapted to cold weather. Women commented that they did not have winter clothing for their children. At the rural RAC, windows were cracked and damaged. People living in a privately rented summer camp were particularly concerned with the winter approaching, as they did not have facilities or resources to keep their rooms warm, and the only kitchen facilities are outdoors.
- **Crowding and lack of privacy:** At the RACs visited, Roma refugees shared small rooms with other family members – at one RAC, interviewees were staying in rooms housing 10–16 people with beds in a dormitory style. While at the summer camp individual families had their own rooms, they still lacked adequate space and furniture – one woman told us she and her husband were sleeping on the floor so that their children could sleep in the only bed.
- **Water and sanitation facilities:** The shelters often had limited showers, drinking water sources, and hot water. Because Roma refugees have been accommodated in buildings not intended as long-term accommodation, like school and university buildings, sanitation facilities have often been placed outside of the RAC buildings. This arrangement makes it hard for disabled people to access showers and toilets, and some parents expressed concerns over how they would shower their children in the wintertime using these outdoor blocks. At the rural RAC we visited, there were only a limited number of washing machines – 2 between 60 people – which was a concern particularly for Roma women, who had few clothes and so needed to wash often.
- **Safety and child-friendly spaces:** Roma women we spoke to were worried about their security and the safety of the children. At the Chişinău RAC, for instance, women were concerned about their children playing outside, as the gates to the RAC are open and strangers often pass by outside, and there is a nearby freeway. At the rural RAC, the only place for children to play is a dusty courtyard.
- **Hostility and tensions:** According to Roma women interviewed, the atmosphere in the RACs is hostile. Many reported feeling that they were treated without respect by the RACs workers, and that there was a feeling of tension between staff and residents. In both RACs, interviewees also reported being stressed by living in close proximity to or without sufficient privacy from refugees of different origins – including Roma refugees from different Roma sub-groups, as well as Russians and third-country nationals – due to differing customs or distrust.

Ilia, 70, is sharing a tiny room at a RAC with her 48-year-old daughter, who is blind, and her two teenage granddaughters, one of whom uses a wheelchair.

There is barely room to walk between the furniture, let alone manoeuvre a wheelchair. Ilia and her family have been in the RAC here for three months.

The only shower block is outside, down a set of steps and across a dusty yard. 'The girl doesn't have access to a toilet,' Ilia tells us. If she needs the bathroom she has to ask a man to carry her out so she can access the washing facilities. 'I don't have access for the wheelchair with my granddaughter, even to go to the shower.'

Renting private spaces is an accommodation option for some Roma refugees which may alleviate some of the issues seen in the RACs. Several refugees we spoke to at the RACs reported that they would prefer the facilitation of private accommodation in houses to live separately. A key informant also expressed their view that private accommodation would likely be a better option for many Roma refugees. Oxfam observed that at the summer camp we visited, where families lived in their own privately rented cabins, shared

community spaces with other Roma families, and had greater autonomy (e.g. to cook their own meals), there were less tension than at the RACs.

However, renting privately is out of reach for many Roma refugees. Rent can be prohibitively expensive for refugees living on cash assistance, and a significant concern for the refugees in private accommodation – as well as for local Moldovans – is the rising cost of utilities like gas and electricity. On top of this, Roma refugees report discrimination by many landlords, saying they will not consider Roma people as tenants.

Roma activists also highlighted to Oxfam that preferences about accommodation vary amongst Roma refugees, with differences emerging between Roma sub-groups as well as individuals. They cautioned against making assumptions about what housing is most appropriate for all Roma people, instead noting that different kinds of accommodation – e.g. facilitation of renting private houses, spaces for communal living with other Roma refugees, or accommodation integrated with non-Roma Ukrainian refugees – will be appropriate depending on the circumstances and the wishes of individual refugees.



Irina lives in a small house she has rented with five other family members. She says she's happy they found somewhere to rent in Moldova, but she's concerned they won't be able to stay. With rising energy prices increasing living costs she's worried that they might not be able to afford this house much longer.

Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

4.2 ASSISTANCE WITH COSTS AND MEETING BASIC NEEDS

Roma families Oxfam spoke to were mostly relying on humanitarian assistance, including cash assistance, as well as their own savings to cover their expenses. But the humanitarian assistance provided at RACs and privately rented accommodation was not sufficient to meet basic needs, and given this – together with limited income opportunities – many Roma refugees are struggling to afford necessities and are

concerned about economic security.

- For participants living in privately-owned spaces, the highest expenses were rent and food. Many were also very concerned about the rising prices of electricity and gas.
- For those living in free accommodation, the highest expenses were on food and transportation (public or private).
- Some women were also sending cash to support family members in Ukraine.

Roma refugees Oxfam spoke to highlighted some of their primary concerns and biggest expenses:

FOOD

Access to quality and varied food was a key concern mentioned during discussions Oxfam had with Roma refugees. While residents were able to cook for themselves at the privately rented summer camp and in private accommodation, at the RACs people rely on pre-made food delivered three times a day. The NGOs implementing the food delivery projects hire local companies to provide the meals which include a main meal for the day. The system of delivering food means that the residents are mostly dependent on the food provided to them and have only limited agency over their food choices.

Focus group discussions and interviews revealed frustration with the lack of quality, quantity and diversity of provided food. Interviewees mentioned that portions were small, that there was only a limited offering of fruit and vegetables, and that the food provided was often not suited to their traditions (e.g. interviewees traditionally would eat more animal protein for breakfast, while at the RACs breakfasts are usually carbohydrate-heavy foods). Most of the Roma women interviewed were particularly concerned about the quality of food regarding their children, mentioning that children want to eat other types of food.

"I have to buy everything: clothes, medicine, even food because the food here is awful."

Roma woman, Chişinău RAC

The meal delivery schedule was also a source of frustration, as residents reported at some RACs that meals were delivered at inconvenient or irregular times – with, for instance, lunch often not arriving until 3pm or 4pm. There are also concerns about acquiring specialized or baby foods. Roma women reported that support for special food needs is very limited: one mother told us that her she was not provided a kind of milk appropriate for her allergic baby and had to buy it from her own budget.



Lunch provided at a Chişinău RAC (above left) and snacks provided at a rural RAC (above right). At this rural RAC, one hot meal a day is delivered, and for the other two meals, cold food like croissants or sandwiches are provided. However, residents are stressed by the quality of the food and their inability to cook for themselves.
Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

ESSENTIAL NON-FOOD ITEMS

Like many refugees from Ukraine, many of the Roma people we spoke to fled to Moldova with little more than what they could carry. As a result, they are in need of support for a range of items essential for living, including clothes, bedding, medicines, hygiene and cleaning products, and items for babies and children.

While some items are provided at the RACs, not everything the families need is supplied – and residents feel that even what is provided leaves gaps that they need to fill from their own budgets. Some NGOs also provide items to people staying at the RACs, but interviewees raised concerns that this is not systematic.



At an empty summer camp Laura is sharing a cabin with her husband and four children. There is only one bed, made of wooden pallets with a few thin sheets on top. When asked whether she brought anything special with her from home Laura points to her baby's bottle. It was the only thing she grabbed as she and her family fled from their home near Odesa in April.

The family has few possessions. 'We were very scared. We just ran. I didn't take anything. I left in what I was wearing,' Laura says.

All of Laura's money goes on essentials. She has to pay for a taxi every time they need groceries or medicine. She and the other women here say they need baby food, formula, nappies, and hygiene supplies like basic soap and shampoo. They also need mattresses, pillows, towels, and bed linen.

In the corner there is a pile of neatly folded blankets. She explains that she and her husband use them to sleep on the floor, so that the children can have the bed.

Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

Interviewees raised concerns about the following items:

- **Clothing:** Families we spoke often arrived with insufficient clothing and are ill-equipped for the changing seasons. However, as most of the family budget goes to food or shelter, there is limited or no extra budget for buying new clothes. Roma women also reported that clothing donations received from Western European countries could not always be used, as they have different dressing customs. Many also prefer to make the clothing themselves. Some organizations, including Oxfam in Moldova, have provided families with shoes, underwear, and children’s clothing, but it is still limited.
- **Hygiene items:** Roma women refugees complained about the availability of hygiene items, especially for personal use and for washing their clothes. In focus groups, women mentioned the need to have better access to personal products like shampoo, soap, and sanitary pads, as well as cleaning products like washing powder and detergent. When speaking about their needs, they also mentioned a lack of trust in the people working in the RACs who are responsible for providing them with hygienic products. They felt that they had been provided only very limited quantities of items like cleaning products, and did not know why the staff had controlled the consumption of these products so much.
- **Medicines:** At the RAC in Chişinău, Roma women told us that there was a medicine room available with basic medicines (ibuprofen, paracetamol), but when they asked for other medicines that were not available there, including prescription medicines, they were told ‘just go and buy it’. One resident at the rural RAC we visited showed us that her infant grandson was covered in red marks from insect bites. She asked for insect repellent from RAC staff, she says, but ‘they say they don’t have it. So I have to buy it.’ Many Roma refugees we spoke to said that the need to buy their own medicines put a significant strain on their budget, or meant they had to go without. One interviewee told us that she needed medicine for her son but could not afford it. A visiting doctor, seeing her need, bought the medicine for the Roma woman’s son out of her own pocket.
- **Items for children and babies:** Roma women at the RACs also talked about needing to buy items for children and babies, like diapers, shoes and clothes, creams, strollers, and toys.

An experienced mother of three young children, Mirela, who is eight months pregnant, knows she is lacking essential equipment for a newborn.

‘I have nothing for the hospital, I have nothing for the baby when he arrives. ... I just have a few things which I took from home. I don’t have anything like clothes or shoes for the baby.’

She says she has asked people at the accommodation centre for help – she needs baby clothes, food for her one-year-old, a stroller – but she has been told she must buy everything she needs for the baby herself.

She is also nervous about what to do when the baby arrives – no one has reached out to her about medical care. The nearest hospital is half an hour away and she is concerned about whether she will need to pay for medical treatment. ‘I’ve had no information from the hospital about what I have to do.’

TRANSPORT

Most of the people interviewed pay for their own transportation costs, whether for public transport or private transport like taxis. They prioritize paying for transportation when they need to buy groceries, arrange their documentation or go to medical appointments.

The problem of transport costs was particularly acute at the privately rented summer

camp, which is cut off from shops, schools and doctors, and lacks access to public transport. The families staying there need to share the costs of taking a taxi to the supermarket.

Transport costs can play into other issues that the Roma refugees experience, like lack of documentation – as they have to pay for transport to and from government offices during the process of acquiring identity documents – and difficulties finding employment.



Refugees at a summer camp share a taxi to travel to get groceries, as their camp is isolated and lacks access to public transport.

Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

4.3 ACCESS TO SERVICES IN PRACTICE: HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATION

Moldova has taken the positive step of allowing access to services like healthcare and education for refugees fleeing Ukraine, however for the Roma refugees we spoke to, this has not always translated into access in practice. For effective access to services, Roma refugees do not only need to have access in theory but need to be informed about their rights and options and be assisted in overcoming logistical barriers to access in practice.

HEALTHCARE

In May 2022, Moldova announced that Ukrainian citizens and their families would have access to primary and emergency healthcare (with some restrictions) in the country. Measures since then have also included Ukrainian refugee children in the Single Compulsory Health Insurance Program, which allows them to access medical services for free.

However, while these measures allow access to hospitals or doctors, not all services are free, and there is limited access to specialized care, particularly paediatric care, as well as proactive care like health check-ups and outreach to newborn babies and pregnant women. There is no information concerning the availability of psychosocial and mental health support.

After the war started it became impossible for Natalia, 62, to get the treatment she needs in Ukraine. She left home to find medical help elsewhere.

“Six months ago, I was diagnosed with cancer. In Ukraine they say I need an operation, but here in Moldova I’m afraid to do it. So I want to go to Germany.”

In addition, these measures do not necessarily cover the many Roma people who lack documentation. Many Roma refugees living further away from services (e.g. in rural or semi-rural areas), in accommodations with limited outreach from the government or NGOs, also find the cost of transport to medical appointments prohibitive.

Roma refugees mentioned a lack of information about their rights and how to access healthcare. Lack of information, as well as language barriers, can be a significant hurdle to ensuring Roma refugees have access to adequate healthcare in practice. This is likely to be even more complicated for families living in private accommodation, where there is less presence and contact with government and humanitarian organizations than in the RACs.

EDUCATION

Roma women at the RACs and in private accommodation told us that their children had not yet been accessing school or pre-school opportunities. Most of the children had previously been attending integrated schools (Roma and non-Roma) in Ukraine.

Joanna told us she wants her granddaughter Elena, 12, to finish school and not marry early like many other Roma girls.

But Elena has no access to a laptop or the internet to follow classes back in Ukraine, and Joanna told us that she didn't know how to help her granddaughter access schooling for the new academic year, which would be starting in September.

Education was a subject of concern for many. Mothers were anxious as they had not been contacted yet by authorities to enrol their children in the upcoming school year. Adolescents were also lacking access to computers to allow them to follow online classes in Ukraine. At the summer camp we visited, this is further impeded as there is also no internet access except what refugees purchase themselves through their phone plans.

For children with special needs, no education had been offered. During the visits, two adolescents were identified with special education needs.

A lack of educational and stimulating activities was also a concern for children younger than school age. At one of the RACs visited, children had access to recreational activities provided by a local partner engaged by UNHCR. In the other places visited, there were no educational activities taking place, and children had limited toys or space to play. There were no staff to aid with looking after children during the day, and teenagers, especially girls, often assisted with caring for younger children.

4.4 RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING GENDERED NEEDS

Speaking with Roma men and women revealed differing needs and concerns for Roma men and women. This reinforces the need for a gender sensitive approach – which is also responsive to Roma cultural expectations and traditions around gender – when trying to ensure all Roma refugees have access to the humanitarian assistance they need.²⁰

Gender specific issues and concerns raised by the women and men Oxfam interviewed included:

- Roma women refugees were distraught that they could not prepare meals for their families in the RACs. During the interviews, some Roma women became very emotional as they shared their frustration that they do not have the means to provide quality, culturally appropriate food or cook for their children. Roma experts explained that preparing food for family and children is a very important task culturally for Roma women. This issue, together with the low quality of provided food, is causing significant stress for the Roma women we spoke to. In order to facilitate Roma women's ability to cook, there is a need for kitchen space, electrical appliances and utensils. Even in the private summer camp, where a makeshift outdoor kitchen had been established by residents, there were concerns about how they would be able to continue to cook in winter as there are no indoor cooking facilities. Roma women also sometimes do not have access to fridges to conserve their food – in the RAC we visited in Chişinău there was only one fridge for 150 people.
- Pregnant women and mothers of young babies are in need of more support. The expectant and new mothers we spoke to had not experienced outreach with information or support for medical issues or necessary items for young babies.
- Girls are at risk of missing out on educational opportunities. Particularly in more traditional Roma communities, girls are less likely to finish school, and often have to shoulder greater responsibilities of caring for the home or younger children. This is a concern also for Roma refugees and needs to be considered when facilitating access to education for Roma refugee adolescents. Key informants shared concerns about early marriage and the need to raise awareness concerning this practice, which prevents young women from attending school. A key informant mentioned that Roma people should be aware that promoting education, especially for girls, should not put their cultural values at risk – an approach that would require a longer, systematic behaviour-changing approach which is embedded in an understanding of Roma cultural values.²¹

"It is better for us to cook, to have the possibility to cook for our kids, what they want, what they like. We know the kids, what they can eat, what they want to eat, as a normal family, even if we are refugees."

Roma women's focus group, Chişinău RAC



Outdoor kitchen facilities used by refugees at a privately rented summer camp.
Photo credit: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam

- Men are concerned about supporting their families and need greater access to livelihoods/income generation opportunities. Roma men expressed concern for the safety of their families, and their family well-being in general, as well as worries over difficulties accessing income-generating activities. The men we spoke to were not working, causing stress that they were not able fulfill their perceived roles as providers for their families, and creating a feeling of powerlessness about their situation.

"My family is not happy, I am not happy... My children need a normal life."

Roma men's focus group, Chişinău RAC

Roma refugee men Oxfam interviewed were looking for work, having previously operated small businesses in Ukraine that they lacked the contacts and resources to continue in Moldova. They also felt that discrimination was affecting their access to job opportunities in Moldova. The men interviewed showed interest in participating in training to prepare them for work in Moldova (e.g. as hairdressers, barmen, or in other trades), but said they lacked information concerning how and where they could access such jobs or skills training opportunities.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussions with Roma refugees in Moldova outlined in this paper suggest a number of steps that can be taken by the Moldovan government, and other humanitarian actors responding to refugees from Ukraine, to improve reception conditions for Roma refugees. These steps are suggested to address the urgent needs of Roma refugees in the short term, as well as to address their concerns, build trust between Roma and non-Roma people, and promote inclusion of Roma refugees in the longer term.

Recommendations are intended to build on the positive steps Moldova has already taken to specifically address the concerns of Roma refugees and may also have value for those receiving Roma refugees in other countries neighbouring Ukraine.

5.1 ADDRESSING URGENT NEEDS IN THE SHORT TERM

PROVIDE IMPROVED AND ADEQUATE ACCOMMODATION FOR ROMA REFUGEES.

There is a need to provide accommodation for Roma refugees that is safe, dignified, and appropriate to their needs. In the short term, this requires that RACs hosting Roma refugees are made liveable and adequate for winter, including providing furniture and items for private and healthy sleeping; renovating broken or dilapidated buildings; ensuring buildings have heating; and providing indoor bathroom and kitchen facilities, including adequate facilities for people with disabilities.

Improving RACs accommodating Roma people should also include consideration of how to provide cooking facilities to enable Roma refugee women to cook for their families. In addition to helping improve the quality and diversity of food, a place to cook and socialize with their families would likely have a positive impact on the overall well-being of Roma women in the RACs.

Thinking beyond RACs, governments and humanitarian organisations providing shelter for Roma refugees should also explore other options to find the best solutions for longer-term housing for Roma refugees. This may include providing cash for rent and/or other support for expanded access to private housing opportunities, amongst other solutions. In any case, the discussion on housing options for Roma refugees should involve close consultation with Roma representatives, NGOs and Roma refugees themselves, acknowledge the diversity of opinions and situations within the Roma community, and not fall back on stereotypes of Roma people or assumptions about what they should want.

SUPPORT ACCESS TO VARIED AND QUALITY DIETARY CHOICES, AND ACCESS TO REQUIRED BASIC NON-FOOD ITEMS FOR ROMA REFUGEE FAMILIES.

Roma people are concerned about their access to quality and varied food and their capacity to meet their basic needs with limited financial means. They need more and better assistance with quality food, and basic non-food items such as sufficient and appropriate quality clothing; sufficient and appropriate quality items for safe, healthy and private sleeping; sufficient and appropriate items to prepare, eat and store varied and quality food; and sufficient, safe and affordable energy supply to maintain thermal comfort and prepare food.

Greater and more accessible cash assistance and/or assistance with finding work for Roma men may be a more empowering and sustainable way for Roma refugees to be supported to meet their own needs.

IMPROVE ROMA REFUGEES' ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES IN PRACTICE.

While Roma refugees had some access to healthcare services, many were not able to access the specialist care they needed, lacked information about the services available to them and how to access them in languages they understood, and were concerned about the cost of medications.

Improving access to healthcare for Roma refugees requires consultation with Roma communities and service providers on what barriers in practice exist to accessing healthcare. This may include, amongst other solutions, provision of increased and more accessible information on where and how Roma refugees can access particular healthcare services, facilitation of interpretation services at healthcare access points, financial assistance with healthcare costs where this is not already covered (e.g. medication), and provision of regular health check-ups at RACs and privately rented accommodation such as summer camps.

SUPPORT INITIATIVES FOR ADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS.

Access to schooling for children and adolescents is a key priority for Roma families and needs greater support. Depending on the circumstances and needs of particular children, this could involve supporting enrolment in the Moldovan school systems, taking into account language skills; providing necessary equipment for adolescents to follow online classes from Ukraine; or working with NGOs to provide classes in Roma languages.

The Roma Task Force participating organizations have started the discussion to try to find ways to support the government to provide adequate schooling for Roma children in Moldova. This should also involve a discussion concerning early childhood education opportunities for small children that are not yet of school age, considering that most do not participate in playful or educational activities during the day in the RACs. All Roma children should also have spaces and facilities to be able to play and learn safely.

5.2 BUILDING A BETTER RESPONSE IN THE LONG TERM

ENSURE ROMA PEOPLE ARE CONSULTED AND INVOLVED IN DECISION MAKING TO ADDRESS THEIR NEEDS.

At the institutional level, the Roma Task Force and its members need to be more included in decision-making processes about provision of services. Both government and organizations involved in humanitarian assistance should support the establishment of consultative group(s) of Roma experts to provide advice on Roma issues, and to ensure Roma needs are met and assistance is timely, safe and adequate.

There has been progress, with a Roma representative included in the Moldova Crisis Centre, which is considered a positive first step by Roma experts we spoke to. Still, there is a need to take action to redress the historical lack of knowledge about Roma people, which generates discrimination, misunderstandings and tension.

SUPPORT ROMA REPRESENTATION AT RACS AND IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS, ACCESS TO INFORMATION, AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS.

Despite improvements at the institutional level, there is also need for better communication channels, greater access to information, and access to complaints mechanisms on the ground.

Roma refugees we spoke to at RACs expressed a lot of frustration at not being heard, not having a channel to present complaints and not being satisfied with how those complaints are being handled internally. A response to this issue should be part of an integrated approach of improving the climate in the RACs to remove the tensions among the Roma people, administrators and workers in the RACs.

Roma people interviewed by Oxfam mentioned the importance of having representation in the RACs appointed by them. A representative to inform, communicate and address their daily concerns, facilitating the relationship between the community and the RACs administration could help improve Roma refugees' access to information and facilitate greater consultation at the RAC level. Further discussion is needed to explore the different possibilities that would best facilitate this representation. Discussions on representation should also take into account ways to include both Roma women and men in feedback and consultative mechanisms.

Translation of more information for refugees into Roma languages, and/or the provision of translators to help Roma refugees communicate with NGOs and government agencies could also help address issues around lack of information.

PROMOTE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF ROMA REFUGEES CONCERNING DOCUMENTATION.

Lack of documentation was a barrier to many Roma refugees' plans to move on to other countries, as well as to their ability to access vital humanitarian assistance.

To remove current obstacles to obtaining documentation, it is important to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the situation and different families' needs. There is a need to remove the different administrative and financial difficulties from both government and refugees, and also work on awareness raising with the refugee Roma community concerning the importance of acquiring personal documents.

Supporting local organizations that provide legal advice and support for Roma families is key, as accessing correct information on application procedures for both Ukrainian and Moldovan documents has proven to be very challenging for Roma refugee families.

FIGHT PREJUDICE AND PROMOTE TRUST BUILDING AND UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN ROMA PEOPLE AND NON-ROMA PEOPLE IN BOTH REFUGEE AND HOST POPULATIONS.

It is important to fight discrimination and misconceptions at every level of the response and within all organisations involved in providing humanitarian assistance. Key informants mentioned the importance of promoting trust between Ukrainian Roma families and the Moldovan Roma community, as well as with RACs workers and Moldovan decision makers. Working on mutual trust and understanding would improve the relationship among people in RACs and host communities. This will require additional support to implement capacity-building initiatives in the RACs, communication strategies and materials for the public, and other strategies that would promote new ways of working with Roma communities both in the RACs and across the refugee response more broadly.

Humanitarian actors must also keep promoting knowledge building on Roma refugees by supporting and participating in initiatives that will build disaggregated information (i.e. data that is broken down into detailed subcategories) on Roma people. Disaggregated information can help in decision making concerning how to improve the use of resources and target the most vulnerable refugees. New initiatives from humanitarian organizations working in Moldova have just begun to produce quality data and generate evidence on Roma people, as well as mapping their profiles, situation and needs in the country.

Accessing information on the different assistance provided to refugees in urban and rural settings is also a key issue as refugees in rural settings may encounter more difficulties in accessing specialized health services, documentation and income generation opportunities.

Further research to keep track of the developments concerning the Roma refugee community should be undertaken. Different humanitarian organizations are involved in the current response, but complementary actions targeting Roma refugees are still needed with a bottom-up approach, taking their opinion and needs into consideration.

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY NOTE

The rapid assessment is based on the data collected from site observations, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and individual interviews for personal stories of Roma refugees from Ukraine in Moldova in July 2022. The assessment was undertaken by a team of three people: a female researcher and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) specialist (team leader), a male humanitarian expert and a female communication expert. A local Roma activist supported the research team in arranging for and conducting interviews and ensuring the research tools were contextualised.

SITE VISITS, INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The research team conducted six focus group discussions over the two RACs hosting Roma refugees that they visited, as well as two focus group discussions at a privately rented summer camp. Around 37 women and 4 men participated in these focus group discussions, which were conducted separately, segregated by gender. The research team also conducted roughly ten one-on-one interviews with women at the RACs and in private accommodation.

All information shared was treated as confidential to ensure the principles of Do No Harm. Individual stories shared and pictures taken had consent from the people interviewed.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS AND LOCAL NGOS

The research team conducted interviews either in person or remotely with the following key informants:

- Founder, Roma Awareness Foundation.
- Academic representative on Roma studies and activist, Institute of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences of the Republic of Moldova.
- Senior Minority Fellow, UN Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Moldova (online).
- Project Assistant, Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor (CDA) (online).
- Executive Director, La Strada (online).

LIMITATIONS

This was a rapid assessment to gather a snapshot of voices of people affected by the crisis, and due to its nature, it is not intended to be a comprehensive risk and needs assessment of Ukrainian Roma refugees in Moldova. Some limitations in the information gathered may result from:

- Limited number of areas covered and interviewees.
- Lack of existing disaggregated data on Roma people in Moldova.
- The research would have benefited from interviews with government officials. However, due to time constraints these did not take place.
- Time limitations at each location meant the number and duration of interviews was limited.

- Translation. A female Roma leader was hired to translate the discussions and interviews. She was also an important advisor for the research. However, she is a Roma activist who was consulted by participants on other topics during interviews, which may have influenced the outcomes of the discussions.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the team managed to have a broad series of very open discussions with the different groups they met to collect voices from affected Roma refugee communities themselves. These were valuable conversations and Oxfam very much appreciates and thanks all people who cooperated for their invaluable contribution to the assessment.

NOTES

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- ² UNHCR. (2022). *Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation: Republic of Moldova*. Retrieved 11 October 2022, from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10784>
- ³ See, e.g., OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. (2000). *Report on the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area*. Retrieved 12 October 2022, from <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/f/32350.pdf>
- ⁴ See, e.g., Human Rights Watch. (2021). *Radicals Target Roma People in Ukraine*. Retrieved 12 October 2022, from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/29/radicals-target-roma-people-ukraine>
- ⁵ Clear Global. (2022). *Language Factsheet: Romani Language in the Ukraine response*. Retrieved 12 October 2022, from <https://clearglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/CLEAR-Global-Romani-language-factsheet.pdf>: 'Many Roma people face educational exclusion, leading to low literacy levels. Women, older people, and people living with disabilities are more likely not to read and write, or to do so with difficulty. Social exclusion also limits opportunities for Roma to become fully proficient and comfortable using a dominant language of their local area.'
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- ¹¹ Avocatul Poporului, Ombudsman. (2022). *Report No. 1 on the monitoring the observance of the rights of foreigners from Ukraine in the context of the state of emergency for the period from February 25 to April 30, 2022*. Unofficial translation from Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor, retrieved 28 September 2022, available from: <https://cda.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Final-Raport-nr.1-persoane-stra%CC%86ine-refugiata-engl.pdf>.
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- ¹⁴ UNHCR. (2022). *Moldova Refugee Accommodation Centre (RAC) Weekly Needs Monitoring, Update as of 19.09.2022*. Retrieved 11 October 2022, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/moldova/moldova-refugee-accommodation-centre-rac-weekly-needs-monitoring-update-19092022-enro>
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- ¹⁹ Clear Global. (2022). *Language Factsheet*: 'Many Roma lack identity documentation, and an estimated 10-20% of Ukraine's Roma population, around 35,000 people, are stateless or at risk of statelessness. This increases the risk of human trafficking as people flee from their local area or across borders. It also means people struggle to access international protection.'
- Minority Rights Group International. (2020). *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Ukraine: Roma*: '...many Roma in Ukraine spend their entire lives without any form of identity documentation or registration. ... According to local experts, in Odesa region as much as a quarter of the Roma population were without documentation in 2011: though the proportion had fallen significantly since then, thanks to Roma rights NGOs who had helped hundreds of Roma to navigate the complete process of registering and proving their identity, they estimated that between 10 to 15 per cent of Roma still lack identification papers today.'
- ²⁰ See, e.g., Clear Global. (2022). *Language Factsheet*: Clear Global highlights the need for a gender-sensitive approach for effective communication with Roma refugees from Ukraine. They explain that it is important to respect gender norms in communication with Roma communities. For instance, if a Roma man is present in the group you are supporting, involve him in decision making. If several men are present, involve the oldest, who is likely to be the leader. Communicators should ask people, especially women and girls, whether they prefer to speak alone or with family or community members present. Communications with Roma women and girls on sensitive topics should be done through female staff and interpreters.
- ²¹ See Minority Rights Group International. (2020). *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, Ukraine: Roma*. Retrieved 12 October 2022, from <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-13/>: 'Roma girls are especially at risk when it comes to dropping out of school due to the persistent practice of early marriages in certain communities and other aspects of gender inequality, including the perception that schooling is less necessary for women than men. In many Roma communities, when girls reach their teenage years they are increasingly involved in household chores and taking care of their siblings.'

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