

 20-22 March 2023  
Chisinau, Moldova

# Hearing the Voices of Ukrainian Children and Young People: Child Helplines responding to the Ukrainian Crisis- Workshop Report



## Workshop Partners:

Child Helpline  
International  
UNICEF ECARO  
UNICEF Moldova  
Missing Children  
Europe  
ICMEC  
KIND

## Background:

On 20-22 March 2023, Child Helpline International, in partnership with UNICEF Moldova, hosted a 3-day workshop in Chisinau for frontline workers and helpline counsellors involved in the Moldova Ukraine Crisis Response.

29 Participants from eight different organisations attended: 112 National Emergency Service, Amici dei Bambini, Youth Clinic Support Line- Health for Youth Association, UNICEF Blue Dot, Partnerships for Every Child Moldova: P4EC, La Strada Moldova, Directorate for Protection of Children's Rights Botanica sector, and 116111 Telefon Copilului.

Over the course of the workshop, several opportunities were provided for participants to discuss their organisations' response to the war in Ukraine, their current activities as well as their future plans, both in small group settings as well as with a wider audience. The overarching aim of these discussions was to pinpoint remaining gaps in both organisational and national responses to the war as well as to identify a roadmap to close these.

The following report provides a summary of these discussions, detailing the **key challenges identified** by participants for their organisations as well as the wider Moldovan Ukraine Crisis Response, as well as suggested **solutions**.

# National UCR Challenges

Three key areas of concern were highlighted by participants as affecting the national response to refugees from Ukraine both currently and in the coming months.

**1 Lack of Support systems for young adults.** Participants have noted a general lack of support systems and linked help for young adults or late teenagers. It was found that oftentimes there are a plethora of resources for people below the age of 16. However, within the age range between 16 and 18 years old there is a lack of resources and bridging materials on how to transition between the status of a minor and an adult. Oftentimes a minor that is about to enter that age group, or otherwise about to exit it, finds themselves void of the resources that are available to them to help themselves or assimilate. There are also reportedly other resources available, outside of the Ukraine Crisis response, which may be available to the refugees, which are simply not communicated to them, such as certain healthcare benefits or other state-funded programs.

*Proposed Solutions: Information dissemination through joint advocacy efforts that better inform 16–18-year-old Ukrainians of their rights may lessen the burden on Humanitarian workers to do so, thus potentially minimizing the breaking of rapport between themselves and Ukrainian refugees in this age bracket. The advocacy efforts should also be inclusive of the other potential vulnerabilities that the child may have to create a comprehensive list outside of the general package offered to refugees as part of the Ukraine Crisis Response, in order to navigate the child to a larger bracket of resources, which are available to them in tandem with other governmental or state funded bodies.*

**2 Lack of international case management of unaccompanied & separated minors.** There are seven different child protection systems or databases available internationally, in which different information is registered about missing, unaccompanied and separated children. Oftentimes this information is also registered in different ways, as it is influenced by national legislation differences, reflected in differing definitions such as legal definition of a minor, or of applicable laws, such as the age of consent. The Schengen zone has also been cited as a challenge for tracking cases of unaccompanied and separated minors, as it lacks the data, which would otherwise be available at border controls. Which, at the moment, is not happening neither in Moldova, nor in the EU.

*Proposed Solutions: The participants noted the necessity of having a joint database between states, or within Moldova to track cases. Participants have largely agreed that every child should be linked to a database system to ensure they are under care, as well as to track the status of the child under said care. It is worth noting that such a system will soon be available with the rollout of CPIMS+ [Primero](#) by UNICEF Moldova. This status should reflect the aid the minor already received, as well as their location and any vulnerabilities. The database should be accessible to any response or frontline worker to adequately assess the needs of the child.*

**3 Lack of service awareness.** Participants remarked that one major challenge they are facing is that Ukrainians are on the whole unaware of the scope of available resources in Moldova. This is due, in part, to the lack of information provided in accommodation and reception centres for Ukrainian refugees, at times merely providing a helpline number without a description of what such a helpline might offer. Another part in this is that many services were set up in Moldova following the full scale invasion of Ukraine without the necessary coordination to prevent overlap, and as a result several organisations with similar mandates operate within the country. This situation has resulted in confusion for Ukrainian refugees and competition over at times scarce resources for the involved organisations.

*Proposed Solutions: Initially, a database of all available services, their target groups and resources, filtered by localisation, should be spread amongst organisations. Organisations with overlapping mandates could subsequently coordinate between one another so as to distribute work specialisations or*

geographical regions in which they operate, so as not to inadvertently compete with one another and provide the best possible services for Ukrainian refugees. Finally, awareness-raising campaigns, conducted for instance on TV or on leaflets at accommodation and reception centres with clear descriptions of the help- and hotline numbers and the services they offer could help to clarify the current confusion that

## Organisational Challenges

### Four main organisational challenges were highlighted by helplines involved in the Moldovan Ukraine Crisis Response

**1 Technological challenges.** Several participants reported shortcomings and unpreparedness for the scale of the crisis and the influx of calls on a technological level. Participants reported that this had resulted in long shifts, sometimes spanning entire nights, as well as limited number of phones for the helpline, meaning counsellors had to at times manually drive to one another's places of residence to hand over their phones to the next counsellor on call, adding hours onto already long shifts. Whilst the COVID-19 crisis had already led to adaptation in working with a large influx of calls and remote work, some technical issues remain unresolved, such as the ability to access databases from outside office premises. Participants additionally reported daily struggles with network coverage, office supplies and sim card issues.

***Proposed Solutions:** The solutions provided by the participants is the further technical advancement of the organisations, such as developing smoother processes for the phone handovers, developing easier access points for the database details, which would allow the staff to work remotely. Whilst there may be little available to control when it comes to power outages and network coverage, staff rotation has been proposed from different locations. Fundamentally, this would require greater investment into child helpline services in Moldova.*

**2 Language Barriers.** A large number of participants reported the existence of a language barrier between the operators and the children in need. Whilst a considerable number of counsellors are able to speak Russian, some Ukrainian refugees either prefer not to speak Russian or do not know how to. Some staff are able to understand and speak basic Ukrainian, but providing detailed counselling in Ukrainian is not possible. Ukrainian-speaking staff with the correct qualifications are in short supply.

***Proposed Solutions:** In the short term, participants suggested that more adjustment of awareness-raising materials is required to ensure inclusivity. Looking at the medium-term, staff at child helplines could also benefit from language classes so as to be able to provide counselling in Ukrainian. The long-term solution for participants was to hire and train Ukrainian nationals or speakers. Some of the participant organisations, have already started the onboarding of the new staff members, and could therefore*

**3 Capacity-building needs.** Participants expressed that there is a need for capacity-building activities to ensure all humanitarian workers were adequately trained to respond to the needs of Ukrainian refugees in the country. Frontline workers felt that they, alongside a number of broader range of actors needed additional training in first aid MHPSS and THB and GBV case-management. Participants have also noticed the lack of cooperation between their organisations and the larger governmental structures, which handle the cases. There is an overarching feeling that there is a lack of a joint mechanism for case management, not only between the other organisations dealing with the Ukraine Crisis Response, but additionally from the side of the Moldovan government.

**Proposed Solutions:** Participants were eager to engage in more regular training activities delivered by international organisations and subject matter experts. However, they stressed that the participants attending such workshops and trainings needed to be carefully selected, to ensure that knowledge could be passed down to other employees and would not be lost due to staff turnover. Another suggestion was made to conduct multi-disciplinary workshops in which state organisations and law enforcement attended. In this way, they hoped to increase both the capacity of their workers, as well as awareness of other key stakeholders involved in child protection of Ukrainian refugees.

**4 Counsellor Wellbeing.** Finally, participants expressed worry for the welfare of counsellors. After several years of crisis management following COVID-19 and the Ukrainian war requiring longer working hours, several participants stated that their personal and organizational wellness was suffering. In some ways, this has worsened due to the aforementioned staffing shortage. The volume of calls, heavy topics, long working hours, language barriers and staff shortages have resulted in some feelings of burnout in participants.

**Proposed Solutions:** In the counsellor wellbeing session, several solutions were proposed to minimize the risk of vicarious traumatization, compassion fatigue and burnout at both an individual and organisational level, such as the Schwartz round. Some participants expressed that they were eager to find dedicated psychologists specialised in working with frontline humanitarian workers who could provide supervision for their staff, to minimise burnout risks. Including the noted willingness to train managers on the topic of burnout and employee wellbeing. Subcontracting psychologists for the operators has also been proposed as a solution. The need to redirect and train the existing specialists to work more efficiently has been noted, including greater transparency within the organisations, which would allow the staff members to be aware of the activities and duties of people in the organisation.