# ENHANCING PUBLIC SPACES FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION 2023

## REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

This report aims to provide a descriptive explanation of the projects supporting local public and community spaces, carried out by UNHCR and its partner, ACTED, to strengthen the community inclusion of refugees in the Republic of Moldova.

This report is not intended to be an implementation evaluation, nor does it replace the project closure reports for the year 2023.

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Cover Photograph

*Refugees and locals taking part in community activities in Comrat community centre.*
*© Courtesy of Dmitrii Furtuna/ Laolaltă*

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# SUMMARY

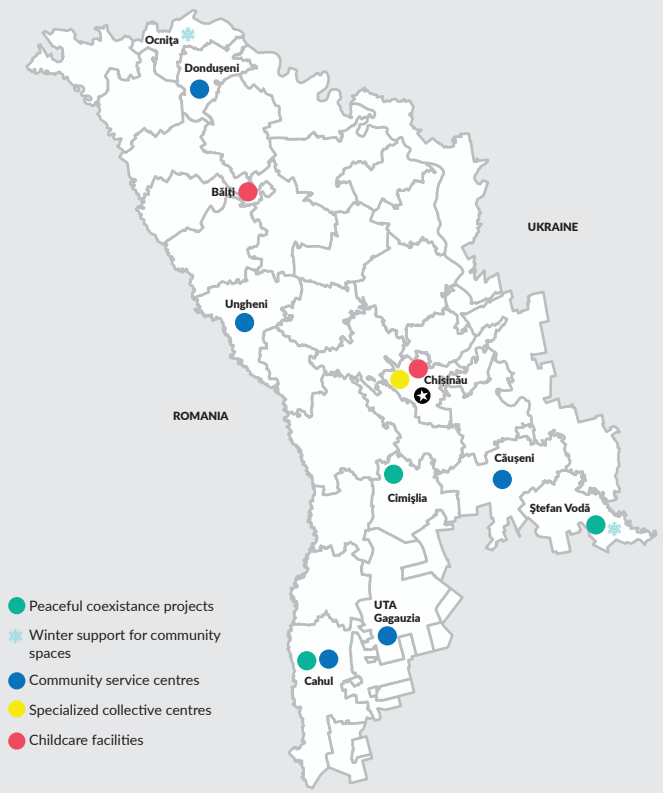
In addition to providing core protection and basic needs assistance for refugees, UNHCR's response in the Republic of Moldova has focused on projects aimed at fostering the social integration of refugees within host communities. UNHCR, in close collaboration with Moldovan authorities at both central and local levels, carefully planned these projects in consultation with refugees and local communities, with particular attention to the protection aspects, especially for women, children, older persons, and people with disabilities.

In 2023, the UNHCR implemented 15 projects to enhance public spaces for refugees and local communities. These initiatives included five peaceful coexistence projects focused on public sports and cultural facilities, five community support centers providing community-based services, two childcare spaces, and one spiralized collective center for older persons and people with disabilities. Additionally, two projects aimed to enhance and winter-proof essential public spaces, creating inclusive and safe environments for refugees and the communities hosting them.

The anticipated impact of this project is to benefit more than 16,000 refugees and members of local communities who will be able to access and use the supported facilities and contribute to safeguard their wellbeing.

UNHCR employed a sustainable approach in executing the projects, emphasizing meaningful community engagement and environmental consciousness to ensure that spaces remain beneficial for communities beyond the refugee response.

In 2023, UNHCR implemented **15 projects** to enhance local public facilities **in 10 districts** across the **Republic of Moldova,** impacting the lives of more than **16,000 refugees and locals.**




UNHCR Projects for enhasing community spaces forscail inclusion in 2023

The designations employed on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of UNHCR concerning the legal status of any country, territory, area, city, or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The theater of the Causeni community service centre was alive with activity during a bustling day filled with diverse events.

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# Enhancing public spaces for community inclusion

Cities and towns around the world have been standing in solidarity with refugees, the internally displaced, and stateless individuals by adopting progressive policies that promote better housing and employment opportunities. They strive to foster social cohesion, ensuring that all residents feel like integral parts of their communities and have access to communal services.

In the Republic of Moldova, cities and communities have generously welcomed and supported refugees from Ukraine since the onset of the emergency. Throughout 2023, UNHCR's efforts, in addition to providing urgent assistance and protection services, focused on strengthening social cohesion between refugees and host communities. The vision was to positively impact community inclusion by enhancing public spaces.

This approach promoted access to public spaces for cultural, educational, and social activities, improving spatial conditions through the renovation of social support infrastructure. This included community centers, public parks, childcare, and sports facilities.

The design of each intervention considered the spatial and physical context of both refugees and Moldovans, ensuring that it met their needs and helped mitigate the risk of social tensions.

UNHCR adopted an area-based approach aligned with the "Cities of Solidarity"[1] initiative, engaging local authorities in a participatory process to ensure the sustainability of these interventions and the activation of public spaces to foster social integration.

This collaborative approach involved consultation and active engagement of community members, ensuring that solutions were tailored to the specific needs and priorities of each community. Through this process, UNHCR fostered a sense of ownership and accountability among all stakeholders, laying the foundation for enduring partnerships and inclusive governance structures. In doing so, UNHCR reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the rights, dignity, and well-being of displaced populations, while also advancing the shared values of solidarity, inclusion, and collective action, and community empowerment.

1 "Cities of Solidarity" is an initiative designed by UNHCR and implemented jointly with local and regional authorities to promote the protection and inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers, stateless persons, and members of host communities in urban and suburban areas. This initiative seeks to enhance access to rights and services by forcibly displaced persons while strengthening the socio-economic capacities of host communities.

# Peaceful coexistence projects

At the heart of peaceful co-existence projects lies a profound commitment to restoring a sense of normalcy for those uprooted from their homes by war. These initiatives recognize the inherent dignity and resilience of displaced individuals and seek to provide them with the necessary support to rebuild their lives in a new environment. Additionally, these projects strive to acknowledge, realize, and strengthen the efforts of local communities who welcomed and embraced the refugees within their cities, towns, and villages.

By promoting mutual understanding and cooperation, these endeavors aim to create a harmonious social fabric where both refugees and locals can thrive together. Emphasizing not only economic integration but also social and cultural cohesion, these projects envision a future where diversity is celebrated and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the collective well-being of the community. moreover, these projects recognize the vital role of host communities who, despite facing their own challenges, extend a welcoming hand to refugees.

## Completed projects

**Cahul multi-functional sports field**
New construction
Project total cost: USD 144,810

The project aimed to establish an open sports area in the center of Cahul. Previously used as a football field, the redesigned space now provides refugees and host communities with access to a versatile sports field. This initiative aimed to foster the healthy development of children, teenagers, and adults through sports activities. The works included the installation of a metal fence frame, construction of a reinforced concrete slab, and the installation of rubber flooring. Additionally, sports gates were incorporated into the design to enhance functionality.

**Ştefan Vodă sports facility**
Indoor renovation
Project total cost: USD 97.090

Aligned with the strategy to promote sports areas, Stefan Voda boasts an indoor sports facility covering an area of nearly 300 square meters. The aim of the project was to comprehensively renovate the facility, providing a space in good condition for recreational activities for refugees and host communities.

*The sports facility in Ștefan Vodă, after all renovation works are completed, now stands as a modern and well-equipped space.*

**Otaci public playground**
New construction
Project total cost: USD 17,709

UNHCR, in partnership with local authorities and Bahtalo Ker, a local Roma organization, installed a playground for children and a sports ground for youth and adults, thereby enhancing the area's recreational facilities. The local authorities chose a strategically central location within the town, maximizing accessibility and convenience for all residents. This carefully selected location not only facilitates easy access but also encourages greater community interaction and engagement in these newly developed public spaces.

**Stage in a public park in Cimişlia**
Renovation
Project total cost: USD 28,047

The public park offers a variety of activities, including a children's playground, a soccer field, a skating area, and a stage for hosting different events. In a city with a population of 12,000 people, approximately 3,000, including refugees and the host community, are expected to utilize this public space. The location was also selected because of its proximity to a refugee accommodation center, providing easy access for refugees to spend time outdoors while engaging with local families. The intervention focuses on the renovation of the stage, encompassing the replacement of the roof and the old wooden plank flooring, as well as the installation of a new lighting system.

**Palanca open cinema in public park**
New construction
Project total cost: USD 31,875

The Municipality of Palanca initiated a project to establish an open-air cinema in the park. The objective of this endeavor was to enhance the original concept and develop a designated area for the open-air cinema, along with other activities designed for children and teenagers. To realize this vision, a comprehensive construction plan was put into action. This included the meticulous construction of two reinforced concrete platforms, carefully covered with durable rubber matting to ensure comfort and safety for moviegoers. Additionally, a sturdy metal screen frame was installed, securely anchored to the ground, to serve as the centerpiece for cinematic projections. A sophisticated lighting system was also integrated into the design, illuminating the space and creating an inviting atmosphere for evening gatherings. Concrete and wood benches were thoughtfully incorporated into the layout, providing ample seating for spectators to relax and enjoy the movie screenings.

Furthermore, special attention was given to accessibility, with the creation of an accessible pathway designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, ensuring that everyone could easily navigate and enjoy the park's offerings.

*The stage of Cimiclia Park, now completed after construction, is poised to enhance the local cultural and enrichment scenes.*

*Palanca Open Cinema: The screen is stored away when there are no screenings. Cinema serves as a powerful catalyst for cultural exchange, bridging diverse perspectives and fostering understanding across borders.*

## Winter support for community spaces

To alleviate the harsh conditions endured by refugees during their second winter in displacement, UNHCR launched its Winterisation Plan for the 2023-2024 cold season. The plan is designed to address the pressing needs of refugees by focusing on enhancing essential infrastructure and providing crucial heating support to over 20 communal spaces situated across the Republic of Moldova. These communal spaces encompass a range of facilities, including community centres, Refugee Accommodation Centres, and childcare facilities.

By upgrading these communal spaces, UNHCR aims to create environments that are not only safer but also more comfortable, ensuring that individuals have access to the necessary resources to withstand the harsh winter. The Winterisation Plan will span throughout 2023 and 2024.

## Completed projects

**Otaci city hall**
Weather proofing the building
Project total cost: USD 42,283

The project aims to enhance the energy efficiency of the building and reduce the heating costs during the winter months. Initially, meticulous efforts were undertaken to install 10cm thick expanded polystyrene boards on all facades of the structure. Following this, a precise application of two layers of 7mm thick plaster covered the entire surface of the walls, contributing not only to durability but also to an enhanced and polished appearance.

*TThe exterior of the renovated Otaci City Hall building now boasts a fresh appearance.*

**Palanca kindergarten**
Installation of a heating system
Project total cost: USD 26,509

In response to the community infrastructure assessment, it was found that the targeted kindergarten faced significant challenges due to its weak and outdated heating system, which struggled to adequately warm its premises during the winter months. To rectify this issue, a series of measures were implemented. Firstly, two entrance doors and two interior doors were installed to prevent heat loss and improve insulation. Additionally, 67 old radiators were replaced with higher-capacity ones to ensure more efficient heating throughout the building. Furthermore, a new gas heating boiler was installed to provide reliable and consistent heating, thereby creating a more comfortable environment for both students and staff.

*The interior of the kindergarten in Palanca after renovation work is completed.*

Ukrainian and Moldovan women participating in one of many activities held in the community service centres supported by UNHCR, Donduseni.

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## Community Service Centres

Community service centres serve as safe public spaces where individuals of diverse backgrounds—women, men, girls, and boys—can gather for learning, social, and recreational activities. These centres offer a wide range of integrated protection services, including legal aid, education, livelihoods training, start-up business grants, primary healthcare, psycho-social support, gender-based violence prevention, child protection interventions, and in-kind assistance tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities and vulnerable individuals. Moreover, community centres actively engage both refugees and locals in awareness-raising activities.

By strengthening these community facilities, UNHCR promotes social cohesion and fosters peaceful coexistence. Through these centers, communities take ownership of local protection responses. Additionally, these facilities allow community committees and outreach volunteers to play a vital role in providing feedback on service quality and assessing the impact of activities and engaging with local authorities in a meaningful way. Furthermore, community centers contribute to sustainable development by nurturing connections and resilience, creating lasting positive change beyond the immediate refugee response.

In 2023, UNHCR supported the establishment of five community support centres in the cities of Cahul, Căușeni, Comrat, Dondușeni, Ungheni. All are major cities with at least 4,840 refugees hosted within them.

Community centres are established in spaces belonging to the communities, ensuring sustainability and relevance for both displaced and host communities. The technical interventions in the centres encompass a range of actions, including new construction to provide purpose-built spaces; renovation to address wear and tear; waterproofing for resilience; and enhancing accessibility for older individuals and people with disabilities.

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*A discussion on disability inclusion is taking place with local authorities and organisations in the main meeting room at newly renovated Cahul Community Support Centre.*

## Completed projects

**Cahul community service centre**[2]
Comprehensive renovation
Project cost: USD 61,219*

The project involved completing the interiors of rooms and restrooms and installing electrical wiring, ensuring both functionality and safety. Pedestrian pathways were upgraded to enhance accessibility, making the center fully navigable for all individuals, including those with disabilities. Additionally, the building's facade was expertly plastered and painted, significantly boosting its aesthetic appeal and durability, making it a visually appealing and inclusive community landmark.

**Căușeni community service centre**
New construction
Project cost: USD 61,219*

The technical interventions included a comprehensive renovation of the outdoor area, featuring the creation of a children's playground and a sports field to promote active lifestyles. Additionally, a sizable stage was constructed to host various community events. A warehouse was also repurposed into a multifunctional space, designed to accommodate workshops and recreational activities, enhancing the community's ability to engage in diverse and enriching events.

**Comrat community service centre**
Comprehensive renovation
Project cost: USD 142,866

Infrastructure development continued throughout the year, with a focus on completing the construction of the outdoor area featuring an organic design. This design includes a large wooden stage, three functional wooden areas for various activities, the establishment of a children's playground, and the installation of lighting poles. Additionally, efforts were directed towards enhancing a specific room designated for protection interviews.

**Dondușeni community service centre**
Comprehensive renovation
Projectcost: USD 35,498*

The intervention primarily focused on improving the thermal comfort within the building by installing 10 cm thick expanded polystyrene boards on all facades. Ventilation ducts were also installed to prevent mold formation in the internal walls. Additionally, pedestrian pathways were constructed to provide universal access, and rainwater harvesting channels were installed along the roof.

**Ungheni community service centre**
Comprehensive renovation
Project cost: USD 194,224

Situated on the 1st floor of Ungheni Palace of Culture, spanning 295 m2, the space features a back yard court for a children's playground. It will offer various services and functions, similar to other CSCs, including cash assistance, protection interviews, a child-friendly space, psychological support, and training facilities, catering to the diverse needs of the community.

*Art performance at the theater of Căușeni Community Service Centre. The centre acts as learning and entertainment hub for the local population and the 744 refugees hosted in the Raion [District]*

2 Additional renovation work is scheduled to take place in 2024

* The number only reflects the amount spent as part of the 2023 budget

Children during the handover of a childcare space in Chisinau offering "bread and salt" a traditional greeting ceremony in Moldova

© UNHCR/Tudorita Andreev

# Childcare facilities

Effective access to childcare and early education opportunities is unquestionably one of the most pressing needs facing refugee families, many of whom face prolonged separation from husbands and fathers. Kindergartens in host communities are under enormous strain, unable to meet the increasing needs of families. Without access to childcare, refugee women struggle to gain meaningful employment.

Child care spaces play a crucial role in empowering families by providing parents the opportunity to seek employment, education, and training. These facilities offer safe and nurturing environments where children can grow and develop essential skills. As children engage in activities tailored to their developmental needs, they also learn the local language and acquire basic social skills, which are fundamental for their integration into the local community. This integration not only enriches the children's learning experiences but also eases the family's transition into society, fostering a sense of belonging and community cohesion. Through supporting child development and freeing up parents to pursue personal and professional growth, child care spaces significantly contribute to the overall vitality and resilience of communities.

UNHCR coordinated these projects through the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection's National Program for Creche Services for Children Aged 0-3. The renovation of two spaces was completed and handed over to local authorities in Chișinău and Bălți.

The child care spaces, like all other projects, will continue to render services for residents beyond the refugee response, ensuring accessibility and support for all families in the community. As integral components of the local infrastructure, these spaces contribute to the development of the community by providing essential care and educational opportunities for children.

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*UNHCR is handing over the childcare space to the local authorities in Chisinau*

## Completed projects

### Bălți kindergaten "Mărțișor"

Improving the building's thermal environment
Project total cost: USD 49,585

The project successfully improved the thermal conditions of the kindergarten by replacing deteriorated wooden windows with modern aluminum ones. This ensured a comfortable minimum temperature, especially during winter, for various creche groups. The installation included 37 aluminum windows, upgraded with a double-opening mechanism and equipped with mosquito nets to promote natural ventilation. Additionally, external metal sills were strategically incorporated beneath the windows to facilitate rainwater drainage and enhance wall insulation. These improvements contributed to increased energy efficiency and overall comfort within the facility.

*The exterior of the kindergarten in Bălți after the renovation work was completed. These enhancements resulted in higher energy efficiency and improved overall comfort levels throughout the facility.*

### Chișinău kindergaten

Renovation of one floor
Project total cost: USD 63,185

This project revitalized a specific creche group and its associated staircase area on the second floor, aiming to expand capacity for accommodating more children. The comprehensive 133.4 square meters renovation included various tasks to enhance the space. This involved applying new wall plasters, installing synthetic laminate flooring, incorporating plasterboard suspended ceilings, replacing windows and doors, and upgrading sewage, water, heating, and electricity systems.

These renovations aimed to create a conducive environment that promoted the well-being of both staff and children attending the creche. Moreover, these improvements led to the opening of a brand new creche group where 24 additional children (including refugee children) will be enrolled the creche.

*The interior of the kindergarten in Chișinău after renovation works and furnishing are completed. These improvements will enhance the facility's capacity to accommodate more children with ease.*

Anatolii and Taisia took refuge in the Republic of Moldova and are currently living in the "Valea Rediului" refugee accommodation centre.

© UNHCR/Eugenia Ciurca

## Specialized collective centres

Approximately 6% of refugees in Moldova are persons with disabilities[3], and 22% of refugee families have at least one member with special needs. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by displaced people with disabilities, older persons, and other vulnerable groups, UNHCR works tirelessly to ensure their protection and inclusion in assistance programs, including access to essential services, such as shelter healthcare, and psychosocial support.

**Valea Rediului, 16 Centre**
Renovation of the 4th floor
Project total cost: USD 192,474

As part of the support initiative by the Government of the Republic of Moldova aimed at establishing long-term accommodation centers, particularly focusing on providing specialized care for persons with disability and older persons, this project aimed to enhance the capacity and living conditions of the accommodation center.
The project involved a thorough renovation of the 4th floor of the building, resulting in an expansion that added 22 additional rooms.

Furthermore, renovations were carried out on a module of toilets on the 1st floor to further improve the center's facilities. These enhancements are crucial steps towards providing better accommodation and support for vulnerable individuals, ensuring their well-being and comfort.

© UNHCR/Natalia Stelea

*After the completion of the renovation works in the accommodation center, a final round of cleaning was conducted to ensure that the newly refurbished spaces were pristine and ready for occupancy.*

3 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) Moldova 2023

UNHCR Moldova is grateful for the commitment towards refugees from the Moldovan authorities at all levels, other UN agencies, the private sector and civil society organisations.

Our work would not be possible without UNHCR's implementing partner ACTED, with whom we work hand in hand every day to improve the lives of refugees and those who warmly welcome them. Also, we are grateful for the Bahtalo Ker organisation for thier vital role in the design and implementation of the Otaci Public playground project. Thank you.

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From the People of Japan

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**More information:**
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