Feedback ≠ Participation:

Trust, transparency and communication with refugees from Ukraine

Information Ecosystem Assessment 2023 - 2024 | Moldova

Internews

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This research was commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Moldova to better understand how Ukrainian refugees and the host community in Moldova create, access and share information about the Ukrainian refugee response, with a specific focus on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) mechanisms.

This research uses Internews' Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) approach to understand the "health" of an information ecosystem, by investigating the availability of locally relevant and reliable information, the presence of mis- and disinformation and what information people are more likely to trust (for further details, see the methodology section below).

At Internews, we believe everyone deserves trustworthy information to make informed decisions about their lives and to enable actors to hold power to account. In nearly two decades on the front lines of humanitarian crises, Internews has seen how poor access to information can increase exposure to risk and derail a response effort, costing time, resources and the dignity of crisis-affected communities.

Internews is a thought leader in the field of information access in humanitarian contexts and has completed more than 50 IEAs in 30 countries to date. As a founding member of the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) Network, we have contributed to the growing acceptance of information and communication as aid, and advocated for communities affected by crisis to access quality information and be allowed to actively participate in humanitarian programming cycles, and the importance of gathering reliable data and information for the development of evidence-based approaches to Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) activities.

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Co-design of research tools, data collection and analysis were conducted by the sociological company iData – www.idata.md.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAP Accountability to Affected Population

CEA Community Engagement and Accountability

CFM Complaints and Feedback Mechanism/s

CSO Civil society organisation

Dopomoha A platform run by volunteer network Moldova for Peace where refugees and Moldovans can request material aid including food, clothing and hygiene items.

Dopomoga A government-supported website which provides information about services and updates relevant to the refugee response in Moldova.

FGD Focus Group Discussion

Green Line The "Green Line", or Refugee Response Green Line, is a telephone service provided by UNHCR in collaboration with the Republic of Moldova which people can call to ask questions about available services.

IEA Information Ecosystem Assessment. Research to understand how information is generated and shared in a particular environment.

IOM International Organisation for Migration

KII Key Informant Interview

Local Authorities Moldovan local government offices, such as: mayorties, local councils and related governmental institutions.

Moldovans People from the Host community residing in Moldova on a permanent basis, regardless of their nationality or belonging to an ethnic group.

NGO Non-governmental Organisation

PA Participatory Assessment

RAC Refugee Accommodation Centre. Centres established to temporarily house displaced people arriving from Ukraine to Moldova.

RCF Refugee Coordination Forum. The RCF is a joint coordination body headed by the Republic of Moldova and the UNHCR which coordinates activities and in the refugee response in Moldova.

Refugees According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is defined as someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war, or violence. In this report, 'refugees' refers to refugees from Ukraine.

RRP Regional Refugee Response Plan

SMS Short Message Service

TPS Temporary Protection Status

UN United Nations

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, officially referred to as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Executive Summary

Findings from this assessment affirm what humanitarians know, but what our systems continue to often overlook - that refugees and host communities - not humanitarians or government - are at the centre of their own information ecosystems.

Refugees have the inherent right to safely access information, enabling them to connect with essential services, make well-informed decisions for their well-being, and hold service providers accountable. This report marks the second assessment of the information ecosystem for refugees from Ukraine residing in Moldova. The frequency of these assessments (released in March 2023 and now March 2024) has resulted in important insights into changing needs amongst an integrating population. It also provides the opportunity for those supporting refugees and host communities to examine more deeply their two-way communication mechanisms, and in doing so work towards accountability to affected people. As with the changes in their day to day life, the information and communication needs amongst refugees from Ukraine are not static, nor are the ways they choose to access and share information. Refugees and host communities exercise this centrality more and more as they become integrated, and feel more at ease existing together in Moldovan society. As refugees from Ukraine shift from working out how to meet their immediate needs through emergency support, to focusing on the priorities of their lives outside of the aid-sector, humanitarian agencies and the Moldovan government mirror this shift through a refugee response plan firmly designed around support from the humanitarian-development nexus and changing support for long-term stays. With these changes comes a shift in: information priorities to navigate new systems; trust in information sources; how people interact with those sources; and in how they interact with each other for information sharing.

Overall, since the first Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) in 2022-23 in Moldova, it is evident that refugees now find it easier to access information about support services. Progress on recommendations from the previous IEA can be found in Annex 1 of this report. Refugees and host communities continue to opt to seek and share information amongst themselves, in increasingly smaller, local groups. However, it is also clear they frequently identify reliable primary sources for information and verification, which they then share across community-based social media. Local authorities, humanitarian agencies and civil society organisations have prioritised accessibility and diversification of information channels for refugees and host communities in the past year. However, there are still groups who have less access to information and two-way communication, such as people who have limited internet access or use (some older people and people with disabilities) and people who are unwilling or afraid to engage in official services (geographically remote and / or people who fear reprisal or return to Ukraine for not complying with legal requirements).

As is often the case, trust in information sources is not one-dimensional. Communities generally feel confident that the majority of information coming from official sources (such as government or humanitarian responders) is accurate and relevant for them. And for younger people in particular, they are more likely to go directly to these sources for information (rather than family or friends). However, trust in information providers does diminish when refugees perceive a lack of transparency in the information made available. When decision makers do not take the time to explain how decisions are made, the information vacuum breeds suspicion, misinformation and erodes trust. For example, changes to legal status and - as a result - access to cash programmes for refugees over the past six months resulted in significant circulation of rumours, misinformation and angst. Though government and humanitarian agencies demonstrated strong coordination of messages and accessible forums for support and questions (online and offline), a persistent perceived lack of transparency at times undermined those efforts.

A lack of recognised agency is another element impacting this information ecosystem. Refugees do not feel their concerns are heard or that their suggestions are taken on board by decision makers. This general sense of a lack of agency impacts their willingness to participate in official feedback systems, choosing instead to discuss and share information amongst themselves in private groups. This means humanitarians, civil society and government miss out on insights and perspectives of communities, and opportunities to better understand the changing needs and capacities of refugees and host communities. Humanitarian agencies are spending a lot of time and energy running complaints and feedback mechanisms that the community as a whole does not see as an effective tool to improve their outcomes in this response.

To understand better the shifting needs of refugees from Ukraine and host communities, humanitarians, CSOs and government need to enhance community engagement efforts - preferably face-to-face and discussion based so as to proactively invite participation in decision making. They also need to tell communities what difference their input is making, across ongoing sectoral assessments and through their participation in accountability and participation mechanisms. Information providers need to be more transparent by explaining what they are capable of doing for people and how eligibility requirements are decided on. They need to provide more information about their intentions (within a long-term, integrated service context) and information on how they operate (for example, what happens with people's data, how they are funded).

Trust requires transparency, transparency comes from engagement, and engagement is more than complaints and feedback mechanisms.

This report provides nine summary findings and seven recommendations across five subject areas: (Section 1) Information needs and access, (2) Trust in information sources, (3) Accountability to affected populations mechanisms, (4) Information-related risks, and (5) Perceptions in Moldovan media.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Feedback ≠ Participation

Humanitarian complaints and feedback mechanisms are accessible and coordinated, but there is low participation of communities in these mechanisms. Refugees from Ukraine are generally very grateful for the support they receive and are trying to integrate more with Moldovan life and services. So, even when there are issues with services, they find the idea of participating in complaints and feedback mechanisms in conflict with that. In this sense, complaint and feedback mechanisms are not fulfilling their purpose across the full spectrum of community participation. More **open, discussion-based opportunities to provide input and participation** - such as Participatory Assessments and in-person community forums - are well suited to refugee populations who are interested in discussing longer term needs amongst the push for their integration into Moldovan society.

Preference for community-run information spaces

The preferred and most common channel for refugees and host communities seeking, accessing and sharing information are community-run social media groups - including for newly arrived refugees and refugees going back and forth between Moldova and other locations. **Communities prefer small, hyper-local groups with known members**, but also participate in larger groups with wider geographical focus. There is evidence of good practices in place in these groups to communally verify information shared and identify scams and misinformation, including sharing warnings and encouraging verification through official sources (such as hotlines).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Does my feedback make a difference?

Outside of community-run social media groups, communities feel there is a **low recognition of their agency** in the ways they engage with authorities and humanitarians about refugee services and issues, which impacts trust levels in them as information sources. Refugees feel they have little say in how services are designed and delivered, which acts as a **disincentive to share feedback**, thoughts and ideas. Generally, communities do not perceive that providing input on the services they receive will make a difference and while humanitarian organisations have strong referral practices and responses to individuals making complaints or asking questions, general feedback loops back to communities in response to their inputs (via needs assessments, complaints and feedback, social listening) are not as evident. In looking at multidimensional measures of trust (see the Internews Trust Analytical Framework), this dynamic contributes to overall lower levels of trust.

Low transparency = low trust

While perceived transparency around the response has improved slightly, refugees from Ukraine and host communities seek **more transparency** from authorities and humanitarian agencies surrounding aid decision-making. High risk misinformation narratives persist about changing eligibility for services, and whether authorities can be trusted with refugee's information. There is low recognition or understanding within communities about which organisations are behind the information shared. Confusion or inconsistencies in information between sources is sometimes perceived to be intended as deceptive for communities.

Inter-agency sharing of feedback and complaints data

Established methods to share complaints and feedback data *between* humanitarian agencies, civil society and government are not evident, and it is not often clear to staff and volunteers (beyond staff focused on and leading AAP efforts) how feedback informs practice. This **lack of standardised processes for sharing and using feedback** and complaints data also impacts coordination of feedback loops back to communities.

AAP in integration efforts

Government complaints and feedback mechanisms are not accessible or known to communities, and **communities perceive the central government as not being interested in feedback**. Local authorities are perceived to be well-connected to communities and open to complaints and feedback. The active and visible presence of government - both national and local - within AAP mechanisms will be essential in integration and social cohesion efforts.

More capacity for two-way communication and tailored information

In terms of perceived accuracy, relevance and accessibility of information, key information sources (humanitarian and government) have established good levels of trust amongst refugee and host populations. However, two-way information sources such as hotlines that provide individually tailored information can be overwhelmed at key times - particularly when legislation or eligibility for services changes are causing angst or confusion amongst refugees.

Information is easier to find, but not for everyone

Information is more diverse, more specific and helpful, and easier to find now than at the beginning of the response. Government and humanitarian **information campaigns are more coordinated and refined**, and have been particularly successful in face-to-face, proactive engagement efforts like Temporary Protection fairs. Additionally, refugees and host communities promote and share helpful information and sources amongst themselves, and are generally more settled and integrated in their information seeking and sharing practices. Significant challenges in accessing information still exist for certain refugee groups, particularly those who do not or cannot engage online (older people, people in remote areas and people who fear officially registering for support).

Media coverage benefits from stronger links to humanitarians and civil society

Information supplied by Government and humanitarian agencies dominates the Moldovan media's reporting on refugee issues. Information is often directly copied from statements and press releases and does not appear to be influenced by editorial processes. Quality coverage of refugee issues occurred mostly through support from grants for media and campaigns in partnership with the anti-corruption body. However, **journalists are eager for more links** with expert sources beyond government, and for workshops to link humanitarians and media (especially in regional areas, as a lot of those links so far have been focused in Chisinau).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Create and build on participatory opportunities for refugees from Ukraine and host communities to engage in service design, decision making and sharing of complaints and feedback. Opportunities need to be reliably regular, localised, accessible to different groups (online and in-person options) and could benefit from combining refugees and host communities for some participation methods. Reporting back to communities on changes made a result of their participation is essential.

2

Develop or strengthen networks of community members (refugees and host communities) who can share information from trusted sources through community networks in social media. Provide digital literacy training and support to guide safe practices across online networks of people from Ukraine, with special emphasis on including older people to encourage safe participation and access to information online.

3

Prioritise and encourage sharing of social media cards and multimedia content through community-run social media. Develop content for and with those groups in diverse and accessible formats such as short audio and video recordings, in Ukrainian, Russian and Romanian. Include clear links to access more information (online, by phone, face to face). Use these mechanisms for planned information campaigns, but also for surges in information needs, for example when social listening efforts identify circulating misinformation or disinformation narratives.

4

Continue to increase transparency to reduce misinformation and build trust.

- Provide clear information to refugees and host communities about how decisions are made and how aid is funded and allocated. Clarify publicly where specific vulnerability criteria are being used to determine eligibility for services.
- Plan and resource sharing of findings back to communities from the inception of assessments or research. Use online community networks and methods mentioned in Recommendation 2 for feedback loops, as well as dedicated and tailored engagement.
- Communicate and be transparent about long term plans (including challenges) for refugees and for host communities
- Ensure information is shared in two-way channels where people can ask questions and clarify information. Continue capacity of monitors to respond promptly, with actionable information to questions and comments on social media and messaging forums and continue hosting social media 'live' sessions to connect refugees with decision makers in the response.
- Continue to invest in and build on existing social listening and rumour tracking activities to actively respond to misinformation circulating about the aid response, including existing misperceptions about the funding, distribution and priorities of aid. Use identified rumours as an early warning system for community information gaps, misperceptions, hopes and fears.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5

Prior to the announcement of changes to legislation, eligibility for services, plan for surge capacity of key, two-way information sources (such as phone-lines, and in community centres) and encourage refugees and host communities to use those channels to clarify information. Work with AAP partners to map phone-lines, assess capacity and integrate or further resource hotlines as needed.

6

Create and support efforts to better link media and refugees / refugee services, including around host community concerns. The media can be a critical tool to support social cohesion efforts and shape perceptions of refugees and the response overall, and should be used to respond to host community questions and concerns about the response, including how response funds are spent and why they are distributed as they are. Efforts could include:

- Conduct roundtable sessions with media outlets and information providers, particularly outside of Chisinau, to increase connections and collaborations between humanitarian, government and media around refugee response issues.
- Collaboratively develop a database of expert sources for media to contact for reports and interviews and allow space for a shared understanding of priorities, processes, and limitations.
- Consider supporting/creating refugee-led media content through dedicated channels that prioritise refugee information priorities and are able to advocate for the needs of the refugee population.
- Continue to invest in and build on existing social listening and rumour tracking activities to actively respond to misinformation circulating about the aid response, including existing misperceptions about the funding, distribution and priorities of aid. Use identified rumours as an early warning system for community information gaps, misperceptions, hopes and fears.

7

Conduct an awareness campaign (utilising two-way and discussion forum mechanisms) about data privacy, to inform refugees from Ukraine how and why their personal data is stored and managed by authorities. Address misinformation that causes fear of sharing identity details with government or humanitarians, for example, fear of registering due to concerns about being sent back to Ukraine.

For progress related to the 2022-23 Information Ecosystem Assessment Recommendations, see Annex 1.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses the Information Ecosystem Assessment (IEA) as the framework to understand the information supply, demand, and dynamics in this environment.

What is an Information Ecosystem Assessment?
IEAs are tools developed by Internews to understand the varied sources, influences and unique local characteristics of how communities produce and consume information. The ways in which people interact with information are what makes information ecosystems dynamic and diverse.

The IEA assesses the "health" of an information ecosystem by investigating three main elements:

- **Information supply:** Suppliers, creators or broadcasters of information;
- **Information demand:** The information needs and preferences of the community;
- **Information dynamics:** Dynamics such as the trust between people and information providers and the traction of mis- and disinformation circulating in the community

In a humanitarian context, information is a vital form of aid. Timely, relevant and accessible information helps affected citizens to understand the situation, make informed decisions and gain access to life-saving aid. In a healthy information ecosystem, people have the skills to assess the quality of the information they receive (this is defined as information literacy). They also know where they can request further information or submit complaints or feedback.

The IEA is a key approach in assessments related to Accountability to Affected Populations, which aims to ensure that aid providers can listen to and act on people's needs, suggested solutions and feedback and complaints, to ensure people receiving assistance play a leading role in the decisions that affect them. Read more about the Information Ecosystem Approach.

Location
Data was collected in four locations in the Republic of Moldova (hereafter referred to as Moldova): Chișinău, Bălți, Cahul and Comrat. These locations were chosen because of their popularity among refugees as destinations for mid- to longer-term settlement. Data was collected from the towns of Chișinău and Bălți, and collection in Cahul and Comrat also incorporated some surrounding villages.

Duration
This research was conducted from November 2023 to February 2024. Data collection took place between December 2023 to January 2024.

Research methods
A mixed methods approach was adopted for this assessment, which included four methods of data collection.

(1) **Desk research and analysis**: Desk research was undertaken to analyse existing reports and assessments, social listening data, action plans and other documents relevant to information access for refugees and citizens in Moldova.

(2) **Focus group discussions (FGDs)**: A total of 25 FGDs were held: 24 face-to-face FGDs (in-person) and 1 FGDs online in Chișinău with a total of 225 participants. Out of them, 14 FGDs covered different groups of refugees (women with children, men, young refugees, older people, refugees who arrived within the past 6 months, people with disabilities, and Roma people), 6 FGDs were held with Host community members, and in 5 FGDs participated Humanitarian staff and volunteers.

(3) **Key informant interviews (KIIs)**: 18 semi-structured KIIs were conducted online and in-person with government officials, local and international relief agencies, media officials and staff from other information sources and refugee services.

(4) **Quantitative survey**: A quantitative, face-to-face survey was conducted with Ukrainian refugees (388 respondents in total) and Moldovan citizens (195 re-

spondents). Data was collected by Ukrainian and Moldovan data collectors. For the refugee survey sample a margin of error is ±5 percent for a sample of 388 questionnaires. For the Host community survey sample a margin of error is ±7 percent for a sample of 195 questionnaires. It means that the reported survey results have an associated uncertainty or potential variation of up to 7 or 5 percentage points in either direction, depending on the sample. See more in 'Challenges and Limitations' for how this report approaches this.

(5) **Media analysis**: Media analysis reviewed the quality and frequency of Moldovan media content related to refugees from Ukraine and host communities. The analysis looked at the degree to which media content provides information that supports audiences to make decisions and access services, and the degree to which media content is useful and actionable for refugees and host communities. The media analysis focused on the content related to refugees from Ukraine published between July and December 2023 from 15 media outlets. Of these outlets, 10 are based in the central region, including Chisinau; 3 are based in the southern region; and 2 are based in the northern region. 69 percent of the content analysed was in Romanian language, while 31 percent was in Russian. Among the analysed content, 45 percent were online articles, 27 percent were radio segments (podcasted online), 15 percent were TV segments (viewed online), and 12 percent were print articles reproduced online. To facilitate the review process, an analysis matrix was developed based on the key questions above, guiding the analyst in their evaluation. A Media Analyst reviewed the content based on a quality matrix and conducted KIIs with leadership at media outlets to understand the capacity and context behind the editorial decisions.

(6) **Online social listening analysis**: Social listening as part of this assessment focused on analysing interactions between online group members and (where relevant) moderators, to understand intra-group information-seeking and sharing practices. Dynamics monitored include sentiments about transparency, levels of confusion in information, satisfaction with responses, and digital literacy concerning misinformation and disinformation management. Internews utilised its established Social Media Influence Mapping methodology to identify relevant channels for monitoring. Two online social listening monitors reviewed a total of 209 posts or comments from 13 online groups/pages. Data collection took place between December 2023 and January 2024, and platforms monitored included Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and Viber. Out of the 209 posts, 70 were found in official pages/groups managed by humanitarian or community organisations, while 139 were from private community groups. The majority of posts analysed, within accessible groups, were written in Russian (95 percent), with other languages including Romanian, English, and Ukrainian. Ethical and data responsibility considerations governed the collection and analysis of online data, ensuring privacy protection and proper handling of any links to social media posts identifying individuals.

Sampling

The IEA approach does not intend to be a statistically representative sample of the refugees from Ukraine residing in Moldova, or host communities across Moldova. However, we do aim for our research to reflect the diversity of the community by ensuring that data collection covers relevant sub-groups of the community according to their age, gender, location and vulnerability group.

To mitigate the risk of disproportionately reflecting certain perspectives (for instance by only incorporating young women) we used a quota sampling method for the survey with subgroups weighted by approximations from past research and publicly available reports. The survey with Moldovan participants covered both Moldovans involved in hosting refugees and others who were not supporting the response, to provide more balanced insights. Around 77 percent of refugee participants in the survey were women. Across all data collection, no personal or identifying information was collected. Data collected in FGDs, KIIs and surveys is disaggregated by age, gender and other research-specific variables. All participants of FGDs, KIIs and surveys gave free and informed consent to participate in this activity.

The age of refugees (survey) ranged from 18 to 88 years old, with an average of 46 years old. Distribution of age groups: 18-29 years old (12 percent), 30-44 years old (46 percent), 45-59 years old (20 percent) and 60+ years old (23 percent). Refugees interviewed in the survey were mostly from Chisinau (46 percent), the others were from Comrat, Cahul and Balti, representing 17-18 percent of each locality sub-sample.

Research challenges and limitations

Data collection constraints: The researchers and data collectors faced several difficulties in accessing up-to-date information about numbers of refugees in Refugee Accommodation Centers, due to their closures. It was challenging to identify the locations of refugees living in private accommodation. Another challenge was related to the discrepancies between the official number of ref-

ugees and the actual number housed in the respective centres, with some refugees only being included on lists (usually there are less refugees than stated in the official reports). The limited timeframe of the overall assessment also made it challenging to sequence data collection in a way that allowed for FGDs and KIIs to validate or dig deeper into findings from quantitative surveys. Therefore, discrepancies between FGD and survey findings were not able to be interrogated.

Participant Engagement: There was significant hesitation or refusal of refugees to participate in surveys and focus groups, due to their past experience with media requesting interviews, and previous surveys conducted for needs assessments and research. We also noticed a higher degree of refusal to participate in the survey of the host community members. Community members felt they had not seen any benefit or positive change as a result of their participation in the past, so did not want to spend time participating again.

Conditions in Moldova may have impacted feedback: Data was collected amidst high levels of inflation and increasing costs across Moldova, and in the leadup to the Christmas season. Winter holidays led to decreased availability of refugees for participation in surveys, as many chose to visit relatives or were otherwise occupied. Although there is no evidence that such events significantly impacted the data collected, such conditions serve as an important backdrop for the feedback provided in this report.

Location: Data was collected within four localities (Chisinau, Balti, Cahul and Comrat). While the chosen localities provide a good spread of geographical representation across Moldova (South, North and Center) the results might not be representative at nationwide scale. As an example, inhabitants of Balti and Comrat are mainly Russian speakers, thus 57 percent of host community survey respondents prefer Russian language when accessing government or humanitarian services in Moldova. But this proportion does not represent the entire population of Moldova, so these data should be treated carefully.

Statistical significance: In some cases findings that would typically not be deemed to be statistically significant (that is, are lower than 5 percent) are included in the findings. This is usually in cases where the initial finding being compared to (for example, in the 2022-23 IEA) was already a low percentage (for example, 10 percent or lower), and a 5 percent change therefore shows a relatively significant shift within that finding. Findings of lower than 5 percent are considered in this report to highlight potential tendencies, but are not intended to represent statistically significant findings.

Research scope

This research did not aim to assess service quality. However, in the process of the research, people gave feedback regarding the quality of services and described their interactions with service providers. Although this is adjacent to the scope of this report, such feedback has been shared with the appropriate governmental and relief agencies for actions.

FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Refugees from Ukraine and Moldovans in host communities have experienced significant changes over the past year, which impacts how they seek, access, create and share information.

Approximately 115,000 refugees from Ukraine remain in Moldova, forming around 4 percent of the total population[1]. As of the end of December, 35,950 of them have applied for temporary protection (TPS) status. In addition to TPS holders, more than 8,000 refugees from Ukraine have regularised their stay in the Republic of Moldova either through the asylum system, work and education permits or family ties. In December 2023, UNHCR announced that refugees from Ukraine receiving cash assistance would need legal status in Moldova in order to continue receiving financial support from March, 2024.

70 percent of the total refugee population requires support to cover their basic needs, with approximately 15 percent classified as extremely vulnerable due to multiple layers of vulnerabilities within their households[2]. The stressors of being separated from loved ones and without traditional support systems, lack of clarity on when / if they can return home, and challenges of adjusting to new systems and ways of life can impact mental health and psychosocial well-being. Information disorders (such as lack of access to information, misinformation and disinformation, and lack of opportunities to feel listened to by decision makers) impact psychosocial well-being, and are also further disordered as a result of poor psychosocial well-being. Overall, refugees from Ukraine and Moldovans are feeling a shift from emergency response to meet the basic needs of refugees, to a more integrated, long-term support system. Though there are exceptions to this, by and large, refugees in focus group discussions expressed a general sense of being more familiar with Moldovan systems and their local environment.

The 2024 Refugee Response Plan mirrors and supports this by highlighting a Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus agenda, which focuses on the sustainable inclusion of refugees into national systems, development programming, strengthened social cohesion, evidence-based programming and localization of interventions. The updated priorities of the plan for 2024 emphasise access to legal status, protection and rights (Strategic Objective 1) and social cohesion between refugee and host communities (Strategic Objective 4), while still ensuring specific needs are met through targeted support and assistance (Strategic Objective 2).

Refugees from Ukraine are also slightly more dispersed and are more transient than in 2022. Closures of Refugee Accommodation Centres (RACs) mean less people are concentrated within those accommodations, and most are settling into various private accommodations. The move away from RACs means there is a need for places of gathering for refugees, and integration efforts have led to religious organisation hubs, churches, and local civil society organisations centres becoming meeting points.

Refugees from Ukraine travelled between Ukraine and Moldova, or other surrounding countries and Moldova more in 2023. When surveyed at border crossings in 2023, 85 percent of people from Moldova had crossed back to Ukraine two or more times prior to the survey.[3] Around half the respondents surveyed by IOM were travelling to Ukraine for a short visit, and 25 percent were unsure about the length of the visit. Around a third of the respondents cited visiting family members as their main reason for returning, and other motives included returning to collect or renew their documents, to check their properties, to access healthcare, and to help family and friends. Of those surveyed for this assessment, 37 percent said they have moved back and forth from Moldova and another country, with 85 percent of those moving between Ukraine and Moldova, and other common movements including Romania, Poland, France and Czech Republic.

In November, 2023, Moldova held local elections - the first in a series of elections to be held in quick succession, with presidential elections happening in 2024 and

[1] Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation in Moldova, 2024
[2] Basic Needs, Socio-Economic Vulnerability and Multipurpose Cash Assistance Moldova Refugee Response Plan, October 2023
[3] International Organization for Migration (IOM), DTM Moldova, Crossing Back Surveys with Ukrainian Nationals, November 2023.

parliamentary elections in 2025. With the elections comes circulation of information about government policies related to refugees, Russia and Moldova's pathway to joining the European Union - all of which have an impact on refugees from Ukraine and the Moldovan communities that host them. Prior to the local elections, Moldovan authorities accused Russia of attempting to influence the elections through illegal campaign financing, vote buying and disinformation[4], which circulated amongst dis and misinformation related to Ukrainian refugee complicity in Russian interference in Moldova[5]. While refugees have overall been welcomed and supported in Moldova, there has been a growing perception of social tensions[6] which can impact how people seek and share information, especially the degree to which they do so in an integrated way through Moldovan channels.

For Moldovan people, most surveyed for this assessment do not perceive a significant change in their day to day situation in the past six months. The majority (60 percent) see little change in their financial position, socialising, health care access, welfare support, security situation, access to basic supplies, employment, leisure activities, housing, education and ability to express themselves in public forums. To different degrees, some Moldovans saw improvements in some of these areas (13 percent on average). An average of 12 percent feel they are experiencing changes for the worse, with financial position being the area where people most feel worse off (at 22 percent). Moldovans are generally happy that Ukrainian refugees came to Moldova and can receive help here (60 percent have a positive attitude toward refugees). However, 20 percent of Moldovans think the refugees should not stay long-term in Moldova. There is a minority (9 percent of interviewed Moldovans) who had and still have a negative attitude toward refugees. Respondent's opinions about Ukrainian refugees are formed mainly from direct experience (54 percent) and from mass-media (45 percent). Social media also plays a role, with 20 percent forming an opinion about refugees from online forums and chat groups.

It is in this changed context that this Information Ecosystem Assessment was conducted. Findings from a similar assessment in 2022/23 provide important background and comparison for many aspects of this report, and are referred to in some cases. Shaped by the changed context outlined above, this assessment focuses on changes to or new information needs, gaps and barriers. Factors that are not subject to significant or relevant change, such as some information landscape or demographic factors have not been covered again in this report. This report also attempts to dig deeper into components of the information ecosystem that are particularly evolving in relation to Moldova's support for refugees, and / or are relevant to longer-term supports, nexus programming and social cohesion - including Accountability to Affected Populations mechanisms and trust in information.

This assessment primarily covered Chisinau, Balti, Comrat and Cahul (where FGDs and surveys took place), however input from other geographical areas are also included via data collected through online social listening in Moldova (not sub-national specific) and KIIs with actors who work nationally.

Figure 1. Changes in host community perceptions of refugees (2023/24)

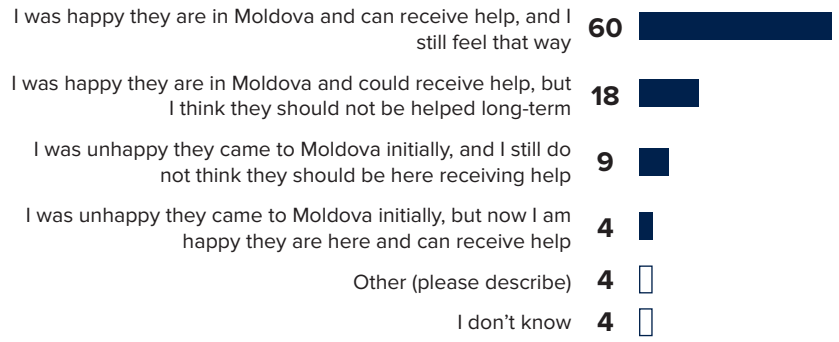
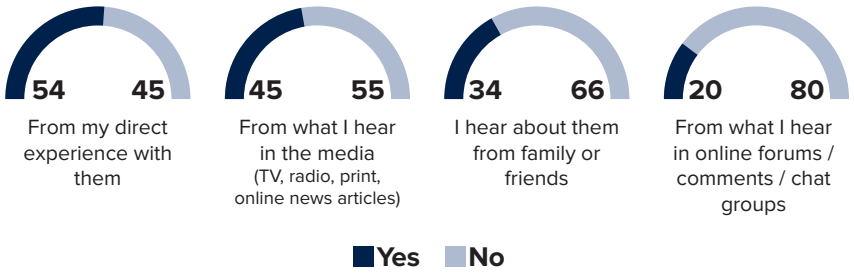


Figure 2. How do host community form opinions on refugees?



[4] Volintiru, C and Plișca, L. London School of Economics Blog, What we learned from Moldova's local elections, November 2023.
[5] Cowlrick, E. Internews, One Year Later: Online Discourse in Moldova about Ukrainian Refugees, February 2023
[6] Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation in Moldova, 2024

Section 1: Information needs and access

INFORMATION ACCESS

Ease of access

When asked if refugees find it easier or more challenging to find the information they need day-to-day, compared to when they first arrived in Moldova, most refugee survey respondents (69 percent) across all locations said it has become easier to access the information they need compared to when they first arrived. This is based on a sample of refugees which includes 73 percent who have been in Moldova more than six months, 27 percent who have been in Moldova less than 6 months, and 37 percent who regularly go back and forth between Moldova and another country (more details below). In early 2023, 60 percent of Ukrainian refugee IEA survey respondents said they did not face issues accessing the information they need. Therefore, based on two years of surveys on information access related to refugee services, we see a generally favourable opinion of information access amongst refugees, and that the majority of respondents see access as tending to improve rather than worsen.

For the refugees based in Balti and Cahul it has become easier to access the information they need, compared to the first days or weeks of arrival in Moldova (79 percent for Balti, and 71 percent for Cahul). Refugees residing in Chisinau have found it slightly easier from their first arrival to access the information they need (68 percent). Comrat rates slightly higher than the other locations in terms of a perception that information access has worsened over time, but overall just 10 percent of refugees surveyed in Comrat feel this way.

Figure 3. Changes in access to information, refugees (2023/24)

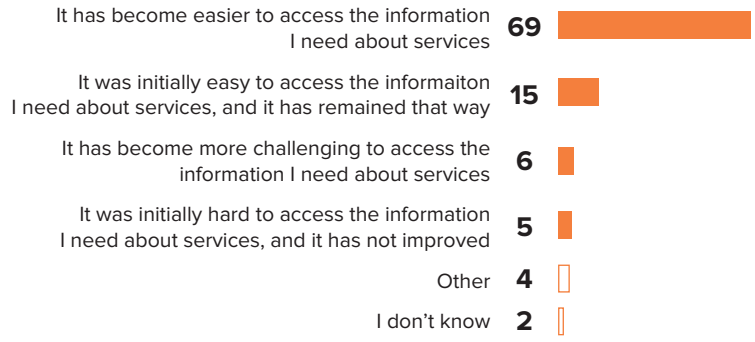
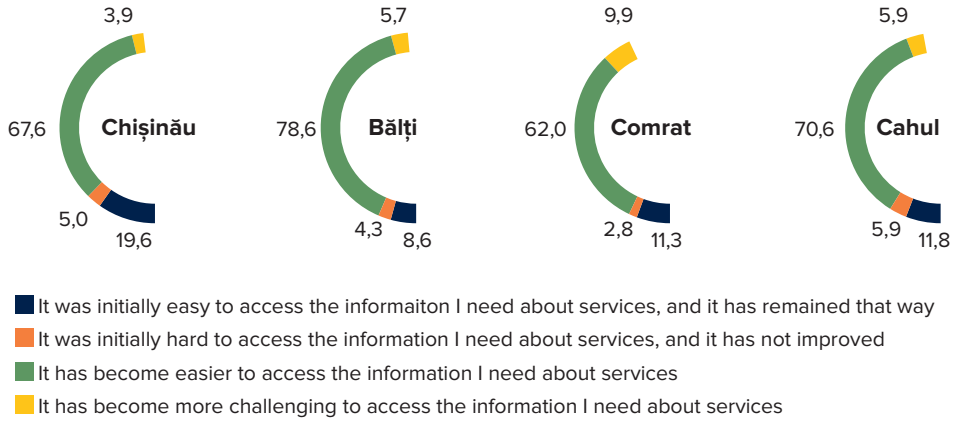


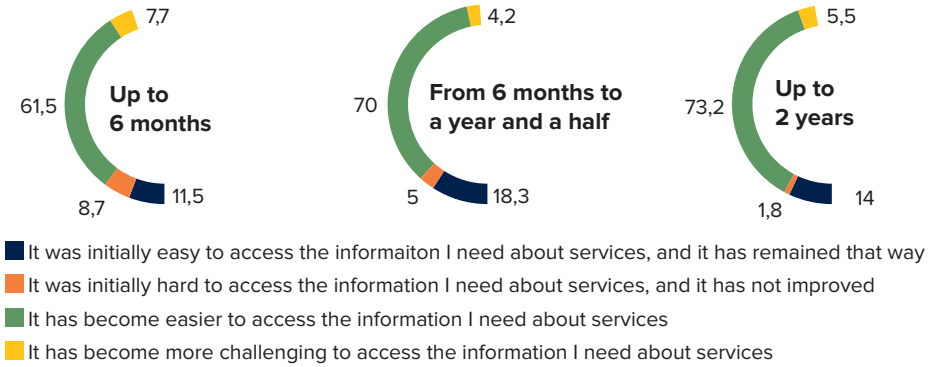
Figure 4. Access to information by region, refugees (2023/24)



Ease of accessing information is somewhat impacted by refugee's length of stay in Moldova, with information access tending to improve with time. Of the refugees surveyed, 62 percent of newly arrived refugees (less than 6 months) indicated improved information access, compared to 73 percent of refugee respondents who have been in Moldova for 1 year and a half or more. Those who have been in Moldova for more than 6 months say they have access to more relevant and detailed information compared to the first weeks or months of their arrival. In focus group discussions, refugees indicated psychosocial stress of the war and transiting to Moldova meant they needed rest, but after a couple of weeks they would start to look for the information they needed. They noted

a feeling of being able to better navigate information sources, and the ability to know what information they need and where to find it (including which specific organisation to go to with particular queries / aid).

Figure 5. Access to information by duration of stay in Moldova, refugees (2023/24)



Recent arrivals (within the last 6 months) to Moldova from Ukraine frequently mentioned accessing information about services for refugees in Moldova online, before arriving in-country. This is supported by IOM surveys at border points, which found that 60 percent of people crossing into Moldova from Ukraine in 2023 looked for aid and support on social media[7]. Agencies supporting newly arrived refugees said many new arrivals are well-informed already, having researched conditions, services and legal status in Moldova before arriving, and having connected through social media groups of other Ukrainian refugees who are currently or were previously in Moldova. In addition to primarily relying on social media groups, refugees newly arriving in 2023 also sought information through RACs, community centres and official websites such as dopomoga.gov.md. Newly arrived refugees, more than those who have been in Moldova for more than six months, indicated they need more information regarding the UNHCR cash program (67 percent versus 56 percent) and psychosocial and mental health support (78 percent versus 65 percent).

For the refugees moving back and forth across borders, access to information is also similarly easy. However those who moved back and forth were more likely to answer that the access to information was easy for them as from the very beginning (19 percent versus 12 percent who have stayed since their arrival). The pattern of information habits for the refugees moving back and forth and those staying in the country does not differ a lot, and refugees indicate that they access the same (online) information sources about Moldova when they are out of the country. However, we observe that those staying in the country are more likely to use local authorities as an information source (19 percent), compared to the refugees moving back and forth (only 7 percent), indicating that those who stay are more likely to develop trust in and ties with local networks and authorities.

Online environments

Online groups are consistently referred to as the most used channel for information, but the increase in users has led to a surge in spam, advertisements, and scams. This abundance of irrelevant content makes finding crucial information challenging, as new arrivals still learn how to discern the relevant information. FGD participants said navigating through the vast amount of data in the online groups they are part of remains a time-consuming task, and spoke of constantly needing to monitor the groups in order to avoid missing out on essential assistance opportunities.

> *There's a lot of spam, scammers, and advertisements now. If you don't check it for several hours, there will already be 500-700 messages.*
>
> *[Chisinau, Refugee recently arrived, Woman, December 2023]*

Young people's access to information

Young refugees from Ukraine show a clear preference for online and primary sources, and describe effective ways of navigating channels and verifying information. They regularly use the official humanitarian and/or government pages on social media and messaging apps (Viber, Telegram), and indicate a preference for these official groups over community-run or private social media groups.

[7] IOM, DTM Moldova, Crossing Back Surveys with Ukrainian Nationals, November 2023.

> *For me personally, the information channel has expanded when I simply found out where to turn. You go and ask a new question. And these people, curators, organisations, volunteers, will answer you if they know this information. The same sources, like social networks, social groups and subgroups and various public organisations are also open. You just need to dedicate time to it, sit and read. Not doing homework with children, sitting, reading, going to a group, and finding out information.*
>
> ***[Chisinau, youth refugees, December 2023]***

Survey data on the use of key online sources (such as the UNHCR website and the Service Advisor site) indicates around 8 percent more young people aged 18-29 use these platforms regularly than older refugees. Young people from Ukraine refugees are less likely to connect with the Dopomoha / Moldova for Peace (only 11 percent of refugees age 18-29 use it regularly, compared to 25 percent age 45-59), though, based on FGDs this is likely because of less recognition of Moldova for Peace as an online platform, and confusion in the association between Dopomoha and Moldova for Peace. Younger people are also slightly less likely to use the refugee response Green Line, with 7 percent of refugees age 18-29 using it regularly, compared to 14 percent age 60+.

Moldovan people's access to information

For Moldovans living in areas with refugees from Ukraine, 50 percent of those interviewed feel very informed or have a good amount of information about the services and support related to the refugee response. This is a slight improvement to 2022, where 43 percent of Moldovans surveyed indicated they had enough information about the response. 67 percent of Moldovans surveyed indicated it is either *important* and *very important* to be informed regarding the refugee response, which is comparable with Moldovans surveyed in the 2022/23 IEA, where 63 percent had the same sentiments. Overall, this shows little improvement and closing of the gap between Moldovans who are keen to be informed, and those who feel they are (17 percent).

In Comrat, Moldovan host community discussion groups expressed feeling they are much less informed regarding the refugee response. They noted that a specific online channel had been set up for them to receive information, but noted there is very little information shared on there and little engagement.

Figure 6. Host communities: how much information do you have about refugee services?

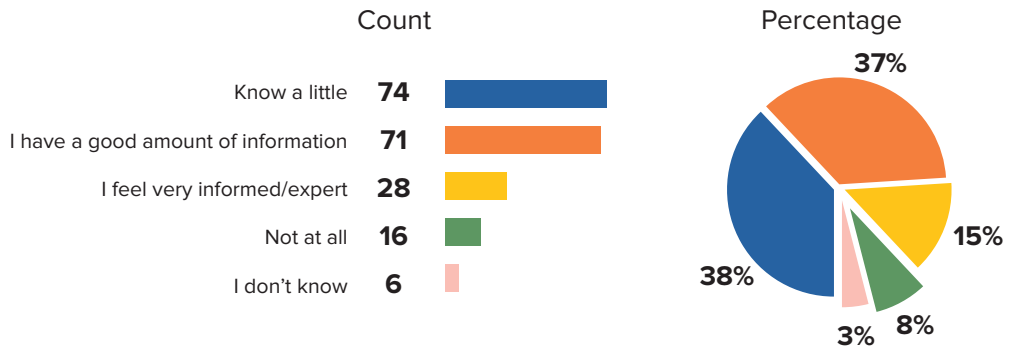
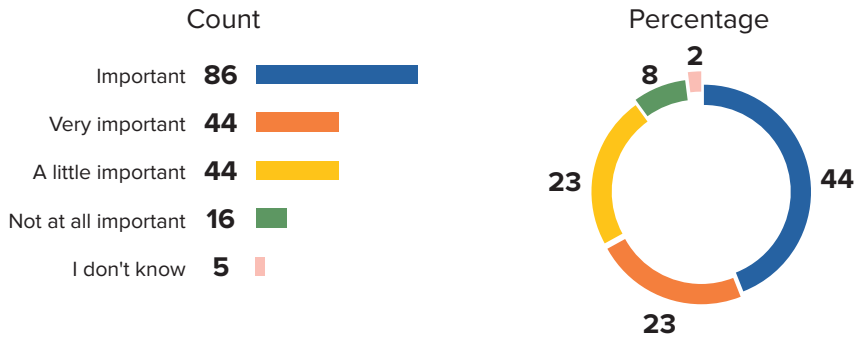


Figure 7. Host communities: How important is it to be informed about refugee services?



In focus group discussions, Moldovans in host communities indicated they feel the information is currently distributed in a more targeted way to the people who need it by organisations and local authorities. They also noticed an overall decrease in general information circulating than at the start of the refugee arrivals, including in the media and in the online spaces they participate in. Moldovans feel that refugees need less refugee-specific channels for information than when they first arrived, because they are starting to integrate into Moldovan society and can seek and share information through work places and education facilities. They also perceived that refugees from Ukraine are / will start to learn or adopt Romanian or locally preferred languages (such as Russian).

Language preferences

> *... those who remained have already integrated into our society, some have already received or want to receive citizenship. Some have settled down to live and work, they have also started to study the language so that they can coexist and live with us in our society.*
>
> ***[Chisinau, host community, Woman, December 2023]***

For 79 percent of refugee respondents, their preferred language is Russian, 19 percent - Ukrainian, and 1 percent - Romanian. When asked if they face challenges in using their preferred language to access information, on average, 51 percent of refugee respondents said they do not face challenges. However, this is less so in Balti (46 percent) and Comrat (34 percent). A small number of respondents indicated some challenges related to literacy, disability access, comprehension or lack of relevance (all under 7 percent). This represents a very slight decrease in challenges faced by refugees surveyed in the 2022/23 IEA, which found that around 10 percent of respondents faced language-based difficulties in accessing refugee-related information. However, two types of challenges (information not being provided in preferred language, and respondents not knowing they can access information and give feedback in preferred language) are faced by a significantly higher percentage of respondents in Comrat.

Figure 8. Challenges in accessing information using preferred language, refugees (2023/24)

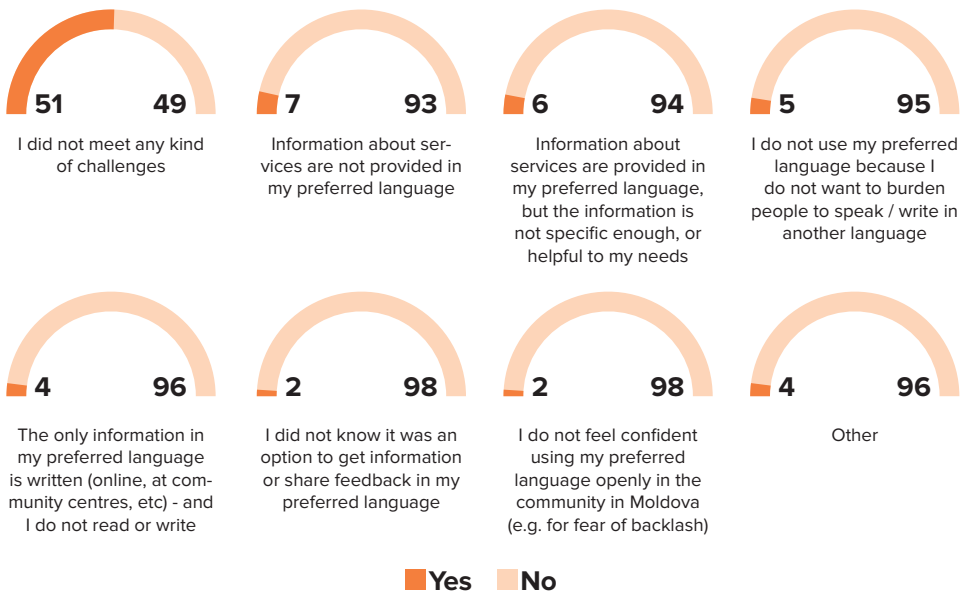
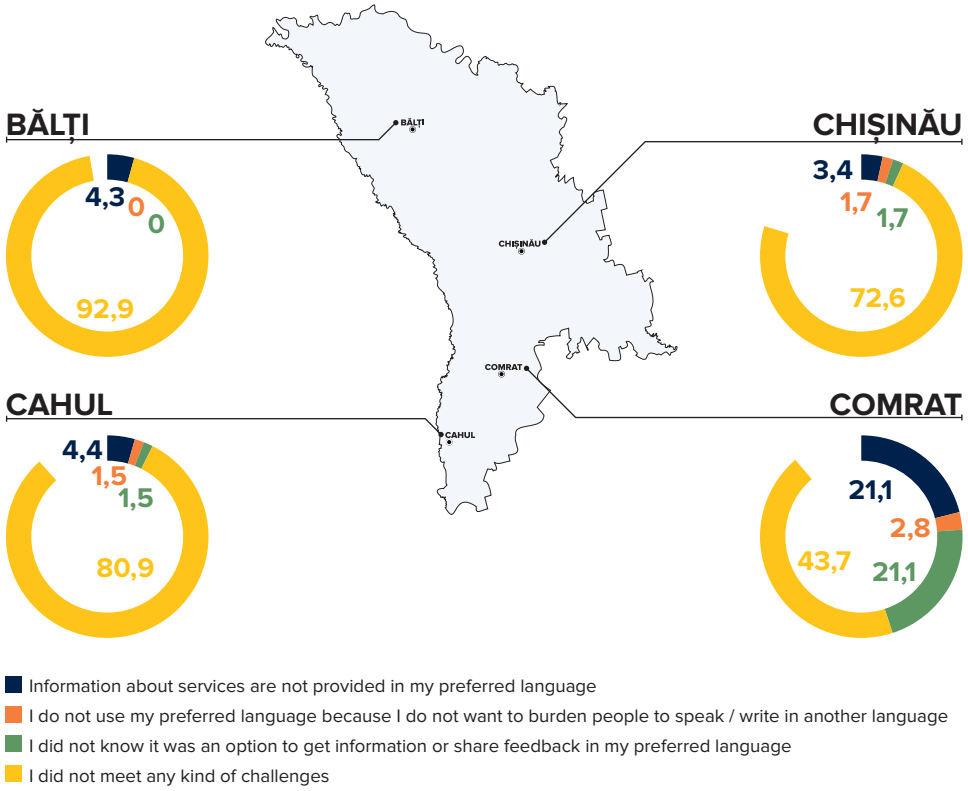


Figure 9. Challenges in accessing information using preferred language by regions, refugees (2023/24)

Do you face any challenges using your preferred language to access services, ask questions, give feedback or make complaints? (Yes, %, refugees, N=388)



In 2023 and onward, based on supports for refugees from Ukraine being increasingly based in Moldova's legal framework[8], it should be expected that refugees (with a 99 percent preference for either Russian or Ukrainian languag-

[8] 2024 Refugee Response Plan for the Ukraine Situation in Moldova

es) will face difficulties in accessing and understanding Moldovan legislative or policy documents that exist primarily in Romanian language. In focus group discussions, refugees noted difficulties in accessing what they referred to as 'official information', and complained that Moldovan government information is not translated into Russian or Ukrainian.

> *We still have not translated into Russian, much less into Ukrainian, the protocol from the Ministry of Health, which contains a list of medical services available to holders of temporary protection and so on."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, Woman refugee from Odessa, December 2023]***

INFORMATION NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Refugees

Longer term and integration needs mean people have a greater desire to engage in meaningful conversations, share their concerns, have someone understand their unique context, and provide valuable advice. Service providers are aware of this and are trying to facilitate this kind of support, but there is a general sense from the community that (outside the face to face engagement such as TP fairs) people have trouble accessing this type of engagement. For example, phone lines are considered to be difficult to get through due to long wait times, and there are key portions of the community who do not have regular / easy access to this level of one-to-one engagement in their issues and concerns.

When surveyed, refugees from Ukraine indicated their top 5 information needs centre around cash assistance, food and clothing vouchers, healthcare access, legal matters (including temporary protection status) and job opportunities. Online social listening showed much discussion about TP-related issues (especially how it impacts cash eligibility) in online groups. While other topics are also important (education, childcare, mental health), there are less than 10 percent of mentions in the survey. Less important topics now are the relocation to other countries (decreased from 16 percent to 2 percent this year), asylum and protection status (decreased from 16 percent to 2 percent this year) and safety.

Figure 10. How have information needs changed for refugees?

Overall compared to the previous year, the desire for more information for the top 5 topics has significantly decreased. The number of respondents seeking more information on healthcare, job opportunities and education for children has halved, compared to the 2022/23 IEA. Although the information on food and cash programs has decreased too (by 24 percent, respectively 17 percent), the interest toward these subjects is still high.

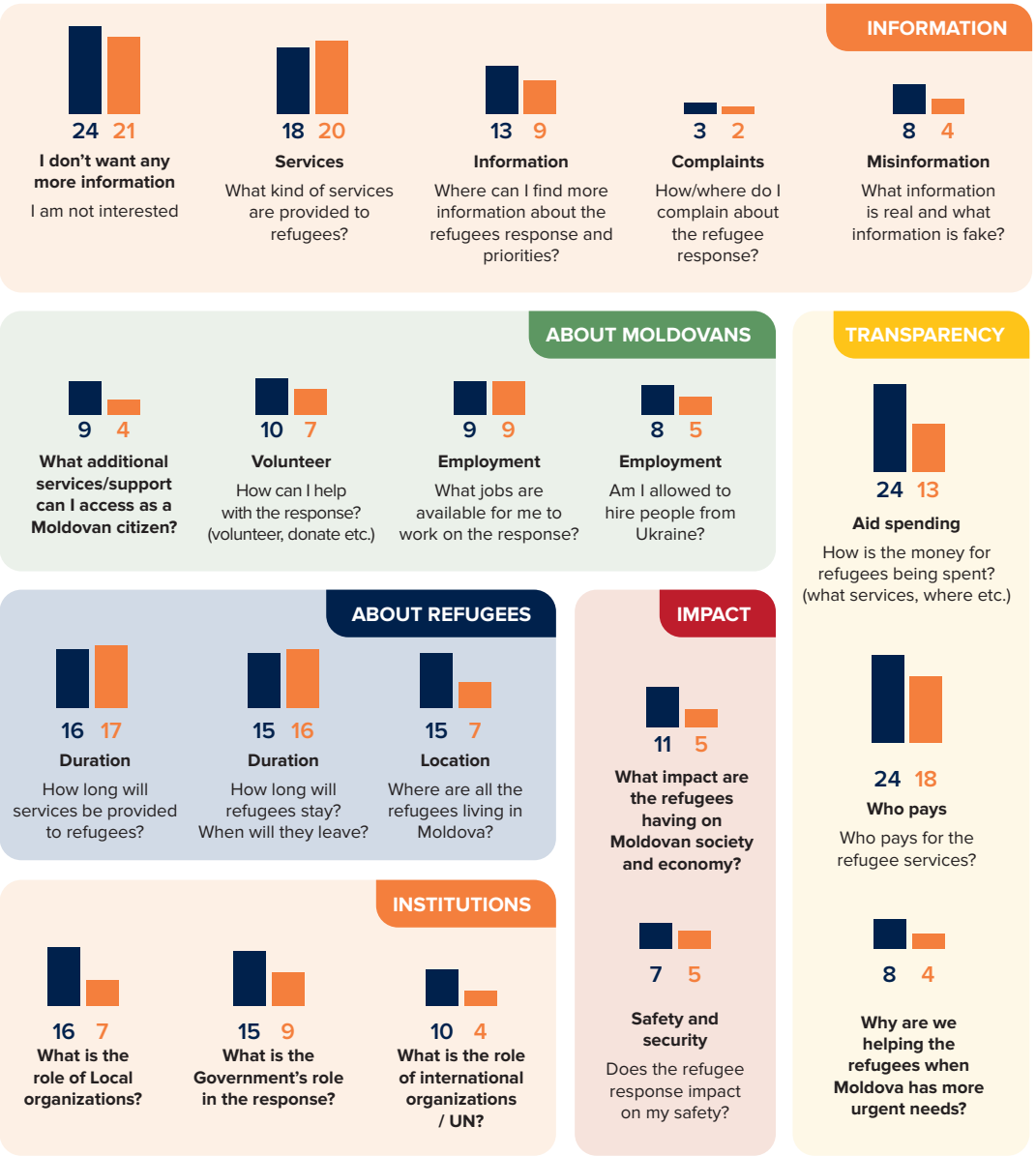
The overall decrease in refugees wishing they had more information on certain topics aligns with sentiments from (the majority of) refugees that they feel it easier to find information and to target sources for the information they need, particularly for those who have been in the country for 6 or more months. The persistent need for more information on food and clothing vouchers and cash assistance aligns with the ongoing high needs for emergency support amongst some of the refugee population (as per the 70 percent of the total refugee population who require support to cover basic needs[9]).

Host communities

Eighty percent of Moldovans in host communities said they were interested in getting more information regarding the refugee response. The top priority 5 topics related to the transparency of funds (who pays and how money is spent), the duration of refugees stay in Moldova (including the duration of services) and information about the services for refugees (what kind of services are provided). Moldovans are also keen to understand more about when the war will end and when / if Ukrainians will return to their country and how many refugees are still in Moldova. Compared to the previous IEA, the interest of the host community towards the majority of topics regarding the refugees in Moldova mostly decreased to a small degree, but has diversified (with 16 per cent more respondents offering 'other' topics when surveyed. This demonstrates a need to offer opportunities for more open discussions and engagement with host communities, who can raise specific (and sometimes more complex) areas of concern or interest. Some topics decreased almost twice in interest in 2023/2024 compared to the previous year, including: the role of the government, local and international organisations in the refugee response, services to Moldovan citizens, employment of refugees by Moldova citizens, misinformation and reasons for helping refugees.

[9] Basic Needs, Socio-Economic Vulnerability and Multipurpose Cash Assistance Moldova Refugee Response Plan | October 2023

Figure 11. Information needs, host community (2022/23 compared to 2023/24)



SOURCES AND CHANNELS

In terms of official government and humanitarian sources, this assessment focused specifically on a list of key sources provided by UNHCR and APP partners, including:

Figure 12. Information sources, refugees (2024)

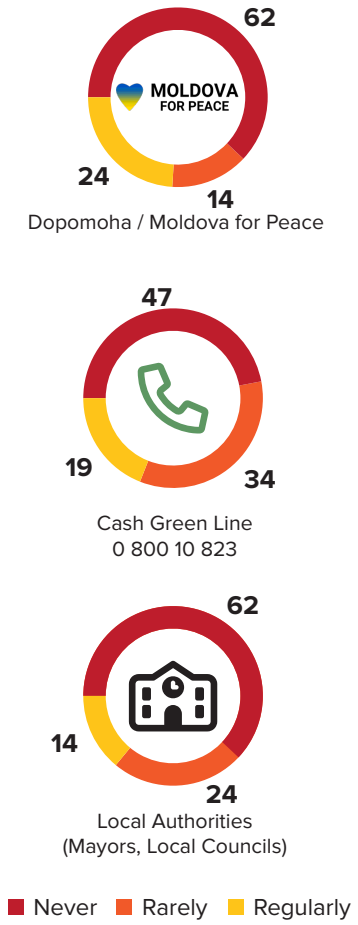
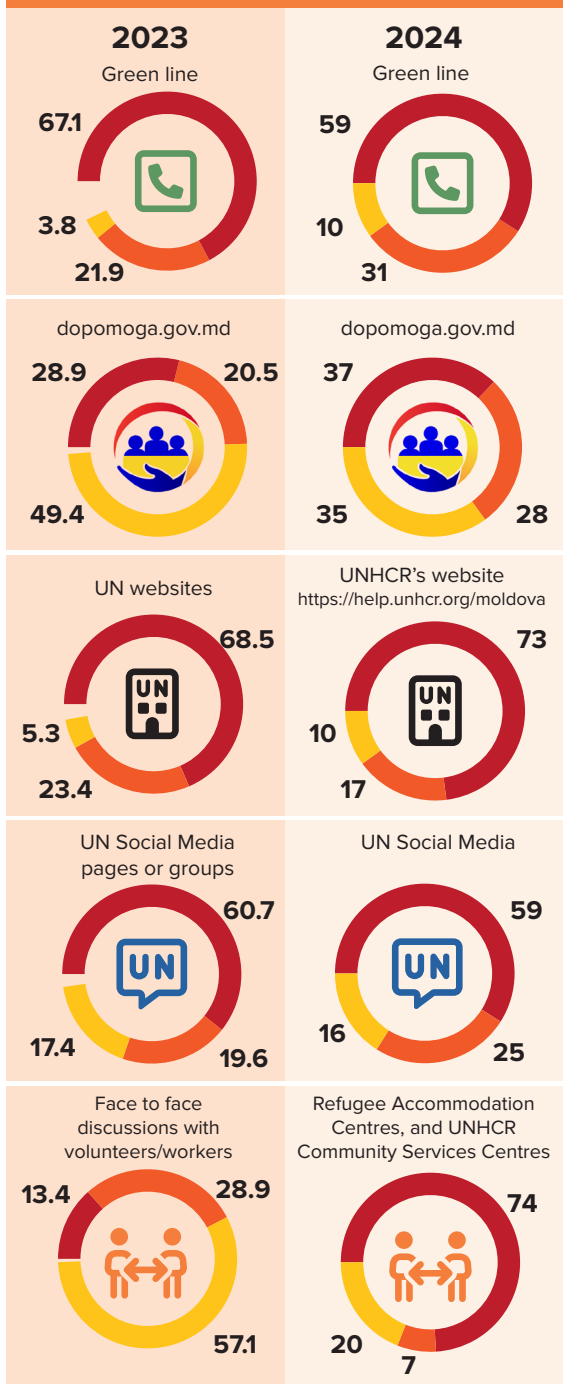


Figure 12. Information sources, refugees (2023/24) *comparison*



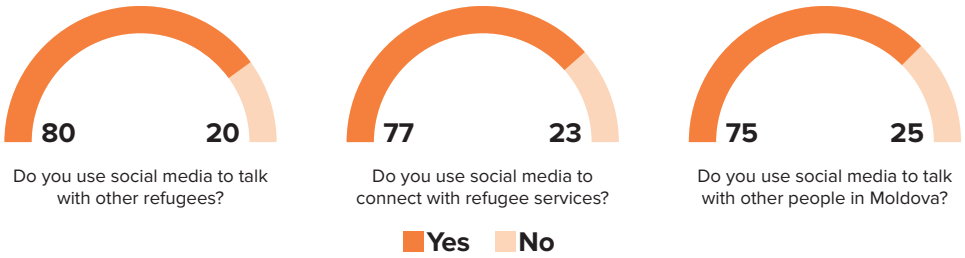
Of those groups, the most used source of information for refugee services is the Dopomoga website (35 percent mentioned in the refugees survey). Dopomoga continues to provide a high standard of accurate and timely information from government and humanitarian agencies, and acts on complaints / misinformation tracked to clarify queries with relevant sources (such as relevant ministries). Refugees also use Dopomoha/ Moldova for Peace (24 percent) and RACs (20 percent) as main sources of information, followed by Cash Helpline (19 percent), UNHCR social media (16 percent) and local authorities (14 percent). These findings are similar to the 2022/23 IEA report findings, and therefore this report will focus on a deep-dive into the trust levels of these sources (see Section 2).

Groups engaged for this assessment (refugees, host communities, humanitarian and community organisation workers and volunteers) overwhelmingly spoke of a shift (even more) towards online groups, and particularly community-run groups as being the main - and increasingly common - channels for refugees from Ukraine seeking, accessing and sharing information. This follows from findings in the 2022/23 IEA that 65 percent of refugees from Ukraine regularly / often sought information via social media, and 22 percent sometimes did (only 12 percent indicated they never did). Specifically, refugees are opting to seek, access, share and create information in hyper-local online groups (including family, friends and neighbours, and in some cases people who are permanently in or spend time in Ukraine), which also shows a shift away from large Telegram or Viber groups that were created and attracted thousands of members in 2022. Large, open (or easily joined private) groups are often regionally focused (for example groups focused in Transnistria or Gagauzia). The large and open online groups range significantly in size from 500 to 100,000 group members, and often include many members not in Moldova (more information on the risks associated with these groups in Section 4 of this report). These groups are not moderated or officially contributed to by humanitarian or government staff, however some are covered via the Laolalta Info Unit's online social listening.

Key humanitarian agencies and civil society groups have strong presence online, including UNHCR, IOM and the Laolalta InfoUnit. Humanitarian agencies have noticeably put emphasis on engaging and sharing information via (organisation-run) online groups, with agency staff noting extra efforts to engage on Telegram and Facebook in particular. There is evidence of efforts to use the opportunity online forums provide for two-way communication on these platforms. For example, IOM intermittently opens up their official Telegram channel for questions, comments and feedback from group members, and has received good engagement at these events.

Dynamic, frank and open conversations and engagement tends to happen more in 'unofficial' and unmoderated community groups, whereas official humanitarian moderated groups are seen by refugees surveyed and in FGDs as acting more as 'noticeboards', where organisations share information on their services. Online social listening conducted as part of this assessment found that refugees from Ukraine are using online spaces to talk through issues and questions, but are ultimately encouraged (by each other) to access hotlines and face to face services, especially about more complex issues (such as legal status).

Figure 13. Using internet for social media, refugees (2023/24)



In person information seeking and exchange was also prominently discussed in focus group discussions, with volunteers and AAP workers indicating that refugees themselves being volunteers or employees of organisations is very helpful because they act as a "connecting link." Women in particular heavily rely on information gathered from people they know directly (relatives, friends, acquaintances), including for verification of information - with focus group discussion participants indicating that if something is not clear for them or if they doubt a piece of information, they call a friend to confirm it.

COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO INFORMATION

The journey to access and share information related to the response is not without barriers, particularly for specific community groups. While this section indicates a generally increased ease of accessing information, there are still gaps in meeting the diverse information needs of refugees. In particular, older people and people with disabilities were consistently recognised by key informants as having less access to information, facing more barriers to accessing and sharing information, and as a result, more at risk. Overall, data from refugees underscores specific information gaps and preferences for specific communities, including lack of trust in or perceived reliability of healthcare information for women, lack of information on accommodation among people with disabilities, and a desire across all marginalised groups for more information on mental health services and self-employment. As such, there is an ongoing pressing need for targeted interventions and inclusive approaches to ensure equitable access to essential information for all refugees, including at risk groups. In the Regional Refugee Response plan, Moldovan humanitarian and government partners indicate they are consistently working to ensure diversity is considered in communication efforts with affected communities.

While the majority of refugees have access to the internet (96 percent), there are still 4 percent who do not have access to the internet at all, similar to 2022/23 findings. Older people are more likely to say they do not use the internet (10 percent), compared to only 4 percent in younger refugees. The refugees who are not connected to the internet mostly rely on word of mouth and traditional information sources (Green Line, RACs, humanitarian and religious organisations). The data highlights a generational divide in information-seeking behaviour, with younger refugees showing a preference for online sources, regularly frequenting platforms like the UNHCR's website, whilst older people and people with disabilities rely more on word of mouth. This assessment did not conduct specific FGDs or interviews with LGBTIQ+ refugees, and therefore did not find particular barriers. LGBTIQ+ participants of the 2023 UNHCR Participatory Assessment noted that the internet and online platforms are the primary tool for them to access information, across various sources they rely on. They also indicated they are aware of where to go to lodge complaints or give feedback[10].

[10] UNHCR, 2023 Participatory Assessment Report, Moldova

Findings about information-related risks faced by specific community groups is documented in Section 4 of this report.

Older refugees and people with disabilities

17 percent of refugees surveyed identified as having a disability, and among that group 39 percent are 60+ years old, and 9 percent are under 29. 27 percent of refugees with disabilities indicated they are accommodated in RACs, and 19 percent are in accommodations with full rental assistance. Their average length of stay leans towards more than six months, more so than other refugees (13.5 percent of people with disabilities declared they stay in Moldova less than 6 months, compared to 38 percent who declared they stay more than 6 months).

People with disabilities and older people from Ukraine rely heavily on word of mouth, often finding it more accessible than official channels due to difficulties in accessing and verifying information online. Both groups are generally less familiar with social media and messaging applications, and even if they own cell phones and have an internet connection, they usually ask others to help find the information online. Few of them use Telegram channels or Viber groups, though most of them know from others they exist.

> *"Mostly, it's word of mouth, people who have been somewhere, they tell each other, that's how we find out."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

> *"Others just do it for me and I don't know. I'm telling you, Viber doesn't exist (for me), that one doesn't exist."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

> *"Me too. I'm only half familiar with the phone, so you ask someone to help me with this phone."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

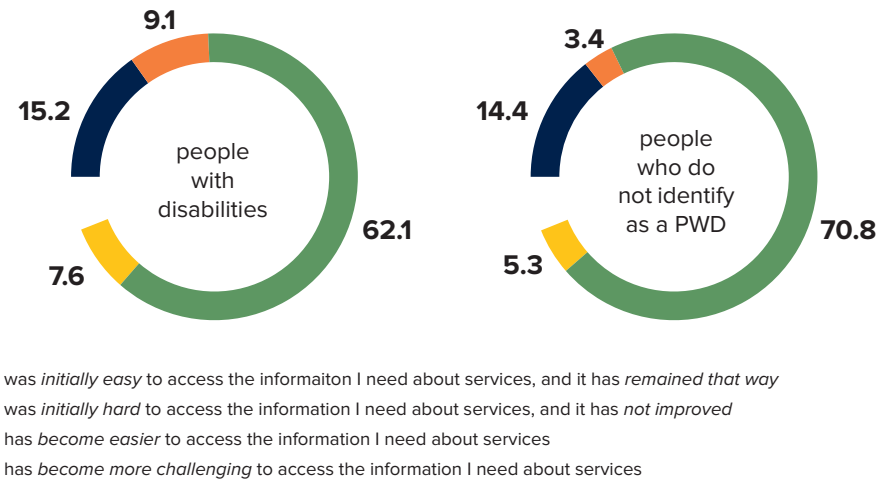
Discussion group conversations with older refugees and persons with disabilities from Ukraine indicate many are aware of the risks of mis and disinformation, and take steps to discern false information - primarily relying on trusted sources like official websites and organisations. Despite encountering occasional misinformation (mainly related to cash payments and humanitarian aid distribution), persons with disabilities and older people expressed overall trust in information obtained from fellow refugees, primarily relying on recommendations from verified and more informed acquaintances.

> *"If something pops up somewhere, I call my friends and they tell me: put it away right away and don't contact or answer them."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

According to the survey, the proportion of people with disabilities from Ukraine who feel there has been no improvement to the challenging state of information access on their arrival is 9 percent (6 percent more than the average experience of the refugee respondents). 8 percent fewer people with disabilities feel that it has become easier to access information, compared to the overall refugee population.

Figure 14. Changes in access to information, refugees, people with disabilities (2023/24)

Do you find it easier or more challenging finding the information you need now to go about your daily life, compared to the first days or weeks that you arrived?
(%, refugees, PWD, N=66)



According to the survey, the information sources most regularly used by people with disabilities are RACs (a third of people with disabilities respondents said they use this source, which is 16 percent higher than the overall average use from refugee respondents), and the Green Line (a 6 percent higher level of use that the average refugee respondent, with 15 percent of people with disabilities surveyed indicating it as a go-to source). The least used sources by people with disabilities, compared to other refugees' groups, are the UNHCR's website (2 percent of people with disabilities surveyed, and 11 percent refugees who do not identify a disability) and UNHCR Community Services Centres (2 percent of people with disabilities surveyed, and 10 percent refugees who do not identify a disability).

During focus group discussions, people with disabilities and older people from Ukraine also mentioned they widely use dopomoga.gov.md website as an official source, as well as legal centres, religious and humanitarian organisations, including: Motivatie (local NGO), Keystone, HelpAge international, Katalyst, Salvation Army in Chisinau, the Church of Ark, AO Casmed and Association for Human Rights Lex XXI in Balti, and UNHCR in Cahul. These organisations were mentioned by refugees from Ukraine in research activities more often in older people and people with disabilities groups in Chisinau and Balti, than in other locations.

> *"To dopomoga.gov.md, probably. There's nowhere else to go."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, Person with disability, Woman, December 2023]***

According to the survey, people with disabilities- more than other groups of refugees - wish to have more information about mental health services (41 percent versus 28 percent general population) and self-employment (11 percent versus 3 percent general population). In focus groups, people with disabilities noticed that now, compared to the beginning of their stay in Moldova, there is more information about employment opportunities, training and courses for adult education.

> *"There is more help, that they want to employ us or train us in something, some courses. There's more such information available now."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

> *"Generally, there is more information regarding studies and work than about the food."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

There is frustration expressed regarding the decreasing availability of humanitarian aid organisations and the lack of clear, consistent assistance. For them, the reduction in access to services and information reinforces itself; decreased assistance leads to challenges in accessing information and diminished trust in information provided by humanitarian organisations. Some older people and people with disabilities noted disparities in aid distribution, with a perception that those living in RACs were receiving more support and information than those in rented accommodation. Some of them felt neglected or overlooked by aid organisations, and stressed that due to their varied health conditions, not everyone had the option of living in a RAC.

> *"I want to say that not everyone will speak up yet (about where aid can be found). And if they do, the sponsor is gone or they'll tell you when they themselves have received it already. You understand, it becomes somewhat hurtful like that."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

> *"Refugees who live in the centres (RACs) have now received warm clothes, blankets and pillows from ... .organisation. But we didn't receive anything. And they were registered for these clothes back in September.....I also need it."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

> *"There are some who believe, go live in the dorms, but due to health conditions, I can't. I have my own problems..."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

Some people talked about the solace and support they feel in attending church services for spiritual and moral guidance. However, some older people and people with disabilities from Ukraine also expressed difficulties in accessing assistance from faith based community centres or programmes, where resources are limited due to lack of funding. They described registration links provided by certain organisations being outdated or inaccessible. Compared to other groups of people from Ukraine, for older people and people with disabilities the church and religious organisations are information sources, and also places for gathering and information sharing.

> *"There's a Church without Walls, and every two months they give a link, and this link doesn't always open. There's both moral and spiritual support. It's a Baptist church, and not all of us are Baptists. For example, I'm not a Baptist, but nevertheless, everything there is so interesting, there's such lively and open preaching. Plus, they also help refugees, look for sponsors themselves. They have interesting spiritual help as well."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

> *"I go there on Sundays. [...] The theme (of discussions) was fear, families. It's interesting, I've been going for the second year and try not to miss it. Just to meet, just to listen, not to lie in bed, but to go somewhere."*
>
> ***[Woman, refugee, Person with disability, Chisinau, December 2023]***

Ethnic Roma

Based on this assessment, Roma people experience relatively good access to information and engagement in refugee services, but do face underlying barriers to accessing some channels due to low literacy rates, especially in women[11]. Participants in the focus group noted a general increase in availability of information, and more information tailored to their specific needs. Like other refugees from Ukraine, Roma primarily use messaging apps like Telegram and Viber and rely on their close social networks for information. They also use these channels to share information, and noted awareness of the need to verify information before sharing it. Focus group participants also mentioned receiving help from volunteers and trusted sources (such as Green Line), which - similar to wider refugee respondents - is a go-to source shared in online groups chats when people have questions or are seeking support. In the 2023 UNHCR Participatory Assessment, Roma participants mentioned a preference for accessing information face to face, for example, in person at the RACs[12].

> *"Easier, of course, it has become easier (to get information)."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Man, January 2024]***

> *"When we came here, at first, we didn't know anything... And now we know where to turn."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, January 2024]***

> *"We ask questions or talk about this information, news, for example, or some help."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Man, January 2024]***

> *"The hotline for all questions. We also learn the hotline phone number from chats."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, January 2024]***

Roma refugees mentioned it is at times difficult to reach operators on the Cash Helpline, including challenges with long wait times and instances of inappropriate or rude behaviour of some operators, that discourages the refugees from reaching out to that source to seek answers to their questions.

> *Often they are very rude there, talk vaguely, rudely. I personally called so many times, asked where to complain about them because they are rude, they don't give a precise answer. The operator says just one word: "wait". We wait for one and a half months, and for two and a half. And we can't find out, (calling it) for an hour, for an hour and a half.*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Women, January 2024]***

[11] Refugee Coordination Forum, Moldova Roma Task force briefing note, December 2023.

[12] UNHCR, 2023 Participatory Assessment Report, Moldova

Roma refugees stated they are mostly speaking Russian language when seeking or sharing information beyond their community or family groups, especially when interacting with the host community. The RRP points to collaborations between the Roma Taskforce and the AAP Taskforce to ensure access to information to Roma communities is in their native language by translating into Romani temporary protection information materials, emphasising the importance of obtaining a legal status, application procedures, and associated rights. NGO and community workers report good local coordination with Roma Mediators, who participate in local coordination forums and are effective in acting as a liaison for engagement with Roma people.

Section 2: Trust in information sources

TRUST FRAMEWORK

Information ecosystems are a complex blend of unmet needs and an overabundance of information. It is crucial to promote the creation of locally relevant and dependable information. However, no matter how factual and relevant the information is, these efforts are futile if the information is not trusted, and is rejected. The Internews Trust Framework offers a perspective to gauge the presence of trust and, importantly, to understand why certain sources of information might be more, or less trusted. This framework consists of four key elements of trust, each comprising three components:

- **Accuracy:**
  - You understand me ("contextual")
  - You know your stuff ("factual")
  - You understand my priorities("timely")
- **Proximity:**
  - You are approachable ("accessible")
  - You speak my language ("language")
  - You are like me ("representative")
- **Agency:**
  - You can keep a secret ("privacy")
  - You don’t force me to do things ("control")
  - You take me and my perspectives serious ("accountability")
- **Intention:**
  - You have no secrets ("transparency")
  - You want the best for me ("interest")
  - You know how to help me ("ability")

This enables us to analyse, monitor, plan, and assess with the goal of fostering, enhancing, or nurturing trust. Crucially, this framework operates on the principle that the goal of information providers is not blind trust. High-quality information benefits from being subject to constructive scrutiny, and information providers should be open to questions and be genuinely accountable to their audiences.

OVERALL TRUST IN INFORMATION TRENDS

This assessment found fairly high levels of overall trust in the official humanitarian and government information sources, based on an average of 71-78 percent of refugees from Ukraine holding favourable opinions of trust components related to key sources. However, when asked about trust in information sources for refugees in UNHCR's 2023 Participatory Assessment, community members indicated declining trust[13], and this assessment has shown relatively low engagement in complaints and feedback mechanisms. Based on these various assessments, we see an initially contradictory picture of trust in information for refugees and host communities in Moldova. However, using the four components of the Internews Trust Framework gives clarity on where different components of trust in information are falling down, to inform more specific actions. Intention is the trust component that is currently least successful for information sources in Moldova around the response. Both refugees from Ukraine and host communities question the transparency of some sources, there is consistent low understanding of who the source is / what organisation is behind the information, and there is a low sense of security in privacy protection.

Agency is the second least successful component of trust for information sources. Refugees feel positive about some sources' mechanisms for two-way communication and feedback, but overall this was the area where the second least number of volunteers felt sources were performing well in, and overall - based on this assessment - we see little uptake in complaints and feedback mechanisms.
Based on discussions with humanitarian and civil society workers, organisations generally have a good understanding of drivers for trust in them as information sources, and strive to work in a way that meets those expectations. For example, local agency staff spoke of experiencing loss of trust from some refugee households, when the households denied being assessed for winterisation support in late 2023. The households denied the assessment due to a feeling of having been assessed and surveyed a number of times, without seeing results or evidence that their input was taken into account. The same agency staff talked about the need to manage expectations of refugees and host communities during assessments, and ensure feedback loops are in place to come back to communities with results, or at the very least, frank information about what cannot change or be delivered.

Based on survey data, it is clear that more transparency around who organisations are, what their intention is, how they allocate money and where money comes from, is of concern for Moldovans in host communities. Moldovans in Comrat mentioned that they do not understand why some people are given help and others are not, and generally why people are treated differently in provision of services and aid. It is unclear whether recommendations for more transparency measures in the 2022/23 IEA have been adopted, based on surveys that indicate that more than half (56 percent) Moldovans feel transparency levels (which were indicated as unsatisfactory) are the same since the beginning of the refugee influx, or less transparent.

> *"And the lack of transparent information, which naturally gives rise to rumours, gossip, misinterpretations, and they are therefore circulated from group to group, which does not add understanding."*
>
> ***[Female, 41 years, refugee from Odessa in Chisinau]***

While trust in official government and humanitarian sources is important to map, it should be emphasised that overwhelmingly, refugees from Ukraine trust information shared between each other. The most trusted channels for this information sharing and seeking are small, online, private groups consisting mostly of known friends and families, or people of one or two degrees of separation. Though these online information sources were not able to be studied as part of this assessment, community discussions in focus groups point to alignment of these types of groups with the Trust Framework components. Namely, in terms of Accuracy, refugees (from diverse groups) referenced commonly shared methods for checking and verifying information with official sources, and recognising misinformation and spam. These include: screen-shotting false information and posting with clear warning text; and encouraging other members to contact phone lines or other official sources to check specific information.

[13] UNHCR, 2023 Participatory Assessment Report, Moldova

Additionally, by sharing information among each other, refugees are effectively creating a peer-to-peer verification mechanism by doing a "reality check" of the information provided by the government or humanitarians, and in the process adding relevant contextual information.

> *"We share what is verified correctly, verified information."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, January 2024]***

Local level humanitarian organisation employees and volunteers spoke of the speed at which information clearly circulates amongst these groups, indicating strong capability for timeliness. In terms of Proximity, the hyper-local nature of these groups easily forms an exchange of information that is relevant and relatable, and the types of channels used (such as Telegram and Whatsapp) allow for group members to ask questions and clarify. Regarding Intention, the tendency towards smaller online community groups (rather than the bigger online groups of thousands of members), mean group members are less anonymous and likely have some material link to the rest of the group that binds them, effectively creating an implicit level of accountability. This may not always be the case, and risks remain in terms of who can join and influence groups like this. However, refugees describe a sense of knowing who they are talking with in these groups, and we can assume a level of clarity on why they are there, their intentions and their limitations. In line with refugee's frequent mention of methods to check that information shared is factually correct, online social media monitoring as part of this assessment observed that group members in bigger groups frequently recommend for people to 'call the hotline' to clarify and check information. This also demonstrates a culture of understanding limitations in not having answers to every question amongst the online groups.

> *"There are women who go to various events and volunteer. They are talking with the refugee congress. [...] And in this way, you understand that they are not distorted, and will not provide you with distorted information. And they will provide you with information that they learned directly from that organisation. They post this on their Viber or in some Telegram channel or on Facebook. And you focus on this and gather information."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, younger refugees, female, December 2023]***

Finally, in terms of Agency, these hyper-local online groups inherently provide a platform for people to ask questions and act as both information seekers and providers. It should be noted there are risks associated with lack of anonymous options for information sharing and seeking (more on this in Section 4). It should be mentioned that because of the supposed high levels of trust in these online community groups, we should be aware of the risk of blind trust - where group members fail to apply a healthy level of questioning of the information shared via these forums.

TRUST IN KEY INFORMATION SOURCES

Key information sources covered on next page: Green Line, Dopomoga, Dopomoha, UNHCR social media and Help Website, Refugee Accommodation Centres, Local authorities.

The trust diagram is formed of quantitative survey data from refugees and host communities, with contextual details from FGDs, KIIs, media analysis and online social listening provided for each quadrant. **White segments = no quantitative data collected for that trust element.** This analysis does not intend to capture all information sources for refugees and host communities, but captures a selection of key sources to understand general or representative levels of trust in information sources. Other key information sources not are included here can hopefully draw from these reflections in their own evaluation of trust levels.

TRUST IN KEY INFORMATION SOURCES

Evidence of strong coordination at local level between humanitarian organisations, community organisations and local services to do outreach to at-risk groups

Dopomoha seen as an accessible information source for young people in particular

Some engagement of refugees as response staff / volunteers, and evidence of great engagement with **Roma Liaisons**

'Understandable information' is the top performing trust element

Local authorities are overwhelmingly seen to provide relevant, factually correct, easy to understand and accessible information sources.

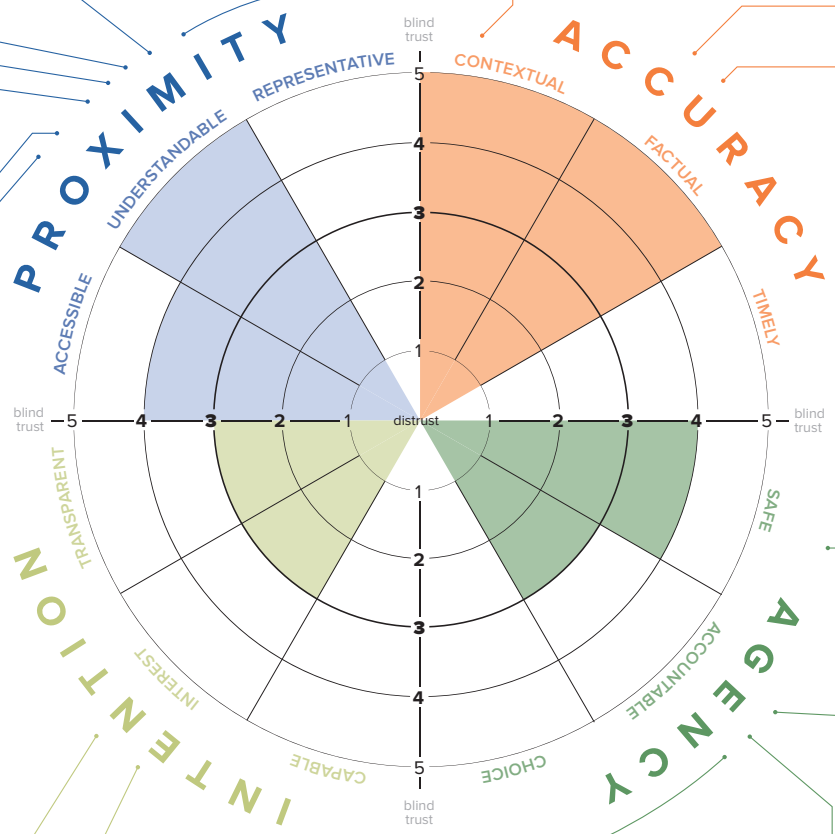
Dopomoga rates as one of the highest sources for accuracy and relevance of information, and is, seen to provide particularly valuable information during the first stage of refugees' arrival in Moldova.

UNHCR social media seen as one of the more accessible information sources

Refugees generally feel **Dopomoga** is well organised and has easy to access information. It is widely used, though 14 percent of refugees aged 60+ said it is not easy to contact the information provider.

UNHCR social media is seen as an accurate and relevant source of information, though some refugees see it as a "news" channel, where UNHCR posts stories about the success of their activities, with less actionable information.

RACs are seen as a trusted source in terms of accurate and relevant information for those in accommodations, but were not seen as an accessible service by some women and people with disabilities. Outsiders have the perception that RACs residents receive more accurate and faster info.



Green Line - 72 percent feel this service is easy to contact, with 24 percent saying it is not easy. Online social media listening showed indication of frustration with long call wait times, particularly at points when new information (e.g. regarding cash services eligibility) is released

Roughly 10 percent of respondents consistently do not feel their privacy is protected across each source, which may indicate a small amount of people who do not feel safe in that way, regardless of the source / organisation.

The Green Line was noted as one of the most trusted sources in terms of accessing information that is easy to understand, and that provides an opportunity to discuss refugee's specific needs

In terms of managing people's privacy and personal data, **Dopomoha, Dopomoga, RACs, UNHCR social media** and **Green Line** as perceived to be safe, but respondents are more unsure about Local Authorities' capacity and intentions in this regard.

UNHCR Help Website has less recognition as useful and easy to understand information source, and is also less known and accessed than other sources

Almost 80 percent of respondents feel encouraged to give feedback to **Dopomoga** and **Dopomoha**.

More than half (56 percent) of Moldovan respondents feel transparency levels (which were indicated as unsatisfactory) are the same since the beginning of the refugee influx, or less transparent.

Many refugees in focus group discussions said they feel there is no point in giving complaints and feedback as it will not make a difference. There is also a general level of exhaustion in participating in surveys and assessments, and poor feedback loop practices by humanitarians and other organisations collecting community data.

Across all websites and phone lines listed - **Green Line, Domoga, Dopomoha and even UNHCR website and social media** - people are unsure who is running or controlling the information source. This was generally their lowest score across the framework.

Local authorities source scored one of the highest amongst sources in refugee respondents being clear on who is responsible and accountable for this source (78 percent of refugee respondents).

The primary issue with accountability is not perceived encouragement to give feedback or complaints, nor access to do so, but the uptake / use of those mechanisms (see Section 3 of this report).

At least 13 percent of respondents said they do not feel encouraged to give feedback across all sources. Some sources (such as **UNHCR social media and website, RACs and Local Authorities**) are seen to encourage and facilitate complaints and feedback less that than the average.

Moldovans in Comrat focus group discussions mentioned that they do not understand why some people are given help and others are not, and generally why people are treated differently in provision of services and aid.

OTHER KEY SOURCES

These sources generally were not as familiar with refugees and / or host communities, and were therefore not able to be applied to the Trust Framework to the same level. Some key perceptions included:

Cash Helpline

The Cash Helpline serves as a crucial helpline for refugees seeking financial assistance and information. However, experiences with the service vary widely. While some refugees, particularly women with children in Chisinau, have had positive interactions, others, especially men, refugees with disabilities, and Roma refugees, have reported negative encounters. Issues range from rude behaviour from operators to unsatisfactory experiences due to long queues and unclear or incorrect information provided by operators, such as misinformation about blocked cards and vague responses regarding payments.

Moldova for Peace / Laolalta

Moldova for Peace / Laolalta (referred to as Laolalta in data collection), is perceived as an organisation offering various activities, primarily aimed at children. Impressions of Laolalta are generally positive, particularly among women with children in Chisinau who appreciate the engaging activities available for their kids. However, younger refugees, Roma individuals, people with disabilities, and men may not be aware of Laolalta or its offerings, indicating potential gaps in outreach and awareness efforts.

Central Authorities in Moldova

(Parliament, Government, Ministries) - Feedback regarding central authorities in Moldova, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, is mixed. Women with children in Chisinau have provided positive feedback for the Ministry of Education but negative feedback for the Ministry of Health, citing a lack of transparency and solutions. However, younger refugees, people with disabilities, Roma individuals, and men generally do not interact with these authorities, highlighting a disconnect between certain demographic groups and governmental institutions.

UNHCR Community Services Centres

UNHCR Community Services Centres play a crucial role in providing aid and assistance to refugees, particularly through aid application forms. While women with children in Chisinau appreciate the availability of online forms, indicating progress in accessibility, challenges remain, with some refugees reporting difficulties with the online form. Additionally, awareness and relevance of these centres may vary in regions outside Chisinau, suggesting potential disparities in service provision and awareness campaigns. Younger refugees are more likely to easily access the Community Centers: 24.4 percent of age 18-29 answered “yes” when asked if it is easy to contact the service, compared to 12.4 percent of 60+ refugees.

Services Advisor

The Services Advisor website (moldova.servicesadvisor.net/en) appears to have low awareness among refugees, particularly among women with children in Chisinau and other demographic groups such as the older refugees and refugees with disabilities. This lack of awareness indicates a need for improved dissemination of information about available resources and services, potentially through targeted outreach efforts.

Section 3: Accountability to Affected Populations mechanisms

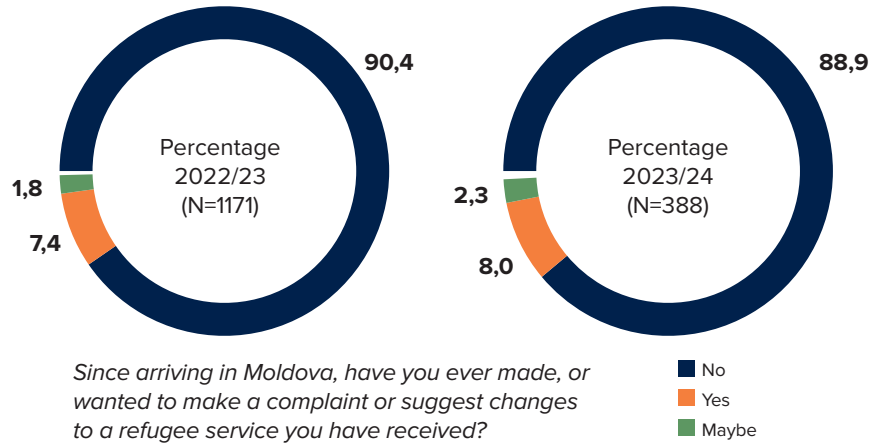
This section looks at what is currently working in AAP efforts in Moldova in relation to the Ukraine refugee response, including how AAP mechanisms are being used, gaps and barriers, and how this has changed over time. This section builds on Section 3 of the 2022/23 IEA, which provided details on available complaints and feedback mechanisms in the response. A complaints and feedback mechanism (CFM) is a system that receives, processes and responds to concerns from the community on humanitarian services, assistance or behaviour. This community feedback is vital for an accountable response designed around community needs and preferences.

The assessment focused on 7 key AAP and communication mechanisms that exist for refugees and Moldovans, as explored in Section 2: Trust in Information. This section will look more broadly at the dynamics, behaviours and barriers related to engagement in AAP mechanisms for refugees and host communities in Moldova.

ARE AAP MECHANISMS SERVING REFUGEE AND HOST POPULATIONS?

The general sentiment from refugees and host communities - with some exceptions - is a sense that humanitarian agencies encourage complaints and feedback, and that the opportunities to access and use AAP mechanisms have diversified and become easier to take up. However, by and large, refugees and host communities in Moldova are not using these mechanisms, with 90 percent of refugees indicating they do not want to, or have never thought about sharing feedback, and 97 percent of host communities. This shows no statistically significant change in engagement in AAP mechanisms since one year ago (where 89 percent gave the same answer)[14]. Of those who have made complaints or given feedback, half of them mentioned it has become easier to do so than when they first arrived in Moldova, and half of them felt it has become more difficult - showing disparate experiences. Those who perceived improvements mentioned opportunities to give feedback face to face, including to volunteers and lawyers providing services as part of Temporary Protection registration. Refugees living in areas outside Chisinau and refugees who have arrived more recently in Moldova (less than one year) are less likely to use CFM.

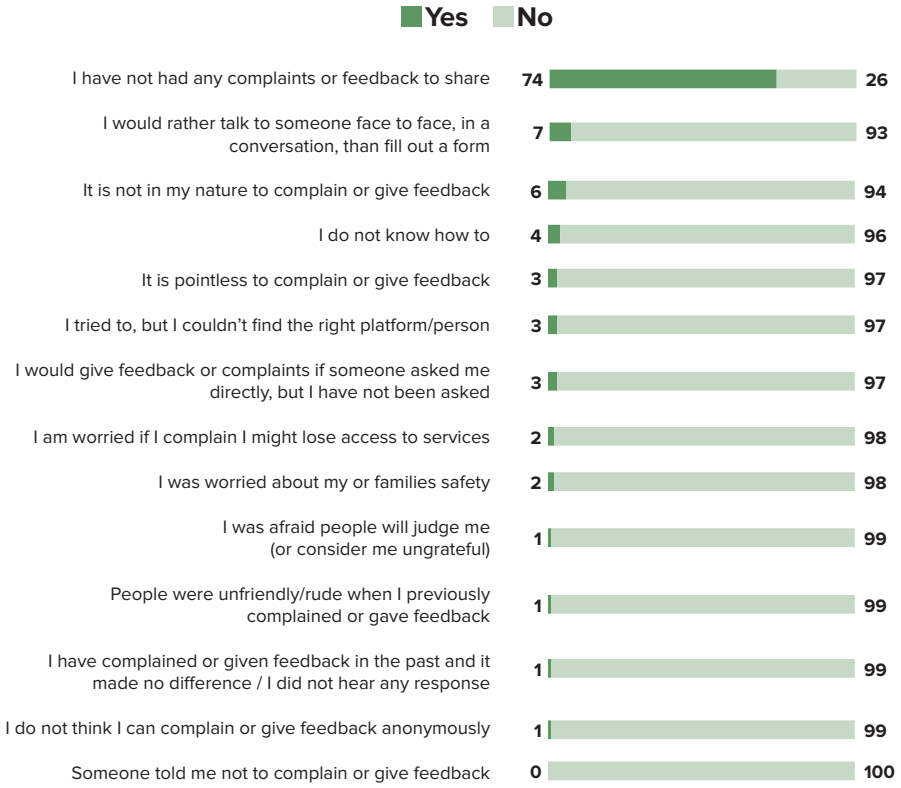
Figure 15. Using AAP mechanism, refugees (2022/23 compared to 2023/24)



The reason the majority of refugees (74 percent) have not offered feedback is because they feel they do not have feedback or complaints to share. Other reasons cited include preferring to give feedback in conversation face to face (7 percent) and 6 percent mentioned it is not in their nature to complain. 4 percent of refugees surveyed stated they have not participated in CFM because they do not know how to do it, and 3 percent do not give feedback or complaints because they see it as pointless.

[14] Floods and deserts: information access and barriers in Moldova's refugee response, Internews, 2022/23

Figure 16. Reasons why refugees do not provide feedback (2023/24)



Amongst Moldovan host communities surveyed, only 3 percent of Moldovan host communities have made, or wanted to make a complaint or give feedback about the refugee response. Similar to refugee respondents, most of those who did not offer feedback said they have not had any complaints or feedback to share, some felt it was pointless and some said it is not in their nature to complain or give feedback. 5 percent said they would rather talk to someone face to face, in a conversation, than fill out a form. A small amount (2 percent) mentioned they did not know how to offer feedback or they tried to, but could not find the right channel to do so.

As highlighted in *Section 2: Trust in information*, refugees from Ukraine and host communities in Moldova rate trust in key AAP mechanisms fairly high overall, with some areas needing improvement in regional locations and with particular groups. However, in the factors that form trust in these sources, two-way accountability mechanisms are one of the weakest. Key informant interviews for this assessment suggest a strong desire - particularly by humanitarian and civil society - to improve accountability to communities and ensure accessible information and communication practices, and describe existing efforts to continue that improvement.

Humanitarian and civil society

Refugee sentiments (for most groups, but not all) indicate a general appreciation for the receptiveness of humanitarian agencies regarding feedback and complaints.

> *"In general, all organisations react, accept claims, complaints, and suggestions."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, refugee Women with kids, December 2023]***

Humanitarian agencies seek to provide diverse options for this type of engagement (face to face, online via social media, through in-person anonymous mechanisms such as suggestions boxes, telephone hotlines and online forms / dedicated email contacts) - some of which are explored below. There is evidence of genuine engagement and allocation of resources for AAP, and some examples of organisations adapting services in response to and based on feedback and suggestions from communities. For example, changes opening times of registration centres, or adjustment to proof of identity for children / families in relation to registration and eligibility following feedback from refugee families[15]. However, key informant interviewees pointed to a lack of systematic and cross-organisational approach to these processes for community-informed programming, making them person, department and relationship dependent. Key informants spoke of strong referral protocols and arrangements for individual cases, including across organisations, but there was little evidence of an established common mechanism for inter-agency sharing of complaints and feedback. Another benefit of having systemised approaches for CFM and other AAP efforts, is the ability for good processes to scale up when needed, for

[15] IOM Key Informant Interview, February 2024

example during a change of policy (such as legal status of refugees) and give appropriate capacity to AAP. There is evidence of this within some humanitarian organisations, but evidence of some channels being overwhelmed at times (for example, phone lines) shows scalability could be strengthened.

Across the board, feedback loops back to those who give feedback, make complaints, and participate in assessments are not consistent. There are excellent examples of agencies coordinating feedback back to communities (for example, in response to feedback received, or following assessments), including via local refugee coordination forums, who work with both external communications to let broader communities know how they have listened, and by including that feedback in mobile outreach conducted by / alongside social services and - where relevant - Roma liaisons. However, this is not consistently done and there are not established standards in place to plan for this at the start of assessments and implement, or integrate into CFM processes. As per Section 2 of this report, this negatively impacts trust and perceived transparency of information sources, AAP actors and humanitarian agencies generally.

Based on interviews, staff and volunteers generally have precise understandings of what defines feedback and complaints (for example, making complaints or giving feedback against specific services or in response to specific incidents). Mechanisms (for example, filling out a form - either over the phone with the operator filling in for the community member, online forms, or a form in person in a community centre) are also typically precise and not particularly adaptive or inviting of general participation or insights. In interviews for this assessment, a key informant indicated that complaints or feedback are considered official and are only recorded when there is a community member's name attached to the report, showing potential issues in understanding and safeguarding the opportunity for people to submit feedback anonymously through a range of ways. This instance perhaps points to a level of confidence in established referral processes (which would have specific names attached) that is not as evident is not as evident regarding complaints, feedback and participation. Unlike with referral cases, there are no formalised, bilateral, inter-agency procedures for sharing complaints and feedback.

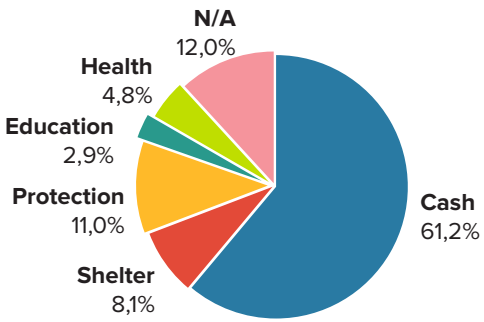
UNHCR conducted a Participatory Assessment (PA) in October 2023, following a similar assessment in 2022[16]. The PA focused on understanding the level of inclusion of the refugees currently in the country, challenges they encounter and opportunities they identify. The assessment employed participatory methodologies (focus group discussions and semi-structured discussions) by AAP Taskforce and Protection Working Group (including Child Protection Sub-Working Group and Disability and Age Taskforce) partners.

Laolalta InfoUnit continues to conduct regular online social listening and share findings via the AAP Task Force and the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) in Moldova, as well as bilaterally to relevant partners. The reports present analysis of refugee and local community social media media posts of threads. The tracking, which is increasingly sophisticated in its analysis, enables humanitarian organisations and other stakeholders to be informed about community discussions, misinformation narratives and identify gaps in the response. For the purposes of this report, Internews conducted online social listening that builds on Laolalta InfoUnit's ongoing analysis (that captures what communities are saying online), and takes the opportunity to examine *how* people interact online about the topics the Laolalta InfoUnit and the Participatory Assessment identified as important to refugees and host communities, including how humanitarian agencies manage two-way information, moderate discussions, and respond to questions, complaints and feedback.

This analysis found that online behaviour of refugees from Ukraine reflects the trend towards cohesive community-level support, with people from Ukraine often using online platforms to discuss concerns, warn each other about information-related risks (such as scams), and disseminate useful information. The personal nature of the majority of the groups that people regularly inhibit does not replace formal feedback forms. Based on online social listening conducted as part of this assessment, negative sentiments shared in community-run groups (which formed about a third of observed conversations), revolve around questions about accessing information and services, complaints about delays and inconsistencies, and frustrations about inadequate responses from service providers. In conversations monitored as being relevant to AAP mechanisms, sixty-five (65) percent of comments indicated a level of uncertainty by the commenter on where to ask questions or get information about humanitarian services. Twenty-one (21) percent constituted a complaint about humanitarian services and ten (10 percent) specifically talked about lack of response from or access to hotlines. Sentiments shared in these groups also indicated a level of confusion about information being provided and a sense of being misled or lack of transparency in the response. In response, group members usually continued to share information intended to support, and often encouraged commenters to ultimately contact official sources to clarify information.

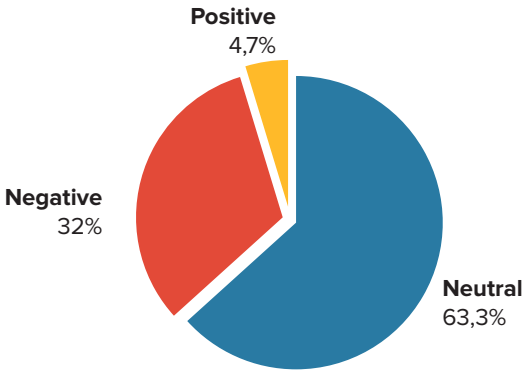
[16] UNHCR, 2023 Participatory Assessment Report, Moldova

Figure 17. Online social listening – key topics of conversation by sector



The vast majority of monitored conversations in online groups related to refugee services and supports related to cash assistance. Most of the cash-related conversations related to a person being unsure about where to ask questions or get information (fifty (50) percent).

Figure 18. Online social listening – sentiment analysis of discussions about cash-related topics



Eighty-two (82) percent of observed cash-related queries raised in official online groups received a general or direct response from admins / moderators.

Figure 19. Online social listening - response from admins

As well as efforts to engage online in the interest of AAP, a key strength of AAP efforts in the past year in Moldova in relation to the refugee response is the diversity of methods humanitarian agencies and civil society use to engage refugees and host communities in making complaints and giving feedback. Temporary Protection fairs continue to be successful in providing a space for refugees to ask questions, get more information from and give feedback to a coordinated range of services. Refugees in focus group discussions spoke of being proactively called for feedback on services via phone, or asked by volunteers for feedback at community centres. UNHCR and other agencies conduct coordinated outreach alongside local social assistance programs, forming mobile teams who can visit households experiencing vulnerability, in hard to reach areas and people who are not online. Working alongside social assistance programs also aligns with integration efforts, establishing more sustainable connections between refugees who may need support for years to come, after emergency assistance for refugees has transitioned into general social services.

Given the clear strength and preference by refugees from Ukraine for hyper-localised information ecosystems, linking the above efforts (including online engagement) with existing and developing community-led networks and ways of communicating will bolster AAP and help ensure it holds its place in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus agenda. For example, this could include ensuring the development of online awareness campaigns are designed in a way that recognises sharing of information between online community groups as a priority, not just through official online social media.

Finally, training and coordination from the AAP Task Force was consistently referred to as the coordinating point, and a go-to forum for advice and sharing experience with partners. There is also evidence of strong coordination at local levels between humanitarian organisations, local authorities and refugees in the community that foster strong accountability, via local coordination forums.

Government

Government of Moldova approaches to AAP differ across central government and local authorities, and - as per Section 2, this correlates with trust in information levels. The central government - including relevant Ministries - play a more background, coordinating role with humanitarian organisations and CSOs, including within partnerships that have been in place well before the influx of refugees from Ukraine in 2022. Relevant ministries regularly participate in the AAP Taskforce, and in drafting key messages, frequently asked questions and other tools that enable consistent and clear communication with communities

about legal status and service provision. Government departments do not engage much with overall AAP strategies, including in strategies for inclusion of vulnerable groups, as they see that as the remit of specific agencies (who they partner with in some cases). The Ministry of Internal Affairs adopted what appears to be a standard consultation mechanism via particip.gov.md in relation to amendments to government decisions on temporary protection of displaced people from Ukraine - available in Romanian, Russian and English. Engagement on the site included a few comments, including from the National Congress of Ukrainians in Moldova, who conducted a small campaign for collecting suggestions, comments and feedback from refugees.

This assessment indicates relatively high levels of trust in local authorities, though not a lot of recognition of formal complaints and feedback mechanisms. FGD participants generally noted a sense of approachability about local authorities, and mentioned that opportunities to talk with authorities face to face is helpful. There is also indication of strong coordination between social services, CSOs, humanitarian organisations and local authorities via Refugee Coordination forums, which hold open forums that include participation of local refugees and host community members. It should be noted that success of these forums may differ between different areas, as this assessment could only look at one example.

Effective local coordination and engagement also includes successful engagement with Roma Community Mediators (including within the Refugee Coordination Forums). There are around 43 mediators across the country, which is a long-standing mechanism developed by the government in 2013 to address the needs of ethnic Romain in Moldova. Refugee coordination mechanisms and services have effectively integrated with Roma Community Mediators, proving to be a critical resource for facilitating dialogue between Roma refugees and local communities, and providing information and support on accessing available services.[17]

It's about participation

Findings across this research show clearly that refugees from Ukraine and host communities in Moldova prefer familiar, two-way forums for communication, and it is worthwhile considering this related to CFM. Survey and focus group discussion findings indicate feedback and complaints are more readily shared and discussed in: close community groups online (with friends and family), more so than official, moderated channels; and one-to-one face-to-face conversations or facilitated discussion groups, rather than filling out an official form.

[17] Refugee Coordination Forum, Moldova Roma Task force briefing note, December 2023.

> *"Yes, of course we can give reviews and we prefer to give reviews in person rather than officially somewhere."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, host community, Woman, December 2023]***

Findings also show a widespread sense of not having anything to complain about, or - in cases where there may be issues - not wanting to seem ungrateful. This likely indicates a conflation of feedback with complaints, leaving little room for use of CFM in the interest of participation. That is, refugees and host communities seem to feel that the purpose of these mechanisms is only to complain about something that has happened to them, rather than being a mechanism generally for input on the response. In this sense, complaint and feedback mechanisms are not fulfilling their purpose across the full spectrum of community participation. Continuing to open up and adapt CFM to include proactive, discussion-based, face-to-face, community-driven spaces will allow for more inclusive input from refugees that can inform adaptations of programs and services. An example of good practice that should be strengthened and repeated are the Participatory Assessments conducted by UNHCR with the support of Protection Working Group and AAP Task Force partners in 2022 and 2023, which were undertaken to understand intentions of refugees from Ukraine and integration needs, and was done so via discussion groups to facilitate the participatory nature of the assessment.

COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK TOPICS

Based on surveys and discussion groups undertaken for this assessment, challenges accessing financial aid and confusion around eligibility emerged as a prominent issue prompting feedback, alongside concerns about medical care, the effectiveness of the Cash Helpline, employment and work-related issues, and living conditions in RACs. According to Laolalta InfoUnit social listening reports analysis, following the announcement of changes to eligibility for UNHCR cash assistance in October 2023, refugees frequently sought and exchanged information about the appropriate ways to make complaints or give feedback on the cash assistance program[18]. In the 2023 UNHCR Participatory Assessment, refugees identified issues accessing information about their rights in relation to Temporary Protection Status, expectations of long-term stays, access

[18] InfoUnit, Laolalta, Quarterly Social Listening report, Oct-Dec 2023

to healthcare, increasing challenges with housing and reduced trust in information phone lines (among others). The Participatory Assessment also included engagement with refugees in the Transnistria region, which allowed exploration of specific challenges in that area, which are higher than elsewhere.[19]

Based on interviews as part of this assessment, it is evident that humanitarian agency staff were aware of the surge of challenges in relation to legal status and financial assistance, in part based on CFMs, and were responsive. Confusion regarding payment sequences and frustrations with wait times persisted for refugees, which in some cases led to sentiments about a lack of transparency, and a sense of deception by humanitarian services (based on online social listening conducted as part of this assessment). This is an example of where more proactive engagement with and more participation and involvement from refugee populations leading up to the announcement of changes could have been beneficial to better integrating communications about cash assistance changes with community level communications.

BARRIERS

Focus group discussions with various groups and key information interviews with humanitarian and civil society staff allowed for a deeper dive into some of the barriers refugees and host communities face in participating in CFM. Generally, people who do not find information access easy are less likely to participate in complaints and feedback mechanisms (the eleven (11) percent of refugees who find access to information difficult - see Section 1 - are underrepresented in participation in complaints and feedback mechanisms).

Based on interviews, people who are understood to face the biggest barriers in AAP mechanism are those who do not have access to the internet and / or have low literacy and digital literacy, including older people and people with disabilities . Some participants in focus groups with refugees with disabilities said they do not see the point in raising complaints due to lack of confidence in the process resulting in resolution. Others indicated participating in CFM conflicts with their belief that they should be grateful for the assistance. Survey data also shows that as people get older, they are more likely to feel it is not in their nature to complain.

> *"I see those little boxes, yes. You always want to write thank you for everything."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, refugee with disability, December 2023]***

> *"I won't file complaints and reviews. I believe that I'll be given what I need anyway, nobody will kick me out onto the street. I've received more help here than... I've never received anything like this in Ukraine, so if someone somewhere isn't working as they should, I won't complain. [...] Complaints are written by inadequate people, so I will never complain about anyone."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, refugee with disability, December 2023]***

Surveys indicate younger refugees (18-29) are twice as likely to participate in CFM people aged 45+, but also had more challenges finding the 'right' CFM compared to older age groups. Younger people are also twice as likely to be worried that complaints may lead to services being cut off.

Compared to other age groups, younger people do not feel it is pointless to complain or give feedback (2 percent, compared to 7 percent of refugees aged 45+). In focus group discussions, young refugees expressed feelings of uselessness, and that their voice is not heard and older people do not value their opinions.

> *"Well, I have had such cases, more than once, that they refused to help me without explaining the reason. [...] I immediately called the [...] dopomoga.gov.md hotline. There they told me that they had nothing to do with this. They are not connected with this organisation in any way and cannot influence this in any way. Well, then, further, I didn't know where to turn. Therefore, to this day I have never received any help from them."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, youth refugees, Woman, December 2023]***

[19] UNHCR, 2023 Participatory Assessment Report, Moldova

Discussions with Roma people as part of this research, indicate a lack of awareness of channels for leaving feedback or complaints. Some participants had negative experiences with accessing assistance, but did not know where to submit complaints. One participant experienced difficulties in submitting complaints, despite multiple attempts.

> *"[...] And no one gave us anything for food; we never received anything. So I asked them where should I go, who should I write to? Make a complaint. They didn't give it to me. They gave me phone numbers. I didn't get through, unfortunately. Apparently, there is something there, blocked, in short. [...] I tried many times (to submit a complaint), not just once, 2-3 times, and then nothing."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Man, December 2023]***

> *"No, we are not aware of such channels."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, December 2023]***

> *"All reviews are written there, in these groups where we are present."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Man, December 2023]***

Other Roma people mentioned in the focus group discussion that they are aware of feedback mechanisms, but didn't use them for the reason of not being perceived as ungrateful. Some Roma people have learned about available channels over time and feel more empowered to address issues. Overall, the Roma participants expressed a preference for continuing to discuss feedback among themselves, within their groups on social media or messaging applications. The December 2023 Roma Taskforce briefing also reinforced this, recommending an increase in the level of involvement of Roma refugees in decision-making processes, via humanitarian activities and engagement[20].

[20] Refugee Coordination Forum, Moldova Roma Task force briefing note, December 2023.

Section 4: Information related risks

Within the information ecosystem studied in this assessment, we know that refugees from Ukraine make decisions for how to seek, access, create and share information. They need safe channels for this, and the absence of those can exacerbate protection risks including sexual exploitation and abuse, gender-based violence, discrimination, trafficking in persons, restriction of movement and diminished access to services. This section covers issues brought up in surveys, focus groups discussions and key informant interviews that relate to information related-protection risks, including misinformation, disinformation and hate speech, digital risks, disclosure of sensitive information, people being missed in information access and AAP (what service providers referred to as 'risk zones') and social tensions.

MISINFORMATION

Misinformation and unverified information circulate amongst refugees from Ukraine and Moldovan communities, particularly online. The dynamics and narratives of misinformation are monitored by the Laolalta InfoUnit in their regular online social listening analysis. For this reason, this section does not aim to provide coverage of rumours and misinformation narratives, but rather draw links between the narratives refugees and host communities are concerned about, and when those narratives present real world risk.

Refugees (in particular, women) stated they do not have reliable information about healthcare. They say the information is often contradictory, and have trouble finding information that gets them the support they need, in a way that is not stressful. Notably, this contradictory or unclear information is conflated with lack of transparency on the authorities' part. This discussion points to the

risk of misinformation acting as a barrier to people receiving vital services. It also points to the way misinformation can contribute to decreasing trust, faith in, or sense of safety in humanitarian or social services - which can further limit access to services and resources in that it tarnishes a key information source as a whole.

> *"And the lack of transparent information, which naturally gives rise to rumours, gossip, misinterpretations, and they are therefore circulated from group to group, which does not add understanding."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, Refugees recently arrived, Woman, December 2023]***

A key example of misinformation that poses a high risk to Ukrainian people are rumours - particularly prevalent within Roma Ukrainian communities in Moldova - that associate Temporary Protection processes or other avenues for formalising legal status, with men being sent back to Ukraine to be enrolled in the military. Specifically, people face these fears about young men, who came to Moldova initially as under 18, but have since aged into conscription age.

> *"We just heard that you are taking this protection in vain, because you are still going to send the men back (to Ukraine)."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, December 2023]***

> *I'm just worried because my son is 19 years old, he came here, he was 17, he turned 18 here (in Moldova). When he crossed the border, he was a minor. We drove along calmly. And that's why they started having this conversation yesterday, that they're starting to take guys from here back to Ukraine to fight. And there are those who say - why should you take these temporary protections!? You shouldn't take it anyway. Well, I just asked because I'm worried, they write in groups that they go door to door and ask for documents."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, December 2023]***

Additional misinformation circulating about temporary protection is the fear that in undertaking that registration, details of the registered person will be sent back to 'special services' in Ukraine, who have the right to then deport them from Moldova. This shows a lacking sense of safety and understanding of what happens to the personal data they share with humanitarian agencies and authorities, and likely results in less registrations (and therefore access to services and protections, and less access to official information sources).

> *"We were told that we did a great stupidity, that we made this temporary protection. So the information immediately goes to the special services in Ukraine. And thanks to this protection, they have the right to come here to deport us."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, December 2023]***

Within host communities, focus group discussion participants mentioned difficulties in distinguishing between true and false information, and particularly of the refugees they host being susceptible to misinformation and sharing it with them. There is a level of information literacy evident (such as checking the source of a piece of information). Messages regarding financial aid received from a non-trustful source were mentioned as examples of false information shared among refugees.

> *"For information about.... financial aid, for example, the lady I host sends me and says - look, call this phone and you will get some help. I don't even react to such messages, because after a few hours she herself detects that it is actually a fake. Only when it's really a verified source, if I don't know better I refuse."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, Host community, Woman, December 2023]***

DIGITAL RISK

Given the concentration of Ukrainian refugee communication in digital spaces, understanding digital risks is important[21]. Specifically, the abundance of large online groups that were initiated during the influx of refugees into Moldova, that have since grown into thousands - sometimes hundreds of thousands - of members means that users need strong awareness of the risks those growing online groups pose. Given there are also many smaller, more localised groups (of friends, friends of friends, neighbourhoods, etcetera), it can be challenging for users to track the transition of a group from a small, private group with a more trusted set of users, to something much larger and unknown. Group members may initially feel safe enough to share personally identifying information or sensitive experiences in those groups, and continue to do so past the point where the group has grown to unfamiliar and insecure levels.

Monitoring of rumours, misinformation and scams / fraudulent behaviour in online spaces is undertaken consistently by Laolalta InfoUnit, as well as other agency-specific online monitoring. Refugees from Ukraine and host communities demonstrate fairly strong collective information and digital literacy, with strong habits in flagging false or misleading information in social media groups and reporting scammers. However, there are groups who are recognised as less digitally literate and at more risk. There is also a common sense of exhaustion with having to sort through misinformation and scams in digital environments - something that should be recognised as a negative psychosocial impact of relying on online information as a refugee.

Protection of personal data is a pain point for some refugees, who shared suspicions that some aid organisations use refugees' personal data to divert the aid. Examples were presented in local media and mentioned by women in focus groups in particular.

> *"According to the news, when the fraud of some humanitarian aid centres was revealed, it is possible that a number of funds were withdrawn under our names. I suspect it was."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, refugee, Woman with kids, December 2023]***

[21] Floods and deserts: information access and barriers in Moldova's refugee response, Internews, 2022/23

Refugees from Ukraine also expressed their fears and doubts about data security and use of personal information, especially in relation to children. One discussion group participant spoke of confusion when a NGO took pictures of her child and then asked for a signature that would allow them to use the photo in a range of ways. Participants also mentioned organisations requiring access to personal data on cell phones when registering on their websites, which caused concern about the confidentiality of their information.

> *"[...] you need to give access to register to this site, you need to give access to all your data, to your phone. There is my pension card, that's all mine. Do you understand? And pictures, and personal correspondence. That is, it turned out that I have nothing personal. I have to give all my personal information for receiving the product package."*
>
> ***[Chisinau, refugee with disability, December 2023]***

Roma refugees from Ukraine regularly encounter scams in group chats, and are similarly familiar with signs of misleading information and actions to take to report it.

> *"Based on likes, we immediately see if there's a scary emoji, I mean, we, people, someone immediately writes that it's spam, don't go there, don't click on the link, don't fill anything out, don't enter your card number, and especially something like that. [...] Moreover, as far as I know, in many groups there are lawyers, they also start (flagging) immediately."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, December 2023]***

DISCLOSURE OF SENSITIVE INFORMATION

For disclosure of sensitive or complex information or referrals, surveys and focus groups discussions suggest that refugees prefer having one-to-one conversations to talk through issues, and generally see phone lines and in-person volunteers, case workers and agency staff as safe and comfortable channels. Refugees who have been in Moldova less than six months indicated it took them some time to start trusting volunteers at centres in order to disclose personal details face to face. Volunteers and AAP workers in focus groups discussions indicated good familiarity and confidence in referral processes, including the importance of adeptly referring people without drawing out too much sensitive information unnecessarily. Humanitarian agencies and phone lines such as Green Line have also indicated strong standards of regular training and capacity building of frontline staff (on phones, social media moderating and in person) to maintain good practices in this area (for example, referrals around gender based violence, human trafficking, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, mental health support needs).

The reliance and preference refugees from Ukraine have for small, localised online groups has built strong, close-knit channels where people have high levels of trust in information shared. However, it should be noted that close groups with high levels of trust also come with risk. For situations where anonymity is preferred during disclosure of information, refugees who have previously relied on their community chat groups to share information and ask questions may find themselves less able or more hesitant to navigate official channels. The groups also run the risk of building blind trust amongst users - moving into an extreme end of the Trust Framework section that means their level of trust in these groups is very high, and their level of questioning or verification becomes lower. Within the coverage of this research, this level of trust has not been observed, but it should be noted as a future risk.

SOCIAL TENSIONS

Social tensions can increase the risk of refugees and host communities feeling unsafe in sharing, seeking, accessing and creating information. Russian vs. Ukrainian vs. Romanian language use has previously been identified as something that can trigger social tensions[22]. As with the 2022-23 IEA, Ukrainian refugees surveyed still prefer to receive and share information publicly about the response in Russian (92 percent when speaking with aid workers). However, some continue to feel uncomfortable speaking it in public in Russian, with younger refugees particularly pointing to this as something that makes them feel unsafe, and makes them less likely to join in discussions and social environments. Some Moldovans have indicated a preference for refugees from Ukraine to learn Romanian, and have expressed concerns that Ukrainian (or even Russian) language would infiltrate and take-over areas. As the refugee response moves into an integration focus, language tensions should remain front of mind, with sensitivities over the loss of Ukrainian language in some households, if expectations for public information sharing overly prioritises Romanian or even Russian. According to recent focus group discussions, these tensions continue to be particularly pronounced in Balti.

Other tensions identified in 2022-23 prevail, such as Moldovan people's perception that Ukrainians are wealthy and are taking advantage of Moldovans, that Moldovans in need are getting less from welfare services because Ukrainians are getting more. Misinformation continues to circulate about how much the government of Moldova spends on the refugee response, prompting sentiments that money is being displaced from social services for Moldovan people. Focus group discussions with refugee groups indicate that social tensions such as these impact refugees' feelings of security and whether or not they make complaints or participate in public conversations. Some refugees feel confident to ask for help (for example, calling out phone operators / service providers when they feel they are being rude, or calling the police in instances where they feel attacked), but others - especially younger refugees and men - avoid confrontation and typically remove themselves from those situations. In the 2023 Participatory Assessment refugee participants expressed that it is essential that international organisations also support the local population, in order to enhance trust and cooperation between refugees and locals[23].

[22] Cowlrick, E. Internews, One Year Later: Online Discourse in Moldova about Ukrainian Refugees, 2023
[23] UNHCR, 2023 Participatory Assessment Report, Moldova

Based on recent discussion groups with Roma people, Roma refugees feel safe in Moldova, reporting that tensions only usually arise when people discuss political issues, but the Roma people try to avoid such conversations. This may indicate a need to ensure safe spaces exist for Roma people's participation in political or controversial discussions.

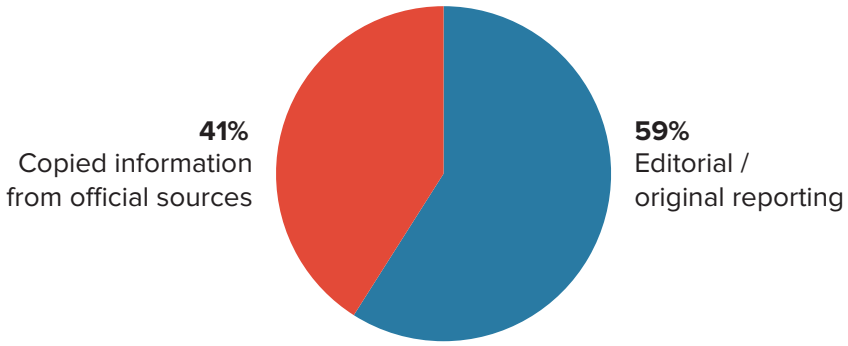
> *"But nobody offends us. In two years, on the contrary, there is maximum respect. [...] We don't get involved in Moldova's politics."*
>
> ***[Balti, Roma refugee, Woman, December 2023]***

Section 5: Perceptions in Moldovan Media

This section looks at portrayals of refugees from Ukraine in Moldovan media and how they may link with perceptions of refugees and social tensions. It also analyses the quality of coverage, and seeks to understand to what degree information in the media is useful for refugees and host communities. The monitoring includes analysis of content produced by 15 media outlets between July and December 2023.

Based on the 103 media reports analysed across Moldova, it is evident that media coverage focuses on services and support measures for Ukrainian refugees (including changes to that support and changes in eligibility), funding of those services and also issues related to the war and its impact on Urkainians in Moldova, and Moldovans. It can be observed that for many media institutions, this topic is not as important as it was in the early period of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Short news pieces based on official information are published, but more complex materials, which would require more time and dedication from journalists, are missing. More than half of the analysed reports (fifty-nine (59) percent) are copy and pasted from government or humanitarian agency press releases or publicly available information. The accuracy across these 'copied' reports are therefore very high in accordance with government and humanitarian messaging. However, most of the reports therefore do not add any contextual information or stories from refugee or host communities experiences, and in many cases lack engaging content.

Figure 20. Reporting quality / accuracy



Journalists interviewed as part of this research indicated the reason for the high representation of copied information from authorities / public administration sources, is because they felt they had enough information from the government press releases and websites, and in most cases do not feel they need to inquire more or expand on this. This means that for the majority of stories, refugees, host communities and experts are not engaged as sources or informants. This data shows that regional outlets engage diverse, mixed sources significantly more than the national average (42 percent compared to 29 percent). They also engage specifically with refugees and civil society experts more than the national average, and significantly less with authorities and public administration (which includes the directly copied press releases) than the national average.

Figure 21. Sources for journalists, nation-wide

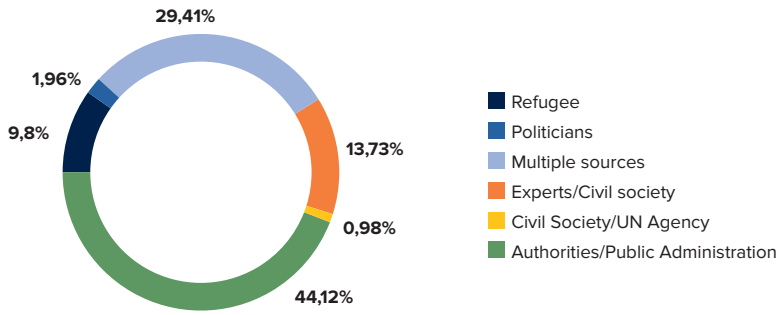
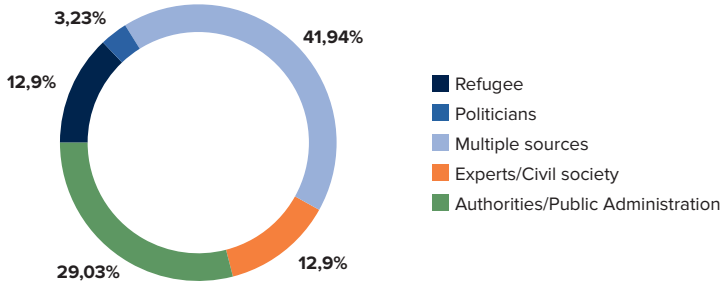


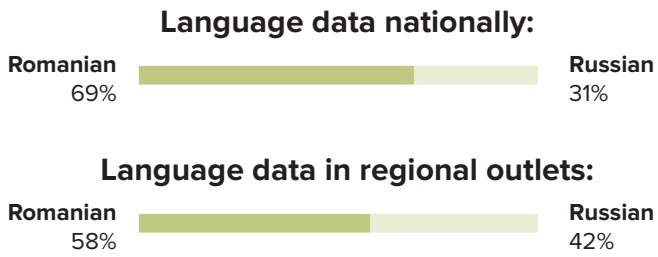
Figure 22. Sources for journalists, regional news outlets



In most cases, journalists have reported accurately and impartially on this subject, without using prejudiced language or exaggerated / manipulated representations of refugees (with the exception of one case), hate-mongering messages, or defamatory attitudes. In most reports journalists adopted a neutral tone and in some cases content that related to integration successes of some refugees were reported in an optimistic, positive way.

The majority of content (69 percent) is produced in Romanian, however in regional areas, close to half the coverage about refugees or refugee issues is published in Russian.

Figure 23. Content languages



> *"Considering that there are Ukrainian and Russian villages in the northern part of Moldova, refugee-related themes are crucial, especially since many of them rely on Russian sources of information. Even after two years since the war started, many people in the northern part of the country justify Russia's actions. In these circumstances, it is more relevant than ever to combat propaganda and manipulation to which the citizens of the Republic of Moldova are subjected. We monitor the public's reactions to these materials regularly to analyse and see how people's opinions and attitudes toward Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova have changed over time."*
>
> ***Media outlet KII, 2024***

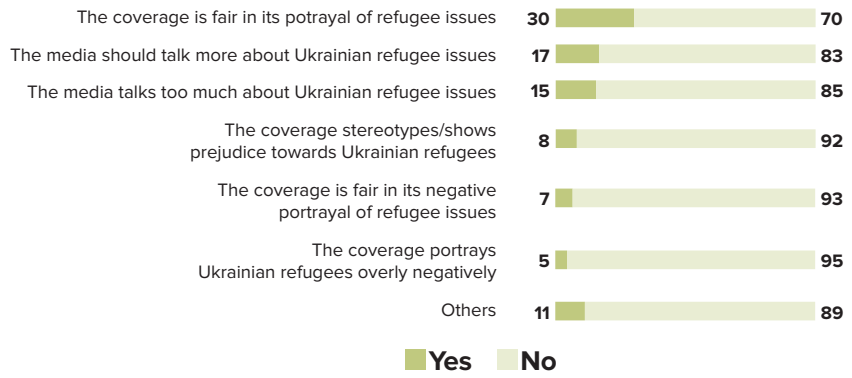
Capacity, coordination and funding

Several media outlets are commissioned by authorities to publish paid content about refugee rights and services, for example, about primary and emergency medical assistance, enrollment in the public education system, social assistance and protection, and employment opportunities. The materials are part of communication campaigns dedicated to preventing and combating corruption by informing refugees from Ukraine, as well as the population of Moldova, about refugee rights. That project is funded by the German government, in partnership with the National Anti-Corruption Center in Chisinau. Some media institutions (TV8, Studio-I, Jurnal TV) have created content about refugees from Ukraine as part of a project launched by the Center for Independent Journalism - "Support for Refugees from Ukraine through Media," funded by the Government of Japan, which is an initiative UNESCO developed within the Regional Refugee Response Plan. This project included training and workshops for journalists on how to ethically and sensitively cover refugee issues, and support for integrating Ukrainian journalists in the Moldovan media space.

As a result of the UNESCO funding 'The Weekly Show' was able to recruit journalists from Ukraine to work on TV and radio production, which provides dedicated content for refugees from Ukraine - focusing currently on long-term stay matters, such as the psychologies of building a new life, education, employment, starting a business. Teleradio-Moldova Company (TV and radio) and Public radio (Radio Moldova) are also a partner in this project, and cover the subject of Ukrainian refugees regularly, with refugee perspectives and contexts presented in almost every report. Broadly, media content focuses on community stories and backgrounds of refugees, including highlighting the successes of integration into the Moldovan society. Some reports - such as those tied to the anti-corruption campaigns, provide useful information for communities. Others focus more on information about refugees that can be seen to contribute towards social cohesion, understanding and integration. It should be noted that the outlets with original content developed about refugees are outlets that have specific grant funding to do so. Though beneficial, it shows an artificial boost to information supply about refugee issues, and also runs the risk of coverage of refugee issues only existing (for the most part) when editors are steered to do so via grant or funding obligations, rather than by audience / community preference.

Editorial teams indicate that overall, reporting on refugee issues is not a priority, based on audience preferences and the demands of other reporting needs (such as elections). Based on surveys, one third of Moldovans think coverage is fair in its portrayal of refugee issues. But, there are divided opinions regarding how frequent the coverage of refugees issues should be, with 17 percent saying the media should talk more about Ukrainian refugee issues, and 15 percent saying the media talks too much about Ukrainian refugee issues.

Figure 24. Perceived quality of media coverage on refugee-related issues, host community



Journalists and editorial teams also indicated a clear fatigue from covering war-related topics, and challenges in getting answers or information from authorities. They have identified efforts that would help with reporting on refugee issues, including easier access to data about refugees - for example data about movements of refugees and migration flows, and understanding the differences between people who stay in Moldova and those who settle elsewhere in Europe. According to interviews, journalists are calling for more workshops - particularly with regional media - and for a database of experts related to the refugee response who they can easily call on to check information and act as sources. Workshops and a central list of contacts was developed as part of funded projects, but is potentially not reaching journalists widely. Journalists do access official websites (such as Dopomoga, other government sites) and find them helpful, but need sources who can provide more context and community level perspectives. Journalists are aware that hotlines can act as good information channels, but do not want to call those lines as they feel they would be using up capacity intended for refugees.

Annex 1: Update on 2022/23 recommendations

This Annex provides a status update on recommendations from the 2023-23 Information Ecosystem Assessment - Floods and deserts: information access and barriers in Moldova's refugee response. This status update does not intend to capture all activities, but to give an idea of progress made generally on each recommendation. The 2024 progress updates were informed by UNHCR and other AAP partners. Sections coloured ***green*** *indicate a lot of progress or the recommendation being completed.* ***Orange*** *sections indicate some progress has been made.* ***Red*** *sections indicate little progress has been made, or activities under this recommendation have not started. Where relevant, orange and red recommendations have been integrated into the updated 2024 recommendations in this report.*

2024 - Some examples of this, e.g. live-streaming of the 2024 RRP. However, communication on how decisions are made, is not generally communicated..

Transparency - provide clear information on decisions, priorities, factors for eligibility

Transparency - Ensure information is shared in two-way channels where people can ask questions and clarify information. Hire monitors, host 'live' sessions

2024 - E.g. Laolalta, NCUM, IOM - with 'live' sessions scheduled in response to monitoring social media and CFM.

This occurs. Laolalta InfoUnit bilaterally shares analysis with agencies + through the AAP TF. This has resulted in action on early identification of information gaps and needs.

Transparency - Continue rumour tracking - Use identified rumours as an early warning system for community information gaps, misperceptions

Transparency - ensure adequate data security practices, and clearly explain to refugees how their personal data will be protected

2024 - There continues to be a lack of awareness in communities about how their personal data is protected. This recommendation is still relevant in 2024.

2024 - This has not happened in a systemised way, though there are strong practices in place and developing amongst humanitarian organisations and CSOs. This recommendation is still relevant..

Transparency - training on content moderation, reporting of online risks, information literacy, fact checking + verification techniques for admins engaged on private communication channels.

Accessible communication Offer information in Russian and Ukrainian where possible, particularly for written materials.

2024 - This is happening. Some refugees indicate they do not receive information or engage with services in their preferred language, so this should continue to be monitored alongside integration efforts.

2024 - this is happening, but, though there have been specific efforts targeted to undocumented men, anxieties and fears exist that still impact info access and engagement.

Accessible communication - use different formats and channels, tailor information for at-risk / marginalised groups

Accessible communication Communicate clearly to the Moldovan community about services they are also eligible to access while also highlighting any relevant eligibility criteria.

2024 - Positive feedback from Moldovan communities on this. Efforts should continue alongside integration efforts, especially re eligibility criteria and decisions around allocation of aid money

2024 - This has occurred, for example, promoting mobile outreach opportunities for temporary protection registration and cash services.

Accessible communication - Share information relevant for older people in digital spaces, so relatives and friends can help transmit information to them.

Accessible communication - Identify areas where Ukrainian youth may be eligible but unaware of services, activities and opportunities offered by Moldovan government and NGOs.

2024 - There are no apparent increased or systematic efforts in this area, so this recommendation is still relevant .

2024 - There is low communication around and public engagement in the Service Advisor Map, so this recommendation is still relevant.

Accessible communication - Ensure up to date information about your services is included in the new Services Advisor map to inform refugees, volunteers and other service providers.

Shift the power - Build processes to regularly listen to community needs and preferences and adapt programmes based on the feedback received.

2024 - There are great examples of online social listening informing adaptation of programmes, however these efforts need to be further embedded and linked to feedback to communities.

2024 - Needs to be strengthened. There is significant evidence of survey fatigue in communities, and refugees and host communities indicated a lack of trust that their inputs into research / assessments make any difference.

Shift the power - Report back to refugees on the result of research conducted with them to allow them to use findings to advocate for their own needs and to address survey fatigue.

Shift the power - Recruit a representative group of refugees to participate in planning processes, such as the RRP, to ensure programming is accessible, trustworthy and effective.

2024 - Local consultations with communities occurred to input into the RRP development. However, this could be further embedded.

2024 - This has occured with support from the AAP TF, however use of feedback and complaint mechanisms by refugees and host communities is limited..

Feedback + complaints - information campaigns to explain the purpose of feedback. Address misperceptions that providing negative feedback could impact individual access to services.

Feedback + complaints - Provide clear evidence of where complaints and feedback have directly contributed to changes in aid responses to foster a culture of feedback.

2024 - As with social listening, there are a few great examples of CFM informing adaptation of services. However, this is not systematic or embedded practice, so this recommendation is still relevant.

2024 - Though this took place within specific agencies, there are still some gaps within key phone line services, so this recommendation still applies.

Feedback + complaints - Provide regular training to phoneline operators in cultural- + trauma-informed communication techniques to ensure they can be sensitive to requests and feedback.

Feedback + complaints - Centralise CFM. Share centralised feedback data with humanitarian coordination mechanisms so more agencies can collaboratively respond to overall community feedback and perceptions.

2024 - Insufficient sharing of CFM data bilaterally between agencies. Considering donor limitations, this rec. can be reframed to emphasise the need for better sharing of CFM data into a centralised system

2024 - This has occurred through TP fairs, mobile outreach, online social listening and adapted practices in response to CFM around TPS.

Temporary protection communication - Use a variety of information formats and two-way communications to inform about TPS, to ensure wide reaching access to this crucial information.

Support media - be ready to answer questions from Moldovan media about the refugee response and create forums where media and humanitarians can regularly interact and build trust.

Some project-funded efforts sucessful, but journalists are still seeking better connections with and access to information from humanitarian services in particular.

2024 - This has occurred in part via UNESCO project funding, but it is unclear whether this will be sustained long-term.

Support media - Encourage and support media organisations to hire content creators from the refugee community.