

REPORT OF

DIALOGUE ON DISABILITY IN THE REFUGEE RESPONSE IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Cahul, Donduseni, Chisinau - 18-20 December 2023

Introduction

Background

Forced displacement can exacerbate the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and result in a higher prevalence of disability in the population. Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalised and disproportionately affected groups in these contexts. Among the subgroups, older refugees, women and girls with disabilities are particularly at risk. Approximately 10% of refugees in Moldova are persons with disabilities, and 22% of refugee households have at least one family member with specific needs, such as a disability or serious medical condition.



UNHCR, together with the Disability and Age Task Force (DATF) of the Refugee Coordination Forum, the European Disability Forum (EDF), the different Moldovan Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP) organized a 2-day event to identify key steps to ensure better participation of OPDs in refugee response activities in the Republic of Moldova, as well as to improve the capacity of humanitarian actors to ensure that their work is disability-inclusive.

Objective and goals.

- Identify gaps and opportunities for disability inclusion at UNHCR Community Service Centers, with a focus on the practical aspects of service provision.
- Build effective long-term relationships between OPDs, service providers and social assistance departments at the municipal level.
- Influence policy discussions and decision-making at the national and regional levels around disability inclusion.
- Develop a joint note with recommendations for UNHCR partners in planning and implementing activities at Community Service Centers and other locations.
- Assess the effectiveness of the format of the two-day event and consider replicating it in other countries of the region.

Importance of collaboration between UNHCR and OPDs

The collaboration between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and organizations representing persons with disabilities holds immense importance in the context of refugees. Refugees with disabilities often face barriers accessing mainstream services and may also have specific requirements. By fostering a collaborative relationship, UNHCR and disability-led organizations can combine their expertise to address the multifaceted needs of this more at-risk population. Such

collaboration helps ensure that the overall humanitarian response is accessible to all, promoting inclusivity and accessibility in various aspects such as shelter, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities. Moreover, the involvement of disability organizations helps in advocating for policies and practices that uphold the dignity and rights of refugees with disabilities, fostering a more comprehensive and rights-based approach to humanitarian assistance. Overall, the synergy between UNHCR and disability organizations enhances the effectiveness and impact of interventions, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees with disabilities in crises.

Event Overview

The 2-day event was structured in collaboration with the European Disability Forum, national OPDs, governmental institutions at the national and local levels and UNHCR partners. The first day's objective, on the 18th of December, was to conduct field visits with Moldovan OPDs to two UNHCR Community Service Centers (CSC) (Donduseni in the north and Chaul in the south) to foster a closer relationship between the partners who are providing services there to refugees and the OPDs.

After the two visits, the information collected was presented at a roundtable in Chisinau on the 20th of December, as a starting point to discuss actions that would improve the engagement of OPDs in the refugee response in the Republic of Moldova and to improve inclusion of refugees with disabilities in partner activities. The second day was also an opportunity for organizations which are working on the refugee response to share their positive experience in supporting refugees with disabilities.



Day 1: Field visit to the UNHCR Community Service Centers

On the 18th of December, two delegations composed of UNHCR staff, EDF and other OPD representatives, visited two Community Service Centers in Donduseni and Cahul where they met with UNHCR partners, local authorities, and refugees with disabilities. The visits provided an opportunity for OPDs to better understand the work UNHCR and its partners are doing, to establish relationships for future collaboration and support, and to have an open dialogue on how to better support refugees with disabilities in the regions.

The findings of the visits were structured using the SWOT structure to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Risks. The findings were as follows:

Strengths

- Different services are provided together in one place (MHPSS, Legal Assistance, Cash Assistance, skill courses, child friendly)
- Good collaboration between local authorities, CSOs and UN Agencies
- Sustainability of the centers (space provided by local governments rent-free), managed by a national NGO
- Cohesion of Moldovan host communities and refugees

- Center were physically accessible for the most part, the buildings were recently renovated, bright and created a friendly environment
- Openness of people working in the center (from the different organizations)
- Sufficient resources available for organizing specific activities
- Consultation with users to identify activities for 2024
- Strong cooperation between CSC and social assistance department in Donduseni
- Presence of Mobile Units for outreach activities

Weaknesses

- Accessible information not available (no signage in the center, no availability of sign interpreter, or braille system in place)
- Lack of data on refugees with disabilities, both for users of the centres as well as in the local community, and lack of knowledge on how to identify people with disabilities
- For Donduseni, location of the center is not in the center of the city so not easy to reach. Public transportation is not accessible and doesn't arrive close to the center
- Lack of capacity of working with persons with disabilities
- Weak cooperation between CSC and social assistance department in Cahul

Opportunities

- Collaboration with ASRM for the provision of online sign interpretation and to develop accessible materials
- Collaboration with OPDs to identify improvements on accessibility
- Collaboration with OPDs on how to include people with disabilities in different activities
- Collaboration with OPD to sensitize staff in the CSCs on how to interact with people with disabilities
- Inclusion of people with disabilities in the process of identifying possible activities for them
- Organizations of activities which people can join online (i.e., language courses)
- Inclusion of available services on pages of local authorities
- Sharing of the CSC concept with other countries and regions as a good practice
- Extension of the services available in centers according to the needs of the users
- Strengthening the referral system with specific services for persons with disabilities and actors providing the services
- Engaging Moldovan OPDs as equal partners in running services centers in the future

Risks

- Closure or change of activities of the centers after the refugee response ends due to a lack of resources
- Fluctuation of qualified personnel to run the center
- Not providing enough resources for OPDs to meaningfully engage and participate

Day 2: Roundtable Discussion, High Level Panel and *Pecha Kucha* Event

Roundtable discussion with humanitarian partners

On the 20th of December, UNHCR, EDF and the OPDs organized a roundtable discussion in Chisinau with humanitarian partners that are actively engaged in the refugee's response. Participants included representatives from UN Agencies, international organizations, national CSOs, OPDs and government



institutions, including representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The findings of the CSC site visits were presented at the beginning of the roundtable for discussion, followed by a broader exchange on disability inclusion in the refugee response overall. EDF and UNHCR, as moderators of the discussion, presented recommendations prepared by the OPDs who

participated in the site visits, which included guidance and action points for humanitarian actors to better include OPDs and refugees with disabilities in their planning and activities in the country.

High Level Panel and *Pecha Kucha* Event

The second part of Day 2 included a high-level panel discussion and a *pecha kucha* event. The high-level panel was chaired by UNHCR Country Representative, Francesca Bonelli, who was joined by the Minister of Labor and Social Protection, Alexei Buzu, US Ambassador Kent Doyle Logsdon, EU Ambassador Janis Mazeiks, and EDF Humanitarian Officer Gordon Rattray. The panel provided an opportunity to discuss ways forward on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the refugee response together.

The panel discussion was followed by a series of brief presentations in *Pecha Kucha* format showcasing positive examples of inclusion from members of the Disability and Age Task Force through. *Pecha Kucha* is a storytelling format in which a presenter shows 20 slides for 20 seconds of commentary each. During the event seven organizations presented their achievements in the refugee response to an audience of over 100 participants from UN Agencies, government institutions, NGOs, and refugees. During the event, Mr. Julius Mvenyi Ntobuah from Newcomers with Disabilities, a Swedish refugee with disability-led organization, also participated. He provided input on the importance of ensuring that refugees with disabilities are able to establish organizations or informal groups that will work with national OPDs in the country of asylum to ensure that the particular needs of refugees with disabilities are met.

Annexes

- 201223 Dialogue on Disability Recommendations
- 201223 Presentation Roundtable OPDs