

Strategic Framework  
Roma Task Force  
2023

## OVERVIEW

Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 600,000 refugees have fled from Ukraine to Moldova, and as of January 2023, approximately 90,000 have remained in the country. Among them, the Roma community is one of the most vulnerable and neglected groups of displaced persons.

Estimates provided by "Minority Rights Group International" suggest that 200,000 and 400,000 Roma people lived in Ukraine before the war began and that around 100,000 Roma people may have been forced to flee Ukraine since the end of February 2022. In addition, data provided by the Moldova Roma Task Force, jointly led by UNHCR and the Roma Voice Coalition, shows that more than 2,000 Roma refugees are currently present and officially recorded in Moldova, even though other sources estimate the total number around 3,000, and 4,000.

For the year 2023 the RTF will be jointly chaired by "INTEROS", an international humanitarian NGO on the front line of emergency response, bringing assistance to victims of armed conflicts, natural disasters and extreme exclusion with particular attention to the protection of the most vulnerable people; and "Coalitia Vocea Romilor", a union of 37 Roma voluntary organizations whose main objective is to make the voice of Roma communities in Moldova heard across the board. The "Coalition" is widely spread across the territory and has been actively engaged since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine in offering humanitarian assistance to Roma refugees and strenuously defending their rights.

The Roma Task Force is also an essential monitoring and reporting tool and represents an opportunity to exchange information. But, most and foremost, it is an occasion to coordinate the intervention towards the Roma refugees effectively and have a positive and impactful outcome.

This working group unites and benefits from the experience of members, partners as well as representatives of communities, and the Government working on a whole gamut of protection activities, such as shelter, CP, and GBV.

Protection work is a collective effort from many actors who mainstream protection in their programs and provide specialized interventions based on their mandate and expertise; some focused explicitly on assisting Roma communities.

The multifaceted nature of protection and the presence of many organizations intervening means that there is a need for effective coordination among all the actors and an effective exchange of information to avoid duplication of efforts.

The responders dedicate their efforts to finding quick and effective solutions for Roma refugees, a vulnerable and discriminated category, through access to rights and services fully committed to humanitarian and protection principles, gender equality, and inclusion.

The members of the Task Force have identified a few strategic priorities for 2023 that could serve as guidelines for the actors involved to positively impact the refugees' lives and ensure that we meet the relevant needs identified through risk and needs assessments during 2022.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2023

### 1. MAPPING

Due to the constant and unpredictable mobility of communities of Roma refugees, it remains essential to continue mapping their geographical distribution accurately. In addition, this exercise will improve the capacity for needs assessment and outreach to provide humanitarian support and information on available services. In implementing this exercise, we must also include refugees that live in private accommodations and in rural and remote areas of the country to ensure maximum coverage and efficiency of the survey.

### 2. TEMPORARY PROTECTION

It is established that Temporary Protection will enter into force on March 1st 2023. This is a positive development for those displaced from Ukraine, as it will provide a more stable legal status in the Republic of Moldova and access to important rights and services. It is, therefore, vital to facilitate and guarantee access to the refugees of Roma ethnicity as well. The working group needs to pay particular attention to refugees that need documents or are encountering difficulties obtaining them.

It is essential to ensure that the refugees know the rights and obligations of applying for temporary protection and receive all the support they might need.

### 3. EDUCATION

Roma children who are Moldovan nationals have lower enrolment rates than the rest of the population and greater drop-out rates during times of crisis (e.g., COVID-19). According to OHCHR and UNICEF, just one out of every two Roma children is enrolled in school, with 41% of respondents telling OHCHR that during the epidemic, none of their children attended school, compared to enrolment rates of 90% or more for other Moldovan citizens. During the Covid-19 outbreak, just 10% of Roma people had access to the Internet.

The Roma Voice Coalition is advancing an even lower rate of Roma children attending school of 30%. For example, for the academic year 2021-2022, the rate for Roma children in Riscani is only 22% - 51 out of 228 children. Additionally, child marriage customs in the Roma culture contribute to low female enrollment rates.

The situation of Roma refugee children from Ukraine is similar, with certain entities advancing at least 25% of the degree of illiteracy from an estimated 450 000 Roma in Ukraine.

Humanitarian organizations and local institutions must engage the community with awareness-raising activities about the benefits and opportunities of education. Activities of informal education with children can be a starting point in this direction with, again, the proper and constant involvement of the community mediators or representatives of the Roma community in Moldova or the identification of community focal points among the refugees themselves.

We should aim to involve children in basic literacy activities by equipping spaces in the RACs since most parents prefer having their children close to them.

#### 4. EMPLOYEMENT AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Refugees can represent a resource for Moldova since they integrate across various communities. Moreover, they help enrich their local communities creating cultural diversity within the local population and helping nurture understanding and appreciation for social diversity. Lastly, they complement the job market in the cities where they settle, boasting entrepreneurship and creating job opportunities.

Along with encouraging Roma refugees to get involved in the educational system, it is crucial to engage them in vocational training activities, insert them in the country's job market, and encourage them to become economically independent and depend less on cash assistance and in-kind aid. Engaging them in employment activities is imperative to avoid conflicts that lately arise more often in the RACs that host Roma refugees.

#### 5. GENDER BASED INTERVENTION

RTF acknowledges the differentiated impact of conflict and crises on women, men, boys, and girls. As such, the RTF encourages its networks to incorporate a gender perspective in all efforts and to ensure gender equality in interventions toward Roma refugees. This includes taking specific actions to facilitate the meaningful participation of women and girls

in all activities around relief, recovery, and prevention, as well as in leadership and decision-making. The RTF also recognizes that women and girls and civil society, especially women's rights and women-led stakeholders, are critical in helping prevent, mediate, and resolve conflict.

## 6. ADAPT TO SHIFTING OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Additionally, it is essential to continue adapting to the shifting operational environment and contribute to identifying gaps in humanitarian assistance and challenges and responding accordingly. Therefore, RTF will continue developing a better understanding of the needs of people of Roma ethnicity fleeing Ukraine and strengthening protection preparedness according to their mission and values.

Moreover, the RTF encourages research, data collection, round tables, and other forms of dialogue to identify the future needs of Roma refugees impacted by the conflict.

## 7. PROMOTE INTEGRATION

It is critical to emphasize the need of strengthening links between Roma refugees and the local Roma population, as well as encouraging the interchange of knowledge and skills.

It is also critical to foster mutual understanding between Roma refugees and host communities. One way to achieve this is to use April 8th, the International Roma Day to arrange a series of awareness-raising events for Roma as well as cultural activities to celebrate Roma traditions and culture.

## ROMA TASK FORCE AS CATALYST

The Roma Task Force will amplify the voices of the Roma communities that are dangerously under-represented and face discrimination and antagonism from local authorities and host communities. Furthermore, consistently responding to field requests for advocacy on these issues, including human rights violations and other protection issues, is vital. In this regard it is important to develop new partnerships and give more visibility to the accomplishments of the RTF. The TF needs to become a catalyst for other partners and for civil society by promoting values of solidarity and multilateralism.

Finally, the crisis that is currently hitting the Republic of Moldova is an opportunity for localization: the more capacity that is built, the more opportunities that are created in the country. Capacity building for Moldovan Roma is just as necessary as assisting refugees in need.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Roma Task Force will continue to meet and report on achievements and updates regularly on a monthly basis. Minutes of meeting will be taken regularly in order to ensure transparency and to keep track of every intervention and the main points discussed.

A mid-term and a final report will be redacted to give value and visibility to the achievements of the TF.

Finally, during the 3 weeks period that the RTF will not meet, every kind of support the Partners might need will be guaranteed