



MOLDOVA 2022 PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT

The 2022 Participatory Assessment Report
for refugees, asylum seekers and stateless
persons in the Republic of Moldova.

Acknowledgements

This report is based on the findings of the Participatory Assessment conducted by UNHCR Moldova in October-November 2022 with refugees,¹ asylum seekers and stateless persons. UNHCR is grateful for the extensive involvement and support of UNHCR partners, local authorities, civil society organizations, and donors. Most importantly, UNHCR would like to acknowledge the resilience and strength of forcibly displaced persons, who continue to share their challenges, hopes, and fears daily with us.

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[COVER PHOTOGRAPH:]

Ukrainian refugee and her child at the border crossing point in Moldova. photo credit: ©UNHCR/ Caroline Bach, 2022

¹ For purposes of this report, the term "refugees" includes both persons recognized as refugees or granted humanitarian protection under the Law on Asylum in Moldova, as well as Ukrainians displaced from Ukraine since 24 February 2022 and whose legal status in Moldova is currently controlled by the emergency law in the country.

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A Ukrainian refugee with her children at the temporary refugee accommodation centre at MOLDEXPO Chisinau, Moldova. Photo credit: ©UNHCR 2022

Executive Summary

The Republic of Moldova, a front-line state to the war in Ukraine, has received nearly 750,000 refugees and Third Country Nationals (TCN) since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. While most arrivals have continued westward to countries in the European Union, over 102,00 Ukrainian refugees² and around 6,000 third-country nationals have chosen to remain in Moldova, trying to re-build their lives in their country of refuge until they are able to return home. They join around 750 refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries and around 1,900 stateless persons who also reside in Moldova.

Those seeking protection in Moldova bring with them their own capacities and needs. Their backgrounds and profiles are varied. Among those from Ukraine, 60% are female, 39% are children, and 22% are older persons. They include persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and ethnic Roma. Some have endured trauma in their home countries, and many have been separated from family. Some have minimal education, while others have university degrees. Non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers come from over 40 different countries, including countries in eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

² For purposes of this report, the term “refugees” includes Ukrainians displaced from Ukraine since 24 February 2022 and whose legal status in Moldova is currently controlled by the emergency law in the country and, as of 1 March 2023, the temporary protection regime. There are also approximately 3,190 active asylum claims submitted by Ukrainian citizens in the Republic of Moldova as of 31 December 2022.

To effectively provide protection and services to those seeking protection in Moldova, it is incumbent upon the government and the humanitarian community to understand and appreciate the breadth of experiences, backgrounds, and needs among those who are here. As part of its ongoing dialogue with the refugee community in Moldova, UNHCR conducted a participatory assessment with refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons in October–November 2022, to deepen its understanding of the protection risks faced by these communities, learn about their local capacities, and listen to their proposed solutions. A total of 43 focus group discussions (FGDs) and one semi-structured discussion were conducted by UNHCR, in coordination and cooperation with other local and international NGOs, with over 340 individuals participating.

These discussions were organized to allow those with specific profiles to speak freely and openly about their experiences. Separate sessions were held with women and men, persons with disabilities, older persons, teenagers and youth, ethnic Roma, LGBTQI+ individuals, refugees, and asylum-seekers from countries other than Ukraine, stateless persons, and able-bodied persons. 73% of the FGs participants were female, reflecting the gendered nature of the Ukrainian refugee crisis overall. The exercise covered 15 *raions* (districts) in the Republic of Moldova, including the region. Participants lived in urban and rural areas, in government accommodation centres, and in private accommodations.

The refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons who participated in the participatory assessment had much to share about their experiences thus far in Moldova, as well as their views on the humanitarian response on issues ranging from housing, medical care, education, and social services. A summary of what was learned is provided below, with more details provided in the report itself. Recommendations on actions to be taken by the government of Moldova, civil society, and the humanitarian community, including UNHCR, are included at the end of the report.

The assessment below is a snapshot of needs and capacities. It is known that these will change over time and that communications with refugees and others in need of international protection must be ongoing. One significant development since the participatory assessment was conducted was the decision of the government of Moldova in mid-January 2023 to grant Temporary Protection (TP) to displaced Ukrainians and certain third country nationals in Moldova, effective 1 March 2023. This is a positive development, which will give Ukrainians a more stable legal status in the country and the opportunity to integrate into Moldovan society more fully. UNHCR intends to conduct another participatory assessment in the summer of 2023 to better understand how this legal status has affected the lives of Ukrainian refugees in the country and where additional efforts are needed.

Summary of Findings

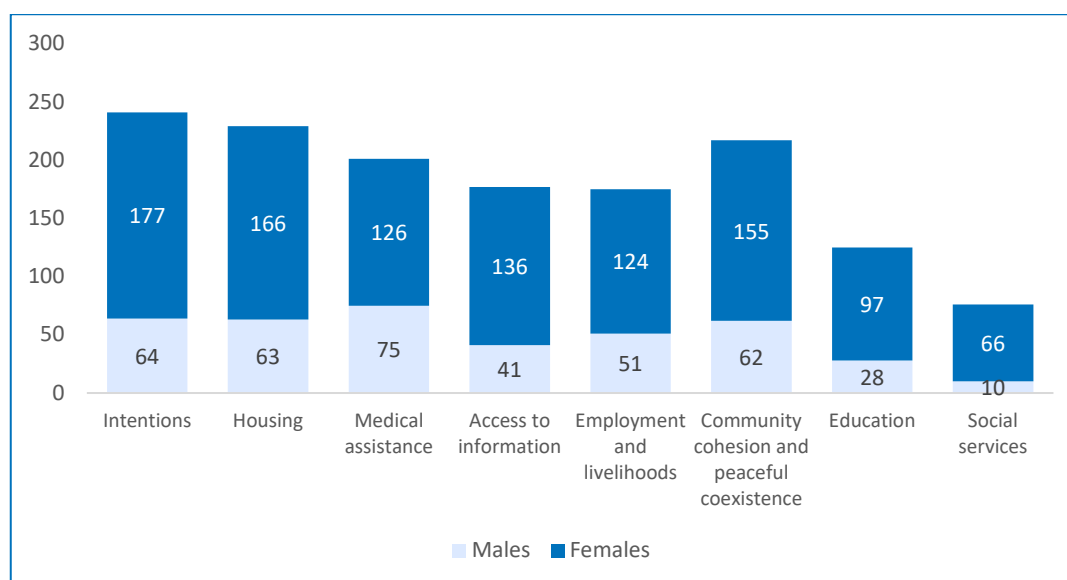


Figure 1 Disaggregation of topics raised by FGD participants by gender

Intentions

A specific objective of the participatory assessment was to better understand the intentions of those refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons in Moldova, be it return to their country of origin, continued residence in Moldova, or intentions to move onward to a third country. Notably, all the participants coming from Ukraine stated that they planned to return to Ukraine when the war is over. The main pre-condition for return is the end of hostilities.

That said, a significant number of individuals, in particular those with children and those with disabilities, stated that basic social infrastructure would need to be in place before they return. This suggests that, for them, their stay in Moldova could be extended. Nearly all participants stated that, at least until the end of the winter season, they intended to remain in Moldova. However, a few participants, mostly men, planned to move onwards to EU countries, to find employment and other opportunities.

In contrast to those from Ukraine, refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries, many of whom have lived in Moldova for years, indicated that they planned or hoped to remain in Moldova for the long-term, choosing to fully integrate in the country and naturalize, if possible.

Inclusion

An extremely promising finding from the participatory assessment was that all the participants, regardless of their background and profile, stated that they felt safe and

welcome in the Republic of Moldova. That said, some participants, generally ethnic Roma and persons with disabilities, shared instances of misunderstandings between the local and refugee communities. While the examples shared did not go beyond offensive verbal comments, they highlight the need to remain vigilant about host community-refugee relations and to support peaceful co-existence and inclusion efforts wherever possible.

Language barriers

Related to inclusion are issues around language. While on a day-to-day level all participants coming from Ukraine stated that they could easily communicate with the local population in Russian, concerns were raised regarding language barriers by young people. Teenagers and young people shared that they had little interactions with local young Moldovans due to the language barrier. Language was also identified by young people as the main obstacle impeding access to education. Apart from obstacles to social cohesion, adult FGD participants also noted that their inability to speak Romanian was an obstacle to their access to employment and livelihoods.

Given these findings, facilitating access to language classes for refugees and others of concern, whether they are children, youth, or adults, is a key recommendation of this report.

Accommodation

Housing and accommodation were among the top priority concerns of participants in the participatory assessment. Concerns around the winter season featured prominently. Persons from all backgrounds emphasized the need for winter clothing and winter-related household items (thick blankets, heaters).

Not surprisingly, accommodation-related concerns often reflected the participants' living arrangements. Those renting private accommodations were particularly concerned about the high cost of utilities and their ability to cover these additional expenses. Persons residing in refugee accommodation centres (RACs) shared their frustration about kitchens not being equipped for communal cooking, noting the importance of cooking for stress release and psychological well-being.

Access to health care

Access to health care was cited by most participants as an area of particular concern. Positively, urgent and primary medical services were generally viewed as good and accessible in Moldova. Access to secondary medical services, however, was problematic, especially for those living in rural areas and in the region. Participants voiced particular concern regarding access to medication. As most participants did not have access to medical insurance, for them, the cost of medications was more expensive than they could afford. For those from Ukraine, another challenge was that some medications that they had taken in Ukraine were not available in Moldova, raising concerns about how they would manage chronic and other illnesses.

Employment and livelihoods

Employment is often considered as an anchor, if not a pre-requisite, to socio-economic inclusion. In this regard, more action is needed. Despite efforts, few of the FGD participants were formally employed. Obstacles cited included perceptions of Ukrainians by potential employers as temporary guests in the Republic of Moldova, language barriers, and access to childcare and social support networks. This is not to say that participants were not working. Some stated that they were unofficially employed or worked at seasonal jobs. Several shared that they had managed to keep their jobs in Ukraine, working remotely. For refugees from countries other than Ukraine, most of whom having lived in Moldova for many years, employment concerns were largely linked to lack of livelihood support opportunities and vocational trainings.

Access to education

Parents and children consistently emphasized the importance of education. The majority of Ukrainian children were continuing their education in Ukrainian schools online, using laptops or phones to access their courses. When asked why they did not enrol their children in local Moldovan schools, which the children could attend in-person, parents cited bureaucratic requirements and language barriers, as well as differences in Moldovan and Ukrainian school curricula. In the region, where Ukrainian schools were more available, enrolment in local schools was seen as more of an option. Parents raised concerns, however, that the education certificates issued by the *de facto* authorities would not be recognized in Ukraine, leading many to decide to continue on-line schooling for their children as well.

Children from the Roma refugee community have specific educational needs. As shared by the children themselves and their parents, many Roma children cannot read or write, especially girls. Therefore, to make sure that Roma children attend local schools and keep up with the programme, participants emphasized the need for preparatory courses and support with homework. The parents also shared that, due to a lack of clothing and proper shoes, especially winter ones, often their children did not want to continue their studies.

Access to information

Access to information is a necessary pre-condition to accessing rights and services. Those coming from Ukraine were generally aware of the main information sources for services in Moldova, including government and UNHCR websites and call centres (dopomoga.gov.md, the Green Line, UNHCR website). At the same time, participants also noted that help groups on social media, such as Telegram, Viber, and Facebook, were also useful and trusted information sources.

As with education, Roma refugees face particular obstacles in accessing information. Many Roma refugee women, as shared by them during the FGDs, are not able to read, making it difficult to access written information without assistance. In addition, in more traditional

Roma refugee groups, women do not have mobile phones or other devices that would enable them to access digitalized informational sources. For these participants, the most trusted sources of information, and on whom many relied, were the Roma community mediators who interacted with them on a regular basis.

Other groups of refugees and persons of concern also raised concerns regarding access to information particular to them. Those living in the region noted that the major sources of information on services available to refugees had almost no information on services available in the region. LGBTQI+ community representatives saw a lack of LGBTQI+-targeted information. As such, they were mostly depending on the NGOs to inform them of their rights and opportunities in the Republic of Moldova.

Access to asylum and naturalization

Unlike those displaced from Ukraine, non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum-seekers must go through the asylum procedure to access protection in Moldova. Of concern, some non-Ukrainian participants in the participatory assessment noted difficulties in accessing the asylum process at the Chisinau International Airport. They also raised concerns about the length of time and requirements involved in the asylum and naturalization processes overall.

Recommendations

The report ends with recommendations to the government of the Republic of Moldova, UNHCR, partners in the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF), and donors on actions to be taken to respond to the issues raised by participants in the participatory assessment. They are broken down by the issue areas noted above. Many of these recommendations were made by participants themselves, as they seek to find solutions to the problems and challenges that they have identified. UNHCR calls on all actors involved in the refugee response to support refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons in this regard. Some recommendations relate to issues raised in different areas, such as increased access to Romanian language classes, which address concerns raised in the areas of livelihoods, education, and social cohesion. The importance of information – for refugees and for service providers – is raised frequently in the recommendations. All actors play a role in ensuring that accurate information is conveyed to all interested parties in an understandable and accessible manner. Complaints and feedback mechanisms also need to be established, monitored, and acted upon by service providers. Finally, some of the recommendations require either external funding or, possibly, legislative changes. The role of government counterparts and donors are especially important here.

It is hoped that this participatory assessment will not only help improve the refugee response in Moldova, but also foster a recognition of refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons as agents of change to the challenges they face, and not only as beneficiaries of services provided by others. UNHCR will take the necessary steps to implement those report recommendations that fall within its competence. It encourages other actors to do the same.



Children from Ukraine and Moldova practicing football in the UNHCR supported Boot-camp training organised in Chisinau, Moldova. ©UNHCR/ Timothy Shoffner

Introduction

In line with its people-centred approach, UNHCR conducts participatory assessments with refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons on a regular basis, to gain a deeper understanding of their situation in the host country and of the protection risks they face. These regular assessments ensure that those forced to flee their homes and/or who are stateless are at the centre of decision-making processes concerning their protection and well-being. Guided by a community and rights-based approach, as well as a focus on age, gender and diversity, participatory assessments involve structured dialogue with persons of concern. During the participatory assessment, UNHCR analyses concerns and risks jointly with refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons, learns about their capacities, and listens to their proposed solutions. The findings of these discussions are then used by UNHCR to programme its protection and humanitarian response.

The 2022 participatory assessment exercise in Moldova included 43 focus group discussions (FGDs) and one semi-structured interview with 342 individuals. The discussions were held with persons displaced from Ukraine, recognized refugees and asylum seekers coming from other countries (e.g., Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Russian Federation), and stateless persons.

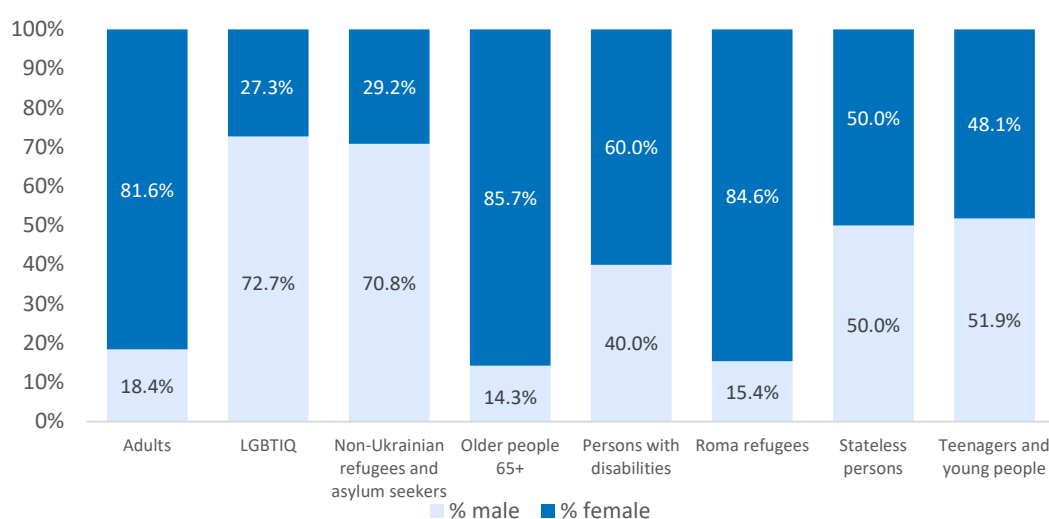


Figure 2 Disaggregation of Participatory Assessment profiles by gender

Figure 2 reflects representation of participants in the Participatory Assessment by gender and profile. To the extent possible, for each category of persons, separate discussions were held with women, men, girls, and boys.

The FGDs focused on two topics: intentions for the future and prospects for local integration. Within these topics, facilitators asked participants to share their views on specific issues, with follow-up questions directing the flow of conversation to elicit relevant information. This approach encouraged participants to speak freely, with participants identifying those issues of greatest importance to them. The objective was to obtain qualitative information that could then be analysed to better understand the protection situation of each group, as well as to identify the capacities and resources within communities to address the protection challenges and risks identified.



Map showing the number of participants in focus dissection groups per location

Main Findings

Adult refugees

19 FGDs in rural and urban areas

Total number of participants: 190

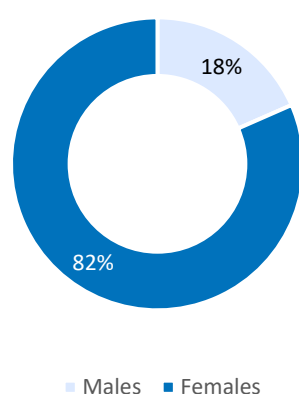


Figure 2 Disaggregation of adult FGD participants by gender

Main highlights:

- Plans to remain in Moldova until it is safe to return to Ukraine;
- Winter-related needs and concerns;
- Concerns regarding accessibility of quality medical assistance;
- Barriers to accessing the labour market

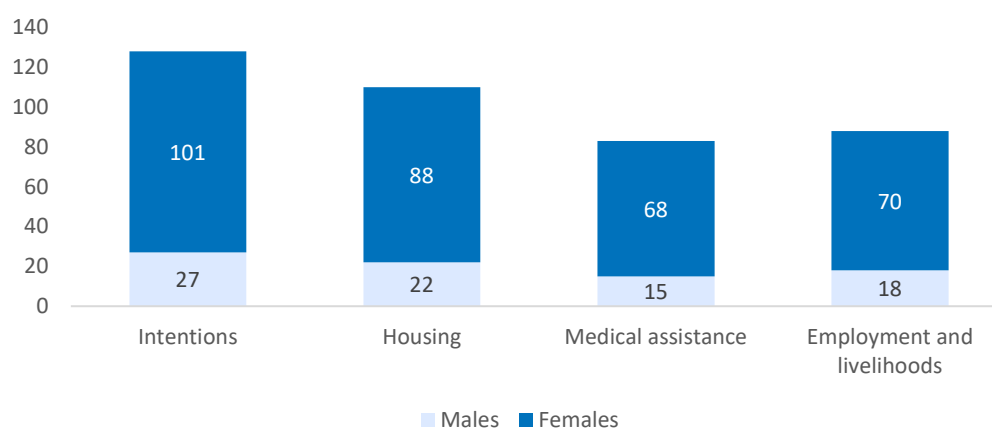


Figure 3 Number of adults refugees who shared their view on the above topics disaggregated by gender

Intentions

In general, participants in the Participatory Assessment stated that they chose to live in Moldova because of the network of relatives and friends residing here, as well as the similar culture and common language. Another important reason noted was the geographic proximity of Moldova to Ukraine: people feel psychologically better knowing they are not too far from their homes and that they can visit relatives in Ukraine and their homes from

time to time. In addition, the participants noted that the cost of living in Moldova is lower than in any of the EU countries.

Some participants, predominantly men, stated that they planned to travel further west at some point, to get a job in the European Union or the United States and to provide for the families. In terms of return, nearly everyone indicated their intention to return to Ukraine when it was safe to do so. Several people who have children, as well as older persons in their households, noted that both safety and rehabilitation of basic infrastructure in Ukraine was important for them to be able to return to Ukraine and restart their lives there. People coming from Donetsk, Mykolaiv and Kherson regions mentioned de-occupation of these territories as another prerequisite to return.

'I will stay [during] winter [in Moldova], but in March I will go home, because I can't stand [displacement] anymore, I am not going to stay the whole life like that.'

A 43-year-old woman from Ukraine, staying in Calarasi.

Language

Participants faced different situations depending on their setting. In rural settings, participants noted that language barriers were more common, as fewer members of the local village spoke Russian. This was less of an issue in urban settings, where Russian was more common among the host community, making communication easier for all. The participants expressed that they were willing and interested to learn at least basic Romanian. Language barriers were identified as one of the main obstacles for finding jobs.

Accommodation

Both participants living in RACs and in private households, in villages and in cities, expressed concerns about housing during the winter season. The main concerns expressed included availability of heating, high utility costs, and lack of winter goods.

Participants living in urban settings highlighted challenges in renting apartments. Landlords are often not willing to rent to persons displaced from Ukraine, worried that they will not be able to afford the cost of rent and utilities. As well, landlords often require a long-term contract or do not accept pets, which poses problems for Ukrainian refugees whose longer-term legal status in Ukraine is uncertain and who often took their pets with them when they fled Ukraine. For those who can rent an apartment or home, the cost of rent is often very high, and many apartments lack basic household items like furniture, kitchen utensils, linen, pillows etc.

The situation is slightly different for displaced Ukrainians living in private accommodations in villages. In some cases, participants were either not paying rent, or were only paying for utilities. In general, FGD participants living in villages said that they were satisfied with their

living conditions, and that they have been helped in finding private accommodation by relatives or friends.

As a general matter, participants accommodated in RACs believed that their living conditions were satisfactory and that they had been provided necessary goods. They did note, however, a lack of hygiene items and a desire to have access to equipped kitchens, so that they could cook for their themselves and their families. Cooking was identified by the participants as a tool for stress-release and psychological well-being.

Compared to Ukrainians who live in cities, especially in Chisinau, those living in more rural settings believed that they received less humanitarian aid than those living in urban areas, such as NFIs, hygienic and food products. They also noted high transportation costs to travel to locations where goods are distributed, as well as a general lack information about available humanitarian assistance.

“Every day we have an activity keeping us busy so there is no time to think about the war.”

A Ukrainian woman staying in a Refugee Accommodation Centre (RAC) in Ungheni

Access to Medical Assistance

In both rural and urban areas, participants generally stated that urgent and primary medical assistance was accessible, satisfactory, and free of charge. Several participants had undergone surgery without having to pay for their procedures. In a few cases, however, participants mentioned a lack of attention and timely care for medical treatment, as well as a discriminatory attitude by doctors towards refugees. All participants stated that medicines were very expensive and difficult to find on the market. In many cases, people with chronic or rare diseases obtained medicine from Ukraine or other countries. Refugees also noted a lack of information regarding COVID vaccinations and health services in general.

Refugees' recommendations

Participants recommended as solutions to these and other medical-related issues the following:

- Spread information more broadly about access to medical assistance, in particular organizations that can provide medication and to services that provide surgeries free of charge;
- Ensure regular visits by doctors to RACs;
- Allocate extra financial support to refugees to cover costs of medicines;
- Include refugees with a serious illness in a government program for providing free medicines;
- Provide some medicines free of charge through community organizations.

Social Services and Administrative Services

As a general matter, participants stated that they lacked comprehensive information about social services provided by the state for refugees in Moldova. The information that was available to them was generally provided by local social workers, municipalities, local NGOs and INGOs. In some cases, refugees created local groups on *Viber* where information was regularly shared. However, it was highlighted that a lot of information was still missing and many reported that they did not know what social services they were entitled to.

Nine FGD participants had sought government-provided social or administrative services. In all these cases, refugees were seeking either humanitarian assistance or information from local public authorities. In all cases, the participants were satisfied with the assistance and information provided. Some participants were also continuing to receive social allowances from Ukraine.

Refugees' recommendations:

The participants would like to have comprehensive information about the social services provided by the state available for refugees in Moldova.

Access to Education

At least 13 FGD participants mentioned that their children attend local schools and kindergartens. However, in both rural and urban setting, the majority of Ukrainian children continue to study online in the Ukrainian school system. Reasons for this include differences between the Ukrainian and Moldovan curricula, as well as the fact that studies in Moldovan schools would not be recognized in Ukraine or elsewhere, as they were only allowed to enrol as "audience members" and not as full-time pupils.³ In addition to these legal barriers, high transportation costs and long-distances to school in rural areas, as well as language barriers, were highlighted as important factors for not enrolling Ukrainian children in Moldovan schools.

³ See Decision No. 10 from 15 March 2022, of the Commission on Exceptional Circumstances, which provides that children displaced from Ukraine can only enrol as "audience members" in a local school, such that they cannot receive grades or a diploma unless they submit an application for asylum.

For those children studying on-line, some parents noted that their children lacked adequate equipment and space. Children often borrow cell phones or computers to attend online classes. While some FGD participants shared that they consider learning Romanian an important part of the integration process, others believed that this would take a long time and that their intention was to return to Ukraine as soon as possible.

In a rural setting, it was stated that there are adequate places in kindergarten and schools for Ukrainian children to enrol, while this was less true in urban areas.

Refugees' recommendations:

Some parents advocated for the creation of dedicated rooms within local schools for children to study together online. In addition, it was suggested that cultural and sport activities be provided for both local and refugee communities, that language classes be made available to refugee children, and that teachers be sensitized to the difficult period that refugee children may be experiencing in school. As a solution to improve the general situation with school enrolment, participants recommended that school diplomas be issued without requiring people to apply for asylum.

Employment and livelihoods

At least 5% of participants mentioned that they were able to get some kind of employment or income-generating activity in Moldova, while at least three persons stated that they worked unofficially.

The main source of income of most participants was financial assistance, with some particularly vulnerable families receiving social allowances from Ukraine as well. Lack of available childcare was noted as an obstacle to the employment of women. Single mothers found it difficult to find jobs with flexible work schedules to allow them to care for their children, especially those of young age. Even for those women who had access to day care, it was noted that it could be difficult to find work due to lack of social support networks. Children often get sick, especially when they are in kindergarten. Without relatives or friends in the area who can take care of them, mothers have to skip work, which employers do not accept. Refugee women did note, however, that working on-line with a flexible schedule could be an option for some single mothers.

Almost all participants agreed that it was easier to find a job in an urban area than in a rural one, for reasons of language (Romanian not always required) and greater opportunities. In rural areas, often the only available options were to work in a local factory for relatively low salaries. However, participants noted that in both rural and urban settings, employers were hesitant to hire Ukrainians for fear that they might leave anytime to return to Ukraine.

Employers also perceived refugees as temporary guests in Moldova and were reluctant to hire them as a result. In some cases, participants stated that they had been offered worse salaries and working conditions compared to local people. For single mothers with young

children, it was more difficult to find a flexible job and to manage the schedule, as children needed constant care because of their age.

More participants living in urban environments said that they had been working, as compared to participants from local villages. Some were working online or attended professional courses in the beauty industry.

Access to Information

In both urban and rural settings, information was generally considered to be available by PA participants. However, gaps were identified regarding specific types of information, as described above. The most used and trusted information channels were social media, the Dopomoga website, NGOs, local authorities, and the Green Line. Participants noted, however, that the information provided, even by these sources, was not always clear and that hotlines were often hard to reach. Information regarding humanitarian aid distribution was also not seen as always timely shared.

Regarding feedback mechanisms, most refugees noted that they knew the channels they could use but did not necessarily believe that their feedback would help improve their situation. In at least three FGDs, participants stated that they had raised complaints but had not received any feedback and were not aware of any follow-up actions being taken.

Refugees' recommendations:

General suggestions for improving access of Ukrainian refugees to the labour market were: provision of Romanian language classes, provision of free vocational training and skills-development courses, and counselling with regards to employment.

Community cohesion and peaceful coexistence

A common view among participants in the PA was that, in general, relations and interactions between refugees and members of local communities were positive. In general, participants living in urban areas were more involved in community activities than those in rural areas, such as cultural, leisure and sports activities, as well as religious ones. In rural areas, while participants noted that they did not have frequent interactions with locals, no conflicts or tensions had been experienced.

This is not to say that tensions do not exist. In urban areas, some refugees shared unpleasant experiences. For instance, in some areas, locals were seen as less open and willing to have a dialogue with refugees due to political views about the armed conflict in Ukraine.

Persons with disabilities

3 FGDs in urban areas

Total number of participants: 15 of diverse ages

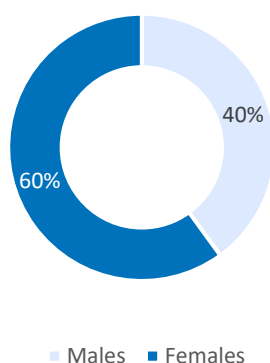


Figure 4 Disaggregation of FGD participants with disabilities by gender

Main highlights:

- Need for inclusion in the labour market for persons with disabilities (PwD);
- Concerns regarding exclusion of men with disabilities from assistance programmes;
- Need of winter items to cope with the cold weather;
- Need to ensure accommodations are accessible to PwD

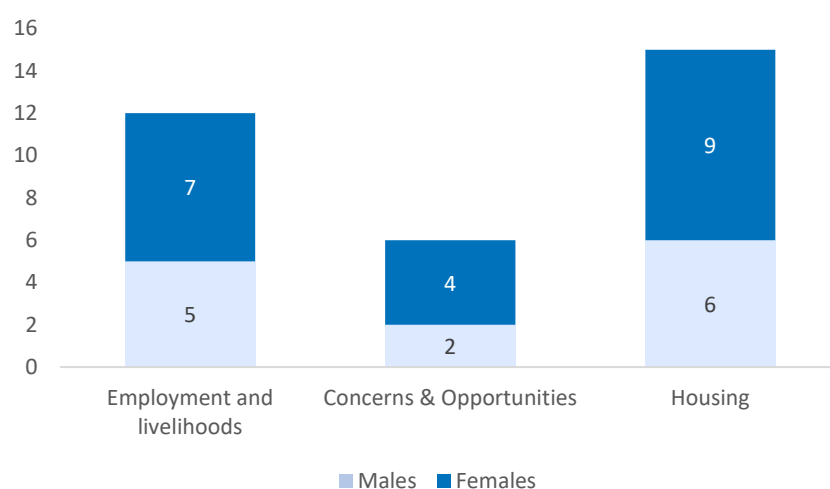


Figure 5 Number of People with Disabilities who shared their view on the above topics disaggregated by gender

Intentions

Most participants with disabilities chose to come to Moldova because of its proximity to Ukraine and because there is a common language with the local population. People mentioned that, overall, they were satisfied with the support they had received and that their interactions with the local community were generally positive. All participants stated that they would like to return to Ukraine once the war is over or when it is at least safe in the area where they live. Until then, they plan to remain in Moldova. Only one participant considered travelling further on to Germany for medical reasons.

Accommodation

The FGD participants were either accommodated privately or in RACs. Refugees who rented private accommodations did not share any specific concerns, while those staying in RACs noted that the conditions were not always adapted to their needs. In addition, they noted that there were many people residing in the RACs, making them crowded and noisy, and that they sometimes lacked basic kitchen appliances. They also complained that the RACs were often cold. That said, no one planned to move out of the RACs where they lived to reside someplace else in Moldova.

Access to medical assistance

In general, access to primary and urgent medical assistance was assessed as good. Mostly positive experiences were reported in this regard. Participants specifically noted that many doctors spoke Russian, which made communication easy. Those residing at RACs mentioned that they had been receiving some medical support, including medicines, from NGOs, while people accommodated privately were not aware of such services. Concerns about the cost of medicines in Moldova and the unavailability of certain medicines were raised.

Access to social services and administrative services

The participants had not yet applied for any governmentally provided social or administrative services.

Access to education

In terms of education, only one participant mentioned that her children were enrolled in a local school. A mother of five children shared that she had tried to enrol her children into school full time, but that the current legal framework did not allow for it. The children of other participants were studying online in their Ukrainian schools, as they planned to go back to Ukraine. However, they noted challenges with these remote studies, such as the need for a stable internet connection and textbooks, which were not always available. Regarding higher education, it was noted that to access university studies, students must submit an original of their secondary school diploma, which may be in Ukraine. Participants noted, however, that even if their children were studying online, they also attended some extracurricular activities in person where they lived.

Employment and livelihoods

The main source of income of all PwD participants was financial assistance. Some stated that they continued to receive social benefits from Ukraine related to their disability. One participant had maintained his job in Ukraine working remotely online. Two participants had found employment in Moldova with the help of NGOs. Overall, participants mentioned that there were employment opportunities, but that the work was often not suitable for persons with disabilities, often requiring physical labour.

Access to information

In terms of access to information, participants shared that they were mainly using social media channels and that they received information from NGOs. Everyone was aware of the *dopomoga* website. In a few cases, participants stated that information regarding humanitarian aid distribution was not shared timely and did not provide the type of details they required (distribution location and time, targeting criteria, etc.).

Community cohesion and peaceful coexistence

Overall, FGD participants noted that the local communities where they lived were welcoming and treated them well. One person raised comments made by local community members that they (local Moldovans) sustain the refugees from their community's budget. It was noted that there was a lack of understanding among the local population that the financial assistance paid to refugees comes from international donors, not the government of Moldova.

Other concerns

Male participants stated that they are often excluded from assistance programmes. According to them, this was because they were men, even though they had a disability. Male participants noted that this was unfair, as they had little to no opportunity to find a job due to their disability.



*Refugee couple from Ukraine staying at a Refugee Accommodation Centre in Chisinau, Moldova.
©UNHCR/ Irina Odobescu*

Older persons 65+

3 FGDs in rural and urban areas

Total number of participants 15

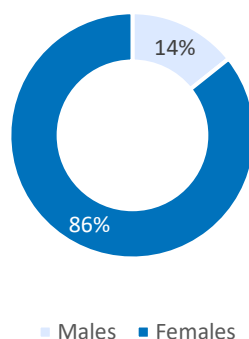


Figure 6 Disaggregation of older FGD participants by gender

Main highlights:

- Concerns regarding accessibility of medical assistance
- Necessity of support for the upcoming winter period
- The need for some cultural or sports activities targeting older people

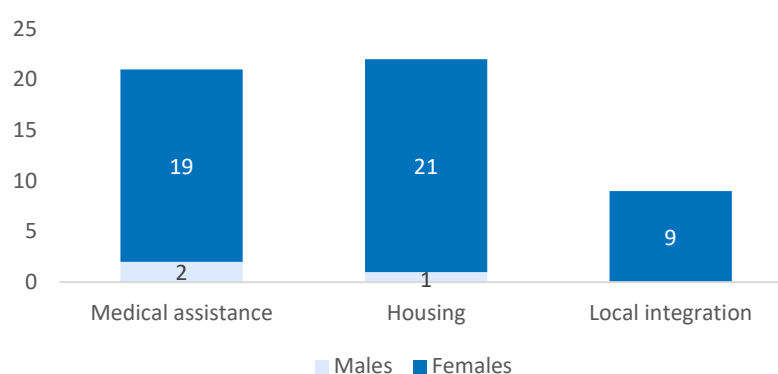


Figure 7 Number of elderly persons who shared their views on the above topics disaggregated by gender

Intentions

In general, participants shared that their experience in Moldova had been positive thus far and that they felt welcome in the country. Participants noted that communicating with the local population was easy, that the Moldovan people were friendly towards them overall and that they were provided with basic aid when necessary. Multiple participants mentioned that they had a network of family and friends in Moldova.

All participants stated that they intended to return to Ukraine once the situation was more stable and safer. Several persons said that they intended to return even if their houses in Ukraine were destroyed. Until they are able to return, though, most respondents planned to remain in Moldova. A few persons, however, were in the process of arranging the necessary documentation to go to Canada and Spain. However, while the participants

generally planned to remain in Moldova, they noted that their children (young people) planned to travel to EU countries to work or study.

“We do not need to integrate here. As soon as the war is over, we are going home!”

An older woman from Ukraine staying in Telenesti village

Accommodation

In terms of housing, older participants were generally satisfied with their living conditions. Some lived with their relatives or were renting an apartment, while others were accommodated in RACs. The RAC tenants were concerned about the lack of facilities for persons with disabilities and with limited mobility. Another concern raised about the RACs was the lack of opportunities to cook, which for them would be a psycho-social support (PSS) activity. The participants, however, shared concerns with regards to the upcoming winter and expressed the need for such winter items as heaters, thick blankets, winter clothing and shoes.

Access to medical assistance

In terms of urgent and primary medical care, access was considered satisfactory overall, with doctors providing the care they needed and speaking a common language (Russian). However, in some locations people noted that doctors were overloaded, making it almost impossible to get an appointment with a specialist in a state hospital. Another important concern raised was the price and unavailability of medicines.

Access to social and administrative services

Two persons had an experience of using services provided by the state to obtain documentation. The other participants did not expect to apply for social services in Moldova, since they did not think they were entitled to them.

Access to education

In terms of education, all the participants' children or grandchildren attended the local school or kindergarten. The majority of them had not encountered any obstacles in integrating there. However, some participants raised concerns about language barriers faced by Ukrainian children.

Employment and Livelihoods

For most of the older participants, their Ukrainian pension was their main source of income, supplemented by financial assistance provided in Moldova. With regards to employment and livelihoods, given their age and various medical conditions, it was much more difficult to find a job or engage in other income-generating activities. Lack of knowledge of the Romanian language was mentioned as another barrier.

Access to information

As the main sources of trusted information, participants named their relatives and friends, Ukrainian TV channels and other internet resources like Dopomoga.gov.md. Social networks, which were an important source of information for younger refugees, were not mentioned as trusted sources by older persons.

Community cohesion and peaceful coexistence

In terms of community cohesion and peaceful coexistence, participants said that they interacted easily with members of the local community and that they had not experienced conflicts. At the same time, the participants who lived in RACs shared that they tended to stay in their RAC and that they rarely left the premises. Some participants said that they did not see a need to integrate in Moldova since their intention was to return to Ukraine when conditions allowed.

Refugees' recommendations:

The participants suggested organizing more cultural and sports activities targeting older people.



Ukrainian children's choir celebrating St. Nicholas day in the UNHCR-supported community centre in Edinet, Moldova. ©UNHCR/ Salahaldeen Abdulrahman

Non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers

5 FGDs in urban areas

Number of participants 37

Nationalities (Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, South Soudan, Angola, Cuba, Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Uzbekistan)

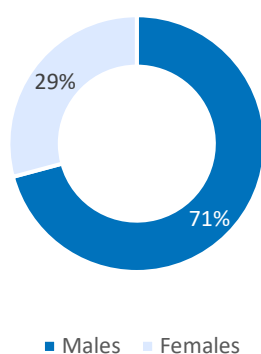


Figure 8 Disaggregation of non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seeker FGD participants by gender

Main highlights:

- Livelihoods and employment concerns; need for creation of opportunities
- Access to the territory and asylum procedure concerns
- Access to healthcare issues

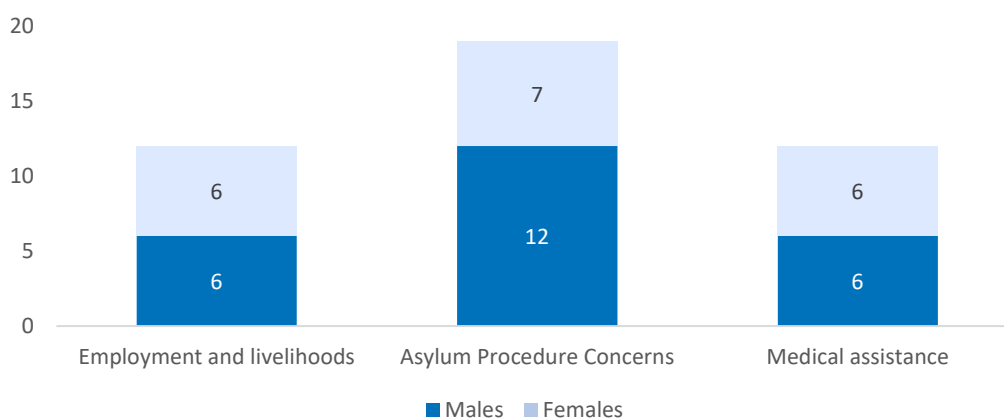


Figure 9 Number of non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers who shared their view on the above topics disaggregated by gender

Intentions

The participants in these FGDs decided to seek protection in the Republic of Moldova for several reasons, most notably safety and security, availability of a network of friends and relatives, and the ability to enter the country without a visa. Most of the participants, except those originating from the Russian Federation, came to Moldova some time ago, with some having lived in Moldova for many years (7 to 23 years). Most of the Russian nationals seeking asylum in Moldova arrived in September-October 2022. Some of them used to live and have businesses in Ukraine.

The future intentions of the participants differed depending on their country of origin or last residence and the time spent in Moldova. While Russian citizens did not plan to return to Russia, those who had been displaced from Ukraine intended to return there when the situation allowed. Generally, people coming from other countries planned to remain in Moldova, although the younger participants hoped to go to the EU to study or find jobs.

Accommodation

In terms of housing, participants had different arrangements, including staying at the Temporary Accommodation Center (for asylum seekers), renting private accommodations (for both asylum seekers and recognised refugees) and social housing (for recognised refugees). Two recognised refugees representing different households shared that they had managed to acquire their own housing in Moldova. Most of the concerns raised regarding housing were from participants who resided outside of the TAC and were related to winter needs and the cost of utilities.

Access to medical assistance

Access to medical primary and urgent medical assistance was generally reported as good. At the same time, it was mentioned that medicines were very expensive and difficult to afford. Dental services were also mentioned as inaccessible because of their cost. Those who were not officially employed and were not of pension age usually did not have medical insurance.

Access to education

Regarding education, all the participants' children were enrolled in local schools and kindergartens. It was mentioned that the children were well-integrated and had learned Romanian and Russian quickly. In general, participants were satisfied with the quality of education. No issues were reported in this regard.

Employment and livelihoods

Most of the participants or their family members stated that they had jobs. Even those who did not speak Romanian or Russian had managed to find employment with the help of NGOs. While refugees did not have difficulties finding a job, they did note that the salaries were very low and did not meet the cost of living in Moldova. Even people who did not speak Romanian or Russian had managed to find employment with the help of NGOs. The main concerns expressed by participants with regards to employment and livelihoods were the lack of professional and business development opportunities. Some participants expressed an interest in vocational training if it were made available.

Access to information

Most participants stated that they had access to information, mainly through the NGOs that were assisting refugees and asylum seekers. People shared that they also received information from the Bureau of Migration and Asylum (BMA)⁴, but that the information was often not comprehensive enough to meet their needs. For example, for those seeking asylum, the asylum procedure was not entirely clear to them. Some non-Romanian and non-Russian speakers stated that they had had trouble communicating with BMA, as well as their attorneys, about their claims and the asylum process. When information is lacking, participants look for it on the internet or ask their peers.

“We used to communicate much more with local people and other refugees and asylum seekers, but now we stopped inviting guests to come and visit us since we can hardly make ends meet. We almost stopped communicating with each other.”

A refugee woman in her late fifties living in Chisinau

Community cohesion and peaceful coexistence

The participants' experiences around community cohesion differed depending on their country of origin, religion, spoken languages and time spent in Moldova. People originating from African countries shared that they had faced discrimination and did not always feel comfortable and accepted in Moldovan society. Those who did not speak Romanian or Russian had difficulties communicating with the local population, such that their social circle was very limited, often leaving them feeling isolated. At the same time, those who had lived in Moldova for several years and who had learned Romanian felt well-integrated and shared only positive experiences.

Access to asylum

Some asylum-seekers who arrived in Moldova through the airport raised concerns about the state officials and access to the asylum procedure. People also expressed concerns about the asylum and naturalization process overall, noting that the process often took longer than stipulated by law, leaving people in a protracted situation of uncertainty and impeding integration.

⁴ As of January 2023, the Bureau of Migration and Asylum (BMA) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs was reorganized and renamed the General Inspectorate for Migration (GIM).

Teenagers and youth

3 FGDs in rural and urban areas

Total number of participants: 27

Note: The participants of the FGDs were between 15 and 25 years old.

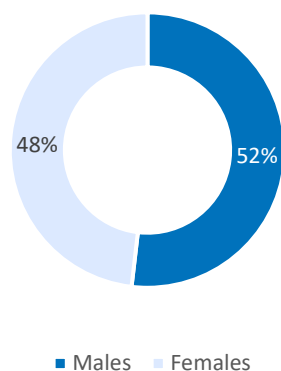


Figure 10 Disaggregation of teenagers and youth FGD participants by gender

Main highlights:

- Barriers in accessing education
- Language barriers
- Importance of extracurricular activities

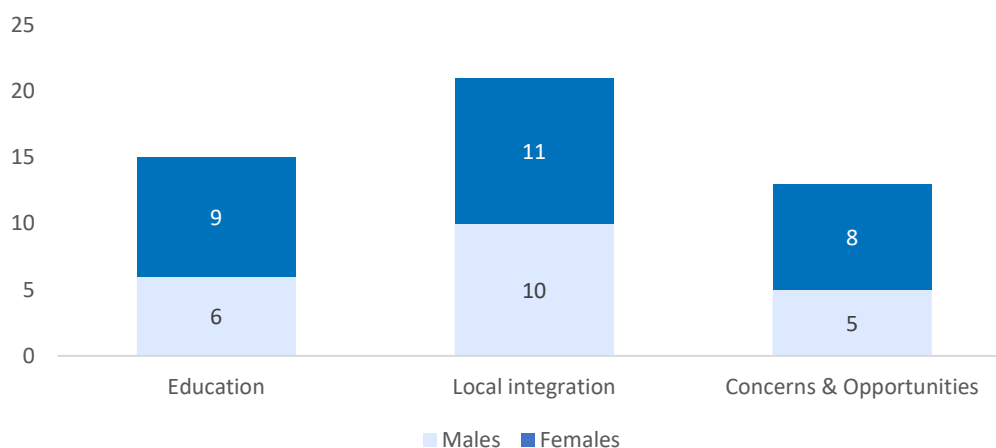


Figure 11 Number of teenagers and youth who shared their views on the above issues disaggregated by gender

Intentions and inclusion

Overall, teenage and youth participants stated that they had been integrating into Moldovan society with relatively few problems. They mentioned that the Ukrainian community was well-established and that they were able to communicate easily with other Ukrainian youth. That said, participants also noted that language was a barrier to local school enrolment, as well as communication with Moldovan young people.

Generally, young people felt comfortable in Moldova, recognizing that the decision to come to the country had been made by their parents and not by themselves. The same was true

regarding future plans. Participants noted that any decision to return or remain would be made by their parents and that they did not have much influence over the decision. Participants did note, however, that they would like to remain in Moldova, as they felt well and safe here. In the longer term, all participants planned to return to their homes in Ukraine when the war was over or when their parents decided to return.

Accommodation

Young people taking part in the FGDs lived with their parents either in RACs or in privately rented apartments. In general, they were satisfied with their housing conditions and had the basic domestic items that they needed. Participants mentioned that some local people were unwilling to rent apartments to Ukrainians. Teenagers living in RACs said that they would like to have kitchens equipped so that they and their parents could cook and eat the food of their choice.

Access to medical assistance

Participants living in Chisinau stated that urgent and primary medical assistance was provided free of charge and that the quality of medical care was good. For those living outside of Chisinau, however, there were concerns about the accessibility and quality of healthcare, with some participants sharing negative experiences. One person had tried to get an appointment with a specialist multiple times but each time his appointment was postponed due to the doctors' workload. When the person did manage to visit the doctor, he was informed that due to the lack of necessary equipment, the required medical examination could not be provided. In addition, participants noted that medicines were costly.

Access to education

All of the participants were continuing their studies in Ukrainian schools and universities online. They were not very interested in joining local Moldovan schools as the curricula did not coincide and there were language barriers. Concerns about potential bullying at the local schools if refugee children started attending them were also shared. At the same time, all of the young people in the FGDs were involved in some form of extracurricular activities in Moldova, which they enjoyed and wanted to continue.

Refugees' recommendations:

As a potential preventive measure, young people suggested to raise awareness to local children and teachers about refugees to avoid bullying of refugee children at schools.

Employment and livelihoods

None of the young people in the FGDs were employed but some participants who were old enough to work expressed an interest in part-time job opportunities. In general, they depended on their families to provide for them.

Access to information

In terms of access to information, participants stated that young people mostly use social media networks, followed by the Dopomoga website. They mentioned that they had more trust in social media channels than official websites and that they found the information provided there to be more comprehensive and complete.

Community cohesion and peaceful coexistence

Teenage and youth participants in the PA noted that their interactions with members of the local community had been very positive, with no conflicts reported. That said, some participants mentioned that they mostly interacted with other Ukrainians and their interactions with local youth were limited.

In addition, several young people over the age of 18 years old shared that they had tried to get a bank card at local banks but had been unable to do so because they were refugees.

"I feel well and safe in Moldova but it is hard to feel safe when you have a mushroom cloud looming on the horizon."

An asylum-seeker from the Russian Federation



A refugee child at the Together for Peace event organised by Moldova for Peace with UNHCR support.
©UNHCR/Irina Odobescu

Stateless persons

1 FGD in urban area

Total number of participants: 8

Note: Participants in this group included persons who had already been recognized as stateless in Moldova and persons who were in the process of applying for stateless status. Several stateless participants were residing in the state hospital for persons with mental disabilities and were represented at the focus group by their legal guardians.

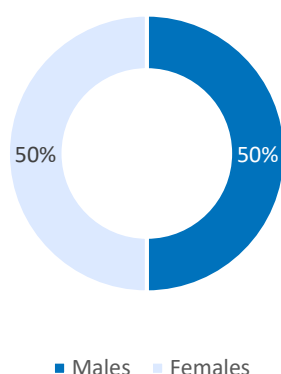


Figure 12 Disaggregation of stateless FGD participants by gender

Main highlights:

- Barriers to access to employment and livelihood opportunities
- Challenges to local integration



Figure 13 Number of stateless persons who shared their views on the above topics, disaggregated by gender

Intentions and inclusion

All the stateless FGD participants had lived in Moldova for quite some time; for some, their whole lives. Some had been brought to Moldova by their parents, while others had remained in Moldova after the USSR collapsed. All of them intended to remain in Moldova. In general,

the stateless persons who attended the FGD considered themselves well-integrated into the local community. Some had formed families and had children.

Accommodation

With regards to housing, some participants lived with their friends and one person lived with his partner in her house. Several participants were accommodated at the state hospital for persons with mental disabilities.

Access to medical assistance

Participants noted that the medical services were generally provided in full, and that the quality of care was good. Participants shared only positive experiences in this regard.

Access to social and administrative services

Participants noted that access to social services was impeded by lack of identity documents, such as passports. While several participants mentioned that they had been able to receive services and assistance from their local municipalities, others shared that they had been unable to do so due to lack of identity documents. Two participants also mentioned that they had not been receiving the social allowances for new-born children or any other social benefits, again due to the lack of identity documents.

Access to education

On education, while participants' children were still too young to attend schools or kindergartens, they were already worried that their (the parents') lack of identity documents may cause barriers for their children's access to education.

Employment and livelihoods

Without identity documents, such as a national ID or a national passport, stateless persons and those seeking stateless status noted that they did not have access to legal employment. As a result, they depended on non-formal employment opportunities to make money for their survival. Participants said that they would like to be formally employed once they have the documents that they need.

Stateless persons' recommendations:

To establish a mechanism for financial assistance for emergency situations for stateless persons.

Access to information

Access to information was limited according to participants. They stated that they were not fully aware of who they could contact or where they could look for the information they needed. Their main sources of information were local authorities and legal aid providers (NGOs).

Community cohesion and peaceful coexistence

With reference to community cohesion and peaceful coexistence, participants stated that they interacted daily with the local community, were able to make friendships and relationships and felt fully integrated.

Roma community refugees

5 FGDs in urban and rural areas

Total number of participants: 39

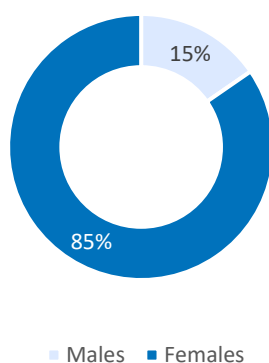


Figure 14 Disaggregation of Roma refugee FGD participants by gender

Main highlights:

- Winter needs and improvement of housing conditions
- Women's empowerment and specific educational needs
- Importance of role of Roma community mediators

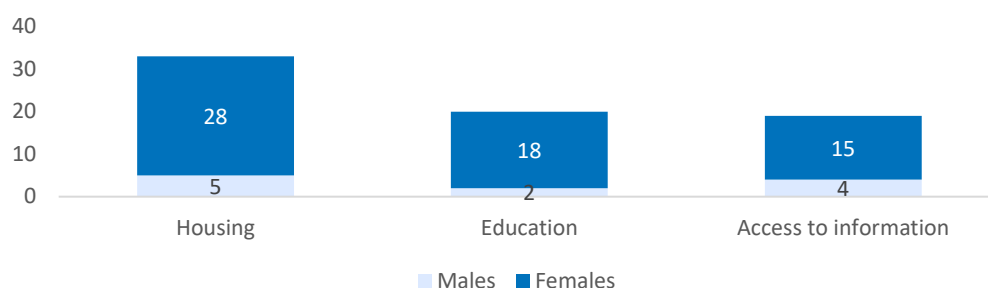


Figure 15 Number of Roma refugees who shared their views on the above topics disaggregated by gender.

Intentions

In general, Roma focus group participants stated that they felt safe and welcome in Moldova and that they intended to stay in Moldova until it was safe to return. Participants expressed appreciation for the peer-to-peer support made available through the network of Roma

community mediators and emphasized the importance of this resource. In terms of long-term intentions, all of the participants stated that they planned to return to Ukraine when it was safe to do so, with the exception of one family of three who was considering staying in Moldova and trying to integrate.

Language

Participants mentioned that an important factor to their integration in Moldova was language. As a general matter, participants stated that Roma refugees do not face significant language barriers in Moldova. Many Roma refugees speak Russian and, within the Roma community, the Romani spoken by the Roma community from Ukraine is similar to that spoken by the Roma community in Moldova. This differs from the situation in Romania, where the Roma community speaks a different dialect, making communication problematic.

Accommodation

In terms of housing conditions, participants residing in the RACs and those living in host communities reported different issues. The conditions in RACs were generally described as better, with the main concerns expressed relating to lack of cooking facilities and lack of trust towards the RAC administrators. Those Roma residing in private accommodations reported challenges in finding accommodation due to negative stereotypes of Roma people. The houses that participants were able to rent had little to no basic housing items, with some participants reporting that they had to sleep on the floor and had no wood to heat their homes. High utility bills were also a concern. In addition, those living in private accommodations reported having less access to information and humanitarian assistance as compared to those staying in RACs. Main concerns expressed by both those living in RACs and those living in private accommodations related to winter: the need for heating, insulation, and warmer clothing.

Access to medical assistance

With regards to medical assistance, Roma participants reported that while urgent medical assistance was generally accessible, treatment for chronic conditions was more difficult due to discrimination against the Roma community. Participants reported that doctors either refused to attend to Roma people or asked for money for their services, which participants believed were otherwise provided for no charge. Another issue raised by Roma participants, as by other participants in the PA, was lack of access to basic medicines due to cost and the unavailability of medicines in Moldova that they took in Ukraine.

Access to education

Access to education is one of the most complex issues faced by the Roma refugee community. Few children are enrolled in local schools. As observed within the PA and confirmed by the Roma Task Force, the few Roma children that are enrolled in school are generally accommodated in RACs, where the families receive assistance from Roma community mediators. FGD participants explained that Roma refugee children in general do

not attend online lessons in Ukrainian schools due to the lack of devices and access to the internet. They also noted a gender dimension to the problem - most Roma women and girls cannot read or write and are not encouraged to get education within the Roma community. At the same time, some Roma girls who participated in the PA expressed their desire to receive an education and to have a profession in the future. Participants mentioned that, to access education, children would need external support through specialized educational programmes to allow them to catch up with other students. They would also need access to school supplies and school clothes, including, most importantly, winter clothes and shoes.

*“My dream was to go to school, but I was never enrolled”.
“I want to be literate”.*

13- and 14-year-old Roma refugee girls in Glodeni

Employment and livelihoods

The situation with employment and livelihoods for Roma refugees is similarly complicated. As explained by the FGD participants, the majority of Roma refugees are women with children, often many children, with the able-bodied male family members remaining in Ukraine. As the children generally do not attend schools or kindergarten, lack of childcare is an obstacle to employment. As well, as noted above, the literacy rate among Roma refugee women is very low. These factors make securing employment difficult. Some participants reported that they and other community members were able to find seasonal work, but that this was more difficult in the winter. In general, people were dependent on cash assistance.

Access to information

As stated by Roma FGD participants, access to information was mostly ensured through Roma community mediators, who were considered the most trusted sources of information. Participants said that community members were largely aware of the main information resources (Dopomoga.gov.md, Green Line, social media groups), but that digital information resources were challenging to access due to low literacy rates, lack of devices and language barriers. Participants also noted that in more traditional Roma refugee groups, women do not have a mobile phone or other devices that would enable them to access digitalized information sources.

Social cohesion and peaceful coexistence

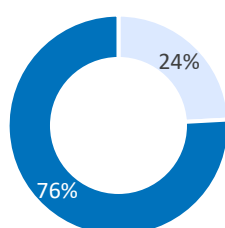
Roma FGD participants provided mixed feedback on social cohesion. In three FGDs, participants shared that they interacted with the local community and that there were no major tensions or conflicts. In the other two FGDs, however, some participants voiced that local people had made offensive comments against Roma people and the fact that they had come from Ukraine. It is also noteworthy that in one FGD, participants renting private accommodations in a rural area stressed that they did not want to have more

communication with the local community, stating that they wished for more isolation so as not to break their own community's rules and traditions.

Refugees in the Transnistrian Region

3 FGDs in urban areas: 2 FGDs with Ukrainians (including Roma community representatives) and one FGD with non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers (South Sudan, Syria)

Total number of participants: 29



■ Males ■ Females

Based on various expert missions, it is estimated that there are between 4.000 and 6.000 Ukrainian refugees residing in the Transnistrian Region.

Figure 16 Disaggregation of FGD participants on the Transnistrian Region by gender

Main highlights:

- Unavailability and unpredictability of assistance
- Concerns regarding the quality of healthcare
- Lack of access to information
- Additional legal/bureaucratic barriers

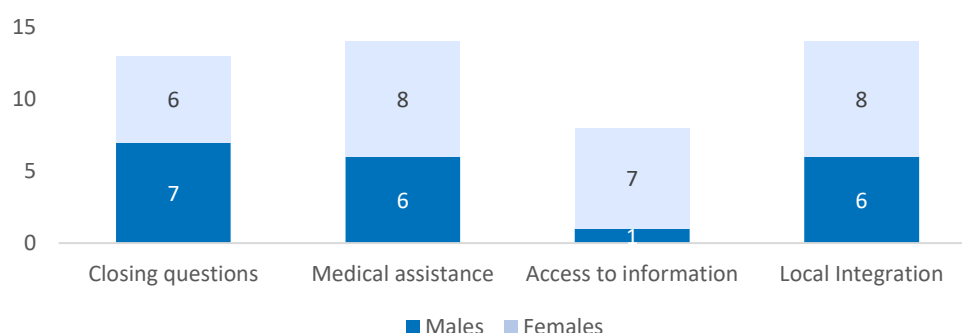


Figure 17 Number of refugees in the Transnistrian Region who shared their views on the above topics disaggregated by gender

Intentions

All the FGD participants from Ukraine stated that they intended to return to Ukraine as soon as the war was over, and peace prevailed. However, a family with many children and a family with a bedridden person shared that the basic infrastructure in their place of return would need to be rehabilitated before they returned. Three participants expressed concern that they would not be accepted back in their communities in Ukraine since they chose to reside in the Transnistrian Region, which is considered to be an ally of Russia.

Refugees coming from other countries planned to remain and naturalize in Moldova. All of them had lived in the Transnistrian Region for at least eight years.

Both groups (Ukrainians and non-Ukrainians) stated that they felt safe and welcome in the Transnistrian Region, noting in particular the lack of a language barrier, even for non-Ukrainians, who also spoke Russian. Another factor that influenced the decision of participants to come to the Transnistrian region was the availability of family and friend social networks for Ukrainians and employment opportunities for non-Ukrainians.

Accommodation

Neither Ukrainian nor non-Ukrainian refugees voiced any major concerns related to housing in the Transnistria Region. It was noted that there was only one refugee accommodation centre in the region. All the FGD participants either rented private accommodations or stayed with their relatives. Rental prices were mentioned among the top reasons for staying in the region, as they are much lower than in other regions of Moldova (on average they pay 100 USD per month for a two-bedroom apartment). The cost of utilities was also considered much cheaper than in the rest of Moldova.

Access to medical assistance

With regards to medical assistance, both male and female FGD participants expressed concerns about the unavailability of specialist doctors (such as pediatric neurologists) in the Transnistrian Region and what they believed to be the poor quality of services. That said, participants confirmed that they had access to medical services provided in the region free of charge, although they tended to travel to Chisinau or even back to Ukraine for treatment of more complex conditions. The unavailability of certain medicines was again raised as another serious issue, as was the cost of those medicines that were available.

Legal status / Access to asylum

Major concerns raised by the participants in all three of the FGDs were linked to bureaucratic barriers to access services due to their legal status. While both Ukrainian refugees and non-Ukrainian asylum-seekers raised this concern, each group had its own specificities.

Ukrainian refugees and third country asylum-seekers shared that, to maintain their legal status in the Transnistrian Region, they had to either leave the region or apply to a local migration office every 45 days according to local migration regulations. Additionally, and more importantly, because the *de facto* authorities of the Transnistrian Region recognize some people displaced from Ukraine as their “nationals,” usually because they were either born in the region or had studied there, they were not able to obtain a migratory certificate which was often need by humanitarian actors to obtain assistance.

FGD participants who were seeking asylum in the Republic of Moldova voiced concerns about the asylum procedure, noting that the length of the process often extended beyond

the timeframe envisaged by law. Participants were also concerned about their access to naturalization in the Republic of Moldova since one of the requirements was to pass the Romanian language exam. This was seen as difficult given the few opportunities to learn Romanian in the Transnistrian Region. Without access to naturalization, participants saw themselves as in an extended situation of uncertainty, with continued difficulties in reuniting with families and more limited access to business development programmes.

Employment and livelihoods

In terms of employment and livelihoods, refugees from Ukraine noted that employment opportunities in the region were scarce and that available jobs paid poorly. Single mothers in the FGDs raised lack of childcare as an obstacle to employment, as available local jobs often required working nightshifts. Some women noted that they had managed to keep their jobs in Ukraine working remotely. Some participants stated that they continued to receive social allowances from Ukraine but could only access them at banks outside of the Transnistrian Region. All the Ukrainian participants in the FGDs mentioned that they were enrolled in financial assistance programmes in other regions of the Republic of Moldova, with financial assistance their main source of income.

All the non-Ukrainian FGD participants were employed. Indeed, they cited availability of specific employment opportunities⁵ in the Transnistrian Region as an important reason for them coming to the region. Participants expressed the need for small business grant programmes targeting refugees. They noted that COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine had had a negative impact on their businesses.

Access to education

All the FGDs participants noted that there were plenty of opportunities to enroll their children in Russian, Romanian and Ukrainian schools. They also noted the availability of after-school activities like sports and arts that were free of charge. However, several women from Ukraine stated that they preferred to have their children study online in Ukrainian schools, expressing concern that a diploma received from a school in the Transnistrian Region would not be recognized by Ukrainian authorities when they returned.

Access to information

FGD participants stated that they had limited access to information in the region. They stated that the main information resources on services in Moldova did not cover the Transnistrian Region, such that people relied on information provided by local NGOs and the local *de-facto* authorities. Participants noted several social network channels that brought together people living in the region. Participants asked that available resources on services in the Transnistrian Region be integrated into the larger information platforms.

Peaceful coexistence and social cohesion

⁵ A chain of second-hand clothing shops owned by a refugee from Syria, who is hiring refugees from Syria and other countries.

None of the FGD participants expressed concerns regarding peaceful coexistence and social cohesion with the local community. They did raise, however, the need to extend assistance to local vulnerable families and people hosting refugees to ensure that peaceful coexistence between the communities and hospitality towards refugees was maintained.

Other concerns

One of the main concerns expressed by all the FGD participants in the Transnistrian Region was the lack of assistance and services for refugees and asylum-seekers residing there. They reported that several local NGOs providing humanitarian NFI assistance and PSS services to refugees ran out of resources. Ukrainian women shared that this kind of aid was very important to their households, stressing the importance of predictable assistance to their household expense planning. Twenty (20) female participants noted that they had tried to access humanitarian aid in other regions of Moldova, but that when the providers learned that they were residing in the Transnistrian Region, they were denied access. As a coping mechanism the women mentioned that they often concealed where they came from and invented an address in Chisinau to overcome this problem of access.

“Thank you for coming and listening to our miseries. We miss simple conversations with people. Come more often!”

62-year-old women from Odesa staying in Tiraspol

LGBTQI+ refugee community

2 FGDs in urban area

Total number of participants 11.

Nationalities: Ukraine, Moldova (one participant resided in Ukraine for several years before the start of the war and has a Ukrainian partner) and Russian Federation

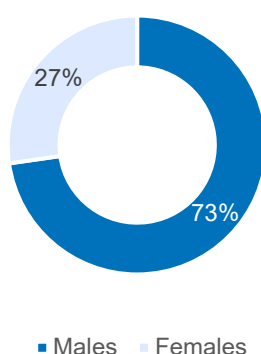


Figure 18 Disaggregation of LGBTQI+ FGD participants by gender

Main highlights:

- Access to the territory and asylum procedure

- Lack of LGBTQI-targeted information
- The role of LGBTQI-targeting organizations

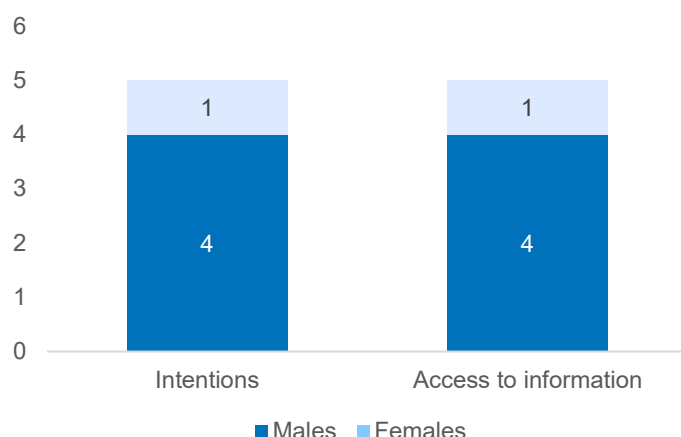


Figure 19 Number of LGBTQI+ persons who shared their views on the above topics disaggregated by gender

Intentions and inclusion

In terms of longer-term intentions, Ukrainian LGBTQI+ participants in the PA, except for two persons whose partners were Moldovan, intended to return to Ukraine when the war and hostilities were over. Until then, they planned to remain in Moldova. One couple shared that they had spent several months in Romania but then decided to move to Moldova, as the cost of living was more affordable, and the local community spoke a common language. Unlike their Ukrainian peers, FGD participants from the Russian Federation did not plan to return to their home country. All of them had arrived in Moldova only recently, within a month of the FGD, and, as such, had not yet decided on a longer-term plan. They chose Moldova as a destination because of its geographic proximity to home, the ability to speak Russian with the local community, and the presence of acquaintances in the country.

Accommodation

Most FGD participants were either renting accommodations privately or staying in a shelter provided by an NGO. No concerns relating to housing were voiced. Participants noted that, in general, it was easy to find accommodations for rent. The conditions in the shelter provided by the NGO were also described as satisfactory, with residents able to stay there for as long as they needed.

Access to medical assistance

Three FGD participants stated that they had applied for and had received medical assistance and that they were happy with its quality. However, two persons (one originating from Ukraine and one from the Russian Federation) expressed concern that they could not access in Moldova certain medicines that they had taken in their home countries. Among the newcomers (mostly persons coming from the Russian Federation) there was also a shared concern about lack of information on how to access medical services and where to look for specific medical specialists. All the information that they were receiving on medical care was being provided by NGOs.

Access to education

None of the FGD participants had children or were students. None had plans to study in Moldova. That said, several persons shared that they would like to learn Romanian and English.

Refugees' recommendations:

LGBTQI+ participants of the focus groups suggested having more community events and involving more members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Access to employment and livelihoods

A considerable number of LGBTQI+ participants (both Ukrainians and Russians) managed to maintain their previous employment working online. One person had found a job in Moldova. Several participants stressed the need for Romanian and English language classes to enhance their access to better-paid jobs.

Access to asylum procedure

Asylum-seekers from the Russian Federation expressed concerns about their treatment at the Chisinau International Airport by government officials and their ability to lodge asylum claims there. They also complained of having to remain for more than 24 hours without water or food in the airport, and of negative comments made about their sexual orientation.

Access to information

Regarding access to information, participants noted that there was a need to have LGBTQI+ community-targeted information. They noted that they were not able to find such materials in Moldova. Their main information resource, and the most trusted, were the NGOs providing assistance to the LGBTQI+ community. Participants stressed that the services and assistance provided by LGBTQI+ NGOs, including information, social accompaniment and case management, were of the utmost importance for the LGBTQI+ refugee community.

Social cohesion and peaceful coexistence

LGBTQI+ participants in the PA noted that relations with the host community in Moldova were generally good. In general, they stated that they did not face discrimination. Those coming from the Russian Federation stated that they felt much safer and relaxed in Moldova about their sexual orientation than in their home country and were able to be open about it. They noted that Moldovan society was more accepting and tolerant towards the LGBTQI+ community than their home society. Ukrainian participants generally agreed with this view, although one female participant stated that she felt safer and more comfortable back in Ukraine.

Complaints and feedback

Overall, PA participants were not aware of complaint or follow-up mechanisms, stating that there was a lack of information about them. Persons with disabilities living in Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs) expressed a fear of being evicted if they complained about conditions there, so they did not. Some participants, however, mentioned that the Green Line, NGO staff, local authorities and police could be channels through which concerns and complaints regarding services could be raised.

In a few cases, participants stated that they had reported through the feedback mechanisms having received incorrect information about voucher distribution, but had never received any follow-up. As a result, participants noted, they did not have much trust and confidence in the feedback and complaints mechanisms overall.

As a general trend, persons accommodated in RACs were better informed about feedback and complaints mechanisms and had better access to them through the complaint boxes than those living in private accommodations.

Special efforts should be made to ensure that Roma refugee community members, teenagers and young people and persons residing in the Transnistrian Region are aware of existing complaint and feedback channels. Guarantees of confidentiality of feedback and complaints, non-retaliation, proper follow up and feedback to the complainants must be ensured to gain the trust of the refugees and asylum seekers and to make these mechanisms effective.



Helpline operators providing information and receiving feedback from refugees. ©UNHCR/ Irina Odobescu

Recommendations

General

- Continue and deepen involvement of refugees in their own protection, including through community mobilization (Government UNHCR, Partners);
- Ensure that persons displaced from Ukraine have access to a stable legal status and are aware of how to obtain it (Government);
- Inform PA participants of the outcomes of the 2022 PA (UNHCR);
- Conduct another Participatory Assessment in summer 2023 to assess the impact of temporary protection on those displaced from Ukraine (UNHCR, Partners);
- Continue and strengthen outreach activities to refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons, particularly outside of RACs (Government, UNHCR, Partners).

In the area of basic needs

- Make available non-food items, in particular winter clothes, to refugees and others of concern, especially during the winter months (UNHCR, Partners);
 - Provide additional financial support to refugees to cover increased energy costs during the winter months (UNHCR);
- With regards to the Transnistrian Region, increase assistance to refugees residing in the region and ensure access to assistance in the rest of Moldova; ensure access to information on available service providers (UNHCR, Partners).

In the area of accommodations:

- Increase options for refugees to cook in RACs (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Reach out to landlords, especially if/when temporary protection is granted, to encourage them to rent apartments and homes to refugees (UNHCR, Partners);
- Explore and implement possibilities of social housing for refugees (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Undertake a comprehensive review of RACs to ensure that they are accessible to persons with disabilities and those with limited mobility (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Monitor access of Roma refugees to the private rental market (Government, UNHCR, Partners).

In the area of health care:

- Undertake information campaigns for refugees from Ukraine explaining available medical services (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Include Ukrainian refugees (including as beneficiaries of temporary protection) and asylum-seekers in the state medical insurance program, with financial support provided by the international community (Government, Donors);
- In the absence of medical insurance, provide key medications free of charge through community organizations and other partners (Government, Partners, Donors);
- Ensure regular visits by doctors to RACs (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Consider how to ensure access to medical services throughout the Republic of Moldova for refugees residing in the Transnistrian Region who may lack necessary documentation (Government).

In the area of social services:

- Undertake information campaigns for refugees from Ukraine on available social services and social assistance programmes, as well as eligibility requirements (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Provide capacity support to relevant government agencies to absorb refugee caseload in their work (Government, UNHCR, Partners, Donors);
- Ensure access of stateless persons to social services given available documentation (Government);
- Increase awareness-raising and information-sharing on available social services for refugees in urban areas and local communities (Government, UNHCR, Partners).

In the area of education:

- Ensure that Ukrainian refugees are able to fully enrol their children in Moldovan schools, and not just as “audience members” (Government);
- Promote flexibility with regard to documentation requirements for enrolment in Moldovan schools and universities (Government);
- Make available dedicated rooms within local schools for children to study together online if accessing studies in Ukraine (Government, UNHCR, Partners, Donors);
- Increase availability of Romanian language classes for refugee children (Government, UNHCR, Partners, Donors);
- Sensitize teachers on the difficulties refugee children face and their role in preventing bullying (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Continue and expand extracurricular activities in Moldovan schools, especially sports and cultural events (Government, UNHCR, Partners, Donors);
- Increase outreach to the Roma community, especially by community mediators, to promote school enrolment among Roma children (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Provide catch-up classes for children from Ukraine, in particular Roma refugee children, who are illiterate or who have minimal education (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Provide clothing and supplies to refugee children who wish to attend schools but lack the necessary resources to do so (UNHCR, Partners);
- Ensure access to education for stateless persons without certain documentation due to their stateless status (Government).

In the area of employment and livelihoods:

- Increase availability of Romanian language classes (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Provide free vocational training and skills development (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Increase counselling on employment opportunities (UNHCR, Partners);
- Increase access to childcare for refugees with children, including community-based (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Undertake an awareness-raising campaign with potential employers on the rights attached to temporary protection legal status (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Increase opportunities for professional/business development for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons (Government, UNHCR, Partners).

In the area of access to asylum

- Provide additional training for national officers at the Chisinau International Airport on asylum procedures (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Invest additional resources in government asylum and naturalization procedures to avoid undue delays in adjudications (Government, UNHCR, Donors).

In the area of access to Information:

- Deploy an information campaign on temporary protection to ensure Ukrainians are aware of this legal status, how to apply for it, and its associated rights (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Ensure that refugees are aware of complaint/feedback mechanisms and that those who lodge complaints receive a reply (UNHCR, Partners);
- Review the main sources of information for refugees to ensure current and clear content, especially on humanitarian aid distribution (UNHCR, partners);
- Ensure diverse modalities of communication; maximize social media but recognize that some refugees will have limited access to it (e.g., older persons, Roma refugees) (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Employ Roma community mediators to facilitate access to information for Roma refugees (Government, UNHCR, Partners)
- Increase information on available services in the Transnistrian Region (UNHCR, Partners);
- Provide targeted information for LGBTQI+ refugees (UNHCR, Partners).

In the area of community cohesion and peaceful coexistence

- Monitor community relations between refugees and host communities, especially in areas where political tensions may arise (Government, UNHCR, Partners);
- Ensure that assistance is provided to both refugees and vulnerable Moldovan citizens (Government, UNHCR, Partners, Donors);
- Organize cultural or sports activities bringing refugees of different ages, genders and backgrounds and local people together (UNHCR, Partners);
- Organize community events involving LGBTQI+ refugees (UNHCR, Partners).

UNHCR **PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT** IN MOLDOVA, THE REPUBLIC OF

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