Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

MOLDOVA

SEPTEMBER 2023

DISABILITY BRIEFING NOTE

Disability & Age Task Force
Refugee Coordination Forum Moldova

The **Disability & Age Task Force** was established in March 2022 with the support of the Refugee Coordination Forum and under the Protection Working Group. In the group are represented humanitarian actors providing specific services for people with disabilities and older people.

BACKGROUND

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has had a substantial effect on Moldova, with an influx of more than 889,000 individuals crossing into the country since February 2022. As of July 2023, Moldova hosts a significant population of displaced individuals, including over 109,000 Ukrainian refugees and nearly 7,600 third country nationals. Approximately **10% of refugees in Moldova are with disabilities**, and 22% of refugee households have at least one family member with specific needs, such as disability or serious medical condition.

The Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) conducted in September 2022 by REACH in Refugee Accommodation Centers (RACs) and Host Communities across Moldova, found that among the households surveyed, 19% of household reported having at least one person with difficulties seeing, 5% hearing, 7% walking or climbing steps, and 4% difficulties caring for themselves.

"I arrived in Moldova by myself in April 2022, as my whole family stayed in Ukraine. The staff of Motivation has supported me over the last year, emotionally comforting me through the most challenging times and providing me with a laptop to take online Social Media Management courses to help me find a job. They have also accompanied me to various interviews; I am confident that I will find a job soon."
(Refugee Woman with disability, 28 years old, Cojușna)

**In the assessment of ACTED were interview 85% of the residents of the different RACs and the assessment tool used the Washington Group Question Short Set on Disabilities*

These percentages increase significantly when looking at respondents 60 and older: within this group, almost half (50%) reported having difficulties seeing, while 24% reported difficulties in hearing, 26% reported difficulties for walking or climbing steps, and 11% reported difficulties in self-caring.

In January 2023, ACTED conducted an assessment* in RACs which revealed that 12% of the population residing in the RACs has a disability increase to 22% if considered also people with serious medical conditions. This percentage significantly increased to 61% among residents aged 60 and above.

Forced displacement can create or exacerbate disabilities, placing persons with disabilities among the most at-risk and disproportionately affected groups in these contexts. Among the subgroups, older refugees, women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. This briefing note provides an overview of the situation of refugees with disabilities in Moldova, their needs and challenges they face, as well as the current efforts undertaken by humanitarian stakeholders part of the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) to address these challenges.

Washington Group Questions - REACH MSNA	5-6	7-10	11-15	16-17	18-59	60+	General
Seeing, even if wearing glasses	5%	8%	13%	14%	17%	47%	19%
Hearing, even if using hearing aid	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%	24%	5%
Walking or climbing steps	2%	1%	1%	0%	5%	26%	7%
Remembering or Concentrating	4%	2%	1%	5%	8%	17%	7%
Self-caring such as washing or dressing	3%	1%	2%	2%	3%	11%	4%
Communicating, i.e understand or being understood	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	5%	2%

**Disaggregation by type of functional limitation and age groups based on the Washington Group Questions, REACH MSNA 2022*

This briefing note aims to provide an overview of the situation of refugees with disability in Moldova and the barriers they face and needs they have, as well as the current efforts being made by humanitarian stakeholders to address these challenges.

KEY RESULTS 2022 – 2023

In **2023**, several partners reported to the Refugees Coordination Forum (RCF) their efforts in supporting refugees with disabilities throughout various programs:

2,325 refugees with disabilities benefited from targeted protection assistance

367 refugees with disabilities participate in PSS activities (protection, child protection, GVB)

6,840 refugees with disabilities received multi-purpose cash assistance

489 refugees with disabilities received in-kind assistance for basic needs

1,225 refugees with disabilities received food packages

1,013 refugees with disabilities received Hygiene Items

151 refugees with disabilities supported to access livelihoods and job opportunities

167 refugees with disabilities received emergency and medical health services

Additionally, members of the Disability and Age Task Force reported at the end of 2022 to RCF they have provided also targeted services for persons with disabilities such as:

1,940 refugees with disabilities were supported by Keystone mobile unit with case management support

122 refugees with disabilities received assistive devices (walking frames, crutches, wheelchairs, hearing aids, optical correction devices)

889 refugees with disabilities and serious chronic diseases were supported with medicines

79 children refugees with disabilities benefitted of rehabilitation services

1,185 refugees with disabilities in Transnistrian region, received financial support

99 families of refugees with disabilities benefitted from the necessary home appliances to improve accessibility

"We are very pound of the fact that our Ministry, with the support of UNHCR, has become more accessible for men and women with disabilities, something which should have been a normality, but unfortunately was not. As the Minister for Labour and Social Protection, as the Minister leading the disability policy in Moldova, making our workplace more accessible was a matter of principle since I could not ask other stakeholders to be accessible if the Ministry in charge of disability policy was not. Now, we are a bit more credible."
(Alexei Buzu, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Moldova)

GAPS AND NEEDS OF REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES

The main gaps for 2023 identified Disability & Age Task Force members through different assessment and monitoring exercises (e.g. UNHCR Participatory Assessment, UNHCR Protection Monitoring, Keystone assessment on Needs for Refugees with Disability and other partner data) are:

- Lack of consistent **disaggregated data** by age, sex, and disability collected and properly analyzed by humanitarian actors.
- Lack of **inclusion** of persons with disabilities **in the labor market** with a tailored approach.
- Lack of **accessible accommodations** either in private accommodation or in RACs.
- Lack of **access to inclusive education** for children with disabilities online or in person.
- Insufficient **availability of medicine** and **diagnostic services** for people with chronical condition which can lead to disability if not treated.
- Lack of **rehabilitation services** such as physiotherapy and therapy for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Lack of **qualitative assistive devices** to enhancing independence of persons with disabilities.
- Lack of accessible procedures and infrastructures for acquiring **legal status** (Temporary Protection, Asylum etc.) in Moldova.
- Lack of access to **specialized medical services** for refugees with disabilities with and without legal status in Moldova.

STORIES FORM REFUGEES

Human interest stories are part of the accountability system of humanitarian organizations to quality assess the work and the impact of the work of the organizations.

Yulia is a young refugee woman from Ukraine with a sever hearing impairment who arrived in Moldova in the first weeks after the start of the war. Yulia found a new home in the house of a Moldovan host family in the north of Moldova.

The mother of Yulia's host family contacted Keystone Moldova and asked for help for Yulia, as she has been living without a hearing device for the past ten years. She informed Keystone that Yulia had the young Ukrainian woman has severe hearing disability and useds the only sign language to communicate.

With the help of the Keystone Moldova mobile team, Yulia underwent hearing tests and doctor consultations. In the end, she received a hearing aid adjusted to her needs, allowing her to hear was purchased for her. With her new hearing device, for the first time in a decade, Yulia is now able, the young woman was able to hear the voices of those around her, improving her life as a refugee in Moldova and facilitating her integration within host community.

Maria and her husband Serghei and her daughter arrived in Moldova in March 2023. After an accident in Egypt Maria has suffered several injuries and different surgeries.
By chance they found out about Motivation who was located next to the apartment where they are living in Chisinau.
Thanks to Motivation and their outreach to identify refugees with disabilities and their needs, and with the support of the Association of Persons with Disabilities in Moldova and UNHCR they were able to receive a

wheelchair after just two days since they arrived in Moldova. The assistive device was an essential tool to ensure Maria could move and be more independent for carry out her daily activities without requiring support from her husband and daughter.

Anatoli and his family put off leaving their home for a long time, until one evening they went out into the garden and heard shrapnel falling on the roofs of neighboring houses. That same night they packed our things into our emergency bags. They chose to come in Moldova because it's the closest country, both geographically and spiritually for them.
Since arriving in Moldova, in the village of Greblesti, Anatoli, his wife and mother-in-law, both with different types of disabilities, are hoping to return home, except that every so often, after a period of quiet, the town of

Mykolaiv gets shelled again. So, they decided to apply for temporary protection in the Republic of Moldova.
The General Inspectorate for Migration has sent a mobile team to Grebleşti to ensure that refugees with locomotor limitations, including Anatoli, have access to Temporary Protection status.

The Task Force proved to be an excellent mechanism for advocacy and mainstreaming of disability in governmental programs and plans related to refugees' support.
It also helped national and international NGOs to build partnerships, to coordinate activities and to efficiently their resources in a more efficient way the resources for supporting refugees with disabilities.
(Ludmila Malcoci, co-chair of the Disability Task Force)

Contacts

Ludmila Malcoci, Director Keystone Moldova, Lmalcoci@khs.org
Alberto Tonon, Disability Inclusion Specialist OHCHR/UNHCR, Tonon@unhcr.org