

Hope and uncertainty: A needs assessment of Ukrainian youth refugees in Romania and Moldova

Executive Summary — April 2023

One year since the escalation of the international armed conflict in Ukraine, more than 8 million people have fled from Ukraine with the majority being young women. Romania and Moldova each host over 100,000 refugees from Ukraine. Youth, defined for the needs assessment as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, are a significant portion of these refugees. Despite this, there is a lack of disaggregated data for youth in existing reports and assessments. Further, there are no qualitative assessments to date that provide an in-depth understanding of youth's needs, priorities, and hopes for the future.

In response to the lack of information regarding youth, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the National Youth Foundation (FNT) in Romania, and the National Youth Council of Moldova (CNTM), collected data from youth refugees from Ukraine in Romania and Moldova.

Youth are like raw material, which has to be worked on. We are the people we should invest in now, and we will then grow and give back to our cities and our country.

15-17 Female, Bucharest, Romania



Findings

Youth feel safe and have access to basic services including healthcare

Given the current situation in Ukraine, with many areas having ongoing conflict, youth consider themselves safe in Romania and Moldova overall. In fact, many expressed gratitude to Romanians and Moldovans for welcoming them and providing a safe place to live and access humanitarian assistance.

Whichever way you look at it, Romania is probably one of the most hospitable countries towards us refugees. It starts from the government, and processing is done quite quickly. Romanians that we come across are very open, friendly, and always trying to help as much as possible. So my experience here has been really pleasant. I'll remember it with gratitude.

25-35 Female, Timișoara, Romania

It is very important for us that there are people who want to help us and are interested in our problems. I have a lot of appreciation for organisations that provide youth programmes, information, and language classes, all of which are really important for us now.

15-17 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

Youth live with uncertainty

Despite the challenges around their circumstances, the majority of youth expressed feelings of hope for the future including for the conflict to end. This hope, in combination with being a refugee with temporary protections and support, also contributes to a sense of uncertainty. Youth feel they cannot plan for the future, which is a strain on their mental health and wellbeing.

I'm aware that I'm here temporarily and it's been seven months already and every month I'm thinking, another month, well, another month, well, another month, maybe a bit more...

15-17 Female, Tulcea, Romania

Youth need accessible language courses

Language is an overarching need that affects everything in youth's lives. Youth report needing to learn Romanian, and some mentioned the need for English to access specific parts of the labour market, through accessible and flexible modalities.

It's a problem that we don't understand the language. People don't want to hire us because it's not profitable for them. We just don't understand Romanian. We might start learning it. And as soon as we learn how to speak Romanian, we will find a job.

15-17 Male (Roma), Costești, Moldova



Findings

Youth need income now

Economic support is the most important need identified by youth. If their economic needs are not met, youth may have no choice but to return to Ukraine before it is safe to do so. Several barriers exist to accessing economic opportunities including the lack of language skills and of predictable and stable legal status, low wages, the need for professional experience, and the absence of suitable childcare.

I had work experience. I was looking for a job, and they offered me a job in some cafe. They just said, 'help the cook.' I actually like to cook, but the salary was very small. They offered me 12-13 hours of work, and the pay was half of the minimum wage in Romania. And it was unofficial. Everyone knows that according to temporary protection, I have full rights, but not everyone observes them.

18-24 Female, Timișoara, Romania

Of course, everyone wants to work. For two or three months at least. If there is a job, I will stay. I am calling employers, and they are immediately rejecting me. I went to two bars and they rejected me there too. Because they don't want to take refugees for a job.

18-24 Female (Roma), Glodeni, Moldova

Youth need social connections and emotional support

Most youth find emotional support for their mental health and wellbeing through social connections with friends and family, engaging in sports or other recreational activities, and joining social gatherings. However, friends and family are dispersed. Becoming a refugee disrupted and reduced youth's social circles and altered the ways in which youth socialise. The need for social connections and emotional support outside of the home is strong, and youth that are able to access youth centres find them to be important to addressing these needs.

My problem is that I want to see my close friends, because they are my support. I miss them very much, and the problem is that I can not see them.

15-17 Male, Tulcea, Romania

For me, [personal space] is the number one problem. I met with a psychologist. Now we live in one room - me, my child, and my mother. I haven't lived with my mother for 15 years. And we're also with my niece. She and my daughter simply do not get along. And this has been going on for months now. I'm sitting here with my laptop, trying to get some work done, there are two pupils sitting on the zoom with headphones, their ears already hurt. And then there's my mother. It's hard morally and psychologically.

25-35 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

Youth need youth centres

Youth find centres instrumental to forming social connections with others, gaining skills to support their daily lives in host countries, supporting their mental health, and integrating in the host community. Many youth express the desire to continue and expand programming at youth centres.

Here you can spend time nicely. Actually there are a lot of different organisations that provide help and support. But I prefer the youth centre because I am the most comfortable here. Here there are classes for children, and they also don't forget about us, young mothers. It's very nice. Great centre. There is English, Romanian, sport, psychology, this is all that we need.

25-35 Female, Suceava, Romania

I don't go anywhere, I don't go to school, I study in my Ukrainian school. So, I rarely communicate with peers, and thanks to events at the youth centre, it is much easier.

15-17 Female, Chișinău, Moldova



Findings

Youth parents need suitable childcare options

Given the predominance of women and children refugees, with the majority of female caregivers being sole caregivers due to the high levels of family separation, the lack of suitable childcare is a highly cited need. Without suitable childcare options, caregivers have difficulty accessing services, language courses, livelihoods, and integrating in host communities, further contributing to burdens on their mental health.

The only problem is that I'm surrounded by children all the time. At the centre, I'm with the children. At home, I'm with the children. There are courses, but I'm with the children. Well, in general, I have this painful problem. Because before, they were at home independently, one in kindergarten, the other in school, and now they are with me all the time. I want a little rest from them. There are no grandmothers here, there are no relatives. This is purely my problem. I can only solve this by moving home, but there is the war.

25-35 Female, Tulcea, Romania

I had to choose, either being with my children or a job.

25-35 Female, Căușeni, Moldova

Roma refugee youth have similar needs to all refugee youth from Ukraine but face more discrimination

It is important to consider Roma-specific needs with an awareness of Roma cultural values and priorities, which may differ from their host communities. Although their general needs are similar, all external stakeholders identified Roma communities as among the one of the most marginalised groups in the region who face ongoing discrimination that can reduce their access to services and humanitarian aid.

Yes, there is a little hope somewhere, but I understand that this war will last another five or six years. Until then, we all understand that this mess will not end, something will remain there or not, it does not depend on us.

18-24 Male (Roma), Glodeni, Moldova



Youth have immense hope for the future

Hope keeps youth going despite the challenges they face. This hope helps youth persevere, but also creates a sense of uncertainty which affects how they navigate life as a refugee.

I want my child to have a great, bright, happy future regardless of anything. I want him to receive a good education, so that regardless of the situation in Ukraine, he has a great choice and big opportunities. The war has brought a lot of changes to my life. But at the same time, I have received a lot of experience and situations here that have changed my worldview. And I am even grateful for some of these situations that have happened because they have changed me, and I think it happened for the better. So, I don't know when the war will end, but I see myself here for now, even in this city.

25-35 Female, Tulcea, Romania

I have hope for the future - a beautiful one.

15-17 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

Select recommendations

The following recommendations are those that organisations working with and for youth and donors should prioritise immediately. See the full report for the complete list of the recommendations.



Organisations working with and for youth in Romania and Moldova

- Share the findings and recommendations of the youth needs assessment with youth to inform future programming.
- Identify and implement opportunities for refugee youth from Ukraine to meaningfully engage in the humanitarian response.
- Continue, and expand where needed, the use of youth centres.
- Expand youth programming to underserved rural areas.
- Provide suitable childcare options to ensure equitable access for youth who are parents that want to access programmes and services in youth centres.
- Fund and expand the coordination and harmonisation of programming across youth, education, livelihood, and protection sectors.



- Provide programming that supports youth's economic needs including accessing the workforce. Some examples include vocational skills training that youth apply quickly, professional language and life skills training for work readiness, job fairs, and paid internships.
- Continue free Romanian and English language courses with flexible modalities and schedules to accommodate youth parents, youth who are studying online, and employed youth. These can include certified levels of language acquisition to further support economic inclusion and integration.
- Provide youth access or referrals to Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking professionals that can provide non-specialised psychosocial support, and when needed, refer youth to specialised services. This should also include referrals to support children of young parents.
- Continue and expand opportunities for youth to access safe spaces with computers and internet so that they can study online in the same place together.

Donors

- Continue and expand investments in youth programming that respond to youth needs identified in this report including:
 - Maintain, and expand where needed, the use of youth centres for youth to connect and share experiences.
 - Provide non-formal education with an emphasis on programming that supports economic inclusion and acquisition of language skills.
 - Ensure programming modalities are flexible to support equitable access for all youth.
 - Provide suitable childcare options for young parents that want to access services.
- Continue investing in programmes that address the immediate economic needs of refugees including cash assistance, through a targeted approach that reduces the stress of unemployment.
- Invest in coordination mechanisms to ensure harmonisation of programming across youth, education, livelihood, and protection sectors.
- Provide funding and opportunities for youth refugees from Ukraine to advocate for their priorities and needs to inform future iterations of the regional and national response plans particularly youth, education, livelihood, and protection sectors.

Methods

The youth needs assessment utilises the **NRC Youth Wellbeing Framework** and included the following methods:



Targeted desk review

Drawing on documents relevant to refugees from Ukraine, particularly those residing in Moldova or Romania, the targeted desk review included the most recent documents to identify qualitative questions and serve as a triangulation point for the qualitative data analysis.



Thematic analysis

Researchers categorised and themed the qualitative data deductively using the NRC Youth Wellbeing Framework as well as inductively allowing other themes from youth to emerge.



Saturation analysis

Using the findings of the thematic analysis, researchers conducted a saturation analysis to identify the frequency that youth explicitly mention their priorities, needs, and hopes.



Triangulation

The researchers triangulated the findings from the youth with the targeted desk review and the external stakeholders where possible.



Qualitative data collection

The research employed qualitative methods with youth refugees from Ukraine between the ages of 15 and 35. In collaboration with FNT in Romania and the CNTM in Moldova, the researchers trained facilitators, the majority of which are youth refugees from Ukraine themselves, to collect data from youth in interactive Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews. Researchers also collected data from external stakeholders from UN agencies, INGOs, and national youth organisations with existing professional roles supporting Ukrainian youth in Romania and Moldova. All data was transcribed and translated into English.

Participants



The Youth Needs Assessment collected qualitative data from youth refugees from Ukraine between the ages of 15 and 35 in Romania and Moldova. NRC partners FNT and CNTM identified refugee youth, including Roma youth refugees from Ukraine in Moldova. Some youth were participants of programming provided by partners, while others were not accessing youth programming at the time of data collection. Given the large proportion of refugees that are female, the assessment has a predominance of female participants.

Participants	Youth	External stakeholders
Romania	153	6
Moldova	96	4
Total	249	10

NRC would like to express its sincerest gratitude to the youth refugees from Ukraine who participated in the assessment and contributed their invaluable time and perspectives.

NRC commissioned Wonder Lab to design and conduct the youth needs assessment. Data used in this report was collected by youth staff from the National Youth Foundation (FNT) in Romania and the National Youth Council of Moldova (CNTM).

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