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

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NRC
NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

FNTJ
ROMANIA

National Youth Council of Moldova

Acknowledgements

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH
Irina and her dog Kofi at the border crossing in Medyka, Poland
Ingebjørg Kårstad/NRC

ACRONYMS	
CNTM	Consiliul Naţional al Tineretului din Moldova / National Youth Council of Moldova
CO	Country Office
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FNT	Fundatia Nationala pentru Tineret / National Foundation for Youth
ICDL	International Computer Driving License
KII	Key Informant Interview
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
TP	Temporary Protection
TPD	Temporary Protection Directive
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UN	United Nations

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1 Introduction

NRC and its partners collected data from Ukrainian youth refugees in Romania and Moldova to assess their needs in order to inform the priorities of organisations working with and for youth in both countries. This assessment defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 35, in alignment with the definitions of youth in both host countries, and aims to better understand their needs which differ from the broader refugee population. Beyond Romania and Moldova, the assessment will contribute to future use of the NRC Youth Wellbeing Framework globally.[1]

2 Background

As of 7 March 2023, over 8.1 million Ukrainians have fled Ukraine and over 4.8 million have registered for temporary protection or other national protections since the start of war on 24 February 2022.[2] This war has triggered "the fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II."[3, p.1] With a recorded 110,921 refugees as of 5 March 2023, Romania has the second highest number of Ukrainian refugees of the neighbouring countries.[4, 5, 6] Moldova, one of the poorest economies countries in Europe, hosts among the highest number of refugees per capita, 107,728 recorded as of 5 March 2023.[4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11]

The majority of Ukrainian refugees are women, including in Romania and Moldova, due to the fact that men ages 18 to 60 are not allowed to leave Ukraine because of the imposition of martial law in Ukraine, with some exceptions.[3, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15] A UNHCR regional study with more than 34,000 participants found that 88% of refugee respondents were women and children.[13] Furthermore, youth aged 15 to 35 comprised 10.2 million in Ukraine prior to the war, and after 24 February 2022, more than 4 million young people have fled their homes.[16] In Romania, 54% of the refugee population is between the ages of 18 and 59 years old, with more than half this group being female.[26] A multi-sectored needs assessment in Moldova conducted by REACH found that 49% of refugees reported being between the ages of 18 to 59 years old, with the average age of interviewed participants living in the community being 31 years old.[10] As such, **youth are a significant proportion of refugees fleeing from Ukraine, particularly female youth.**

2.1 Legal protection

In response to the humanitarian crisis, the European Council activated the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) on 4 March 2022. The TPD provides Ukrainians fleeing the war a number of protections in European Union (EU) Member States including housing, social welfare assistance, a residence permit, healthcare, state education, employment, banking services, as well as freedom of movement within the EU.[6, 7, 17, 18] As an EU member, Romania provides temporary protection to Ukrainian refugees. Romania may extend this protection past 4 March 2024, depending on how the war in Ukraine evolves.[17]

While the Republic of Moldova is not a member of the European Union, refugees have benefited from Moldova's *state of emergency* which has been renewed on a rolling basis.[19] As of 1 March 2023, Moldova is implementing a Temporary Protection (TP) mechanism, offering those who fit the definition of a refugee from Ukraine to register within 90 days to stay legally in Moldova with access to a full range of basic services similar to the EU TPD. The TP mechanism in Moldova will last until March 2024 and is renewable for two terms of six months depending on the situation in Ukraine.

This needs assessment was conducted prior to the activation of the TP mechanism in Moldova when refugees faced additional legal challenges to either extend the emergency protections, or had to register as asylum seekers to gain refugee or humanitarian protection status, a free but lengthy bureaucratic process which is backlogged and takes at least six months.[7, 9, 20, 21]

3 Methods

This assessment utilises the NRC Youth Wellbeing Framework which NRC developed to inform programming activities throughout the humanitarian programme cycle.[1] It consists of three foundational domains that support youth wellbeing - safety, basic needs, and education, and eight wellbeing dimensions - social, emotional, self-confidence, economic, community contribution, critical thinking, physical health, and personal values. Prior to this needs assessment, NRC, its partners, and refugee youth from Ukraine prioritised wellbeing domains and dimensions for the Romanian and Moldovan contexts. *See Annex 1: NRC Youth Wellbeing Framework* for a detailed description of the foundational domains and wellbeing dimensions.

Figure 1: NRC Youth Wellbeing Framework
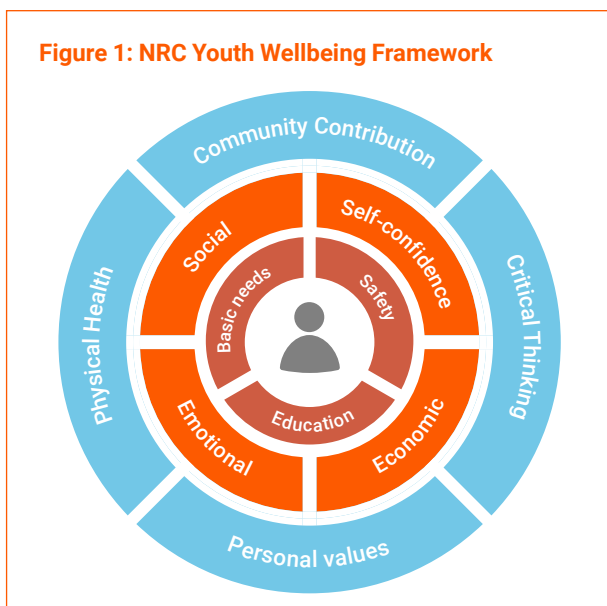
The Youth Needs Assessment included the following methods:

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. Search terms for the review included youth, adolescents, refugees, livelihoods, and assessments for both Romania and Moldova.

Qualitative data collection

The research employed qualitative methods with youth refugees from Ukraine between the ages of 15 and 35. In collaboration with National Youth Foundation (FNT) in Romania and the National Youth Council of Moldova (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 (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). 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.

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.

3.1 Youth participants

The Youth Needs Assessment collected 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.[13]

FGD and KII participants differed by age group, with the following disaggregation: 15 to 17 year-olds, 18 to 24 year-olds, and 25 to 35 year-olds. In Moldova, the assessment also targeted Roma youth refugees from Ukraine as they face unique challenges including discrimination. See **Table 1** for the participants in both Romania and Moldova.

Table 1: Youth and external stakeholders

Youth Participants - qualitative data collection							
Location	15-17F	15-17M	18-24F	18-24M	25-35F	25-35M	Total
Romania	32	24	20	26	31	20	**153**
Moldova	18	15	10	15	34	4	**96**
Total	50	39	30	41	65	24	**249**

External Stakeholders - qualitative data collection	
Romania	6
Moldova	4
Total	**10**

3.2 Limitations

The limitations of this needs assessment include:

- There was a lack of disaggregated data in existing reports and assessments that are a part of the targeted desk review.

- There was a lower number of youth participants than planned for the assessment. This was in part due to the fact that youth are integrated within the host community and some are transient, making it difficult for organisations supporting youth to identify them. In response, NRC and its partners extended the data collection timeline to identify and engage more youth for the study, which allowed for more youth participants.

- The assessment attempted to gather information from youth in rural areas. While the partners were successful in doing so, it was limited in part for the previously mentioned reasons.

- NRC partner staff collected data in Russian and Ukrainian which was then transcribed and translated into English by a translation company, and there may be nuances lost in the translation.

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4 Findings overview

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

This report summarises the findings of the needs assessment for youth refugees from Ukraine in Romania and Moldova. When there are contextual nuances for either Romania or Moldova, the report provides more detail. The term 'youth' refers to the youth who participated in this assessment, and the term 'participant' refers to both youth as well as interviewed external stakeholders. The findings are separated into three sections: youth experiences, needs, and hopes for the future. The needs highlighted in this report are all connected and mutually reinforcing.

4.1 Youth Experiences

This section provides contextual insights from participants that allow for a deeper understanding of youth's needs including youth feeling safe in host countries and having access to healthcare in alignment with temporary protections provided by Romania and Moldova. However, the temporary nature of these protections in combination with the current state of the war in Ukraine create a sense of uncertainty.

4.1.1 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

One of the places that youth continuously mentioned they felt safe and welcomed were in youth centres. Outside of youth centres, some participants, in particular female youth, expressed concerns about risks associated with discrimination, including by landlords and employers, as well as perceived concerns about human trafficking and sexual exploitation.[30, 31, 32]
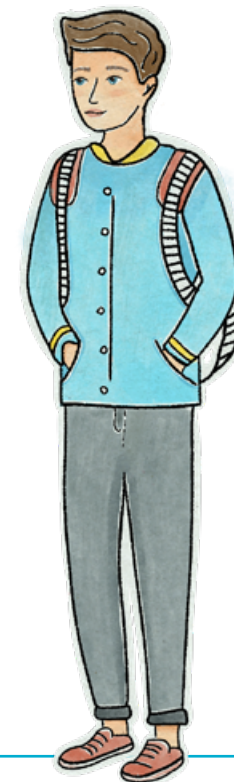
Access to healthcare

As part of legal protection in both countries, refugees have access to healthcare. The majority of youth appreciate this benefit and many utilise it.

I even called the medical department at night, I went to the hospital and I got the first medical help for free, right away.

18-24 Female, Suceava, Romania

Despite these positive experiences, there are challenges to navigating the healthcare system. Youth experience language barriers as not all providers have translators available. Youth report confusion when trying to identify which services are free, and frustration around documentation requirements to access services. In addition, some do not have access to medication they used in Ukraine. Some youth felt discrimination because of their refugee status including quality of care and not understanding rights under temporary protection law with regards to free healthcare. In Moldova, participants described discrepancies in access and care between urban and rural areas including a lack of medication and doctors, as well as long wait times for care.[11, 27, 28, 29]

4.1.2 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 creates a sense of uncertainty. Youth feel they cannot plan for the future, which is a strain on their mental health and wellbeing.[21]

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

We practically have no plans. We have a dream of coming back home, but it is dangerous to be there, so now we are here. This is a quite difficult period for me. I try to focus on what I can do today, otherwise I will be disappointed. I try to avoid making plans and setting any long-term goals to function as productively as possible now. So, God willing, we will make plans later.

25-35 Female, Timișoara, Romania

Youth expressed concerns about how long humanitarian support will continue, with the fear of having to go back to Ukraine if the war becomes protracted and the support ceases. Some youth are simply uncertain and do not know whether or not they will return, stay, or travel to another country.[13]

Well, it is good here, but home is better.

18-24 Female (Roma) , Glodeni, Moldova

I just want to go back home. I want to see my loved ones. I have been here for nine months. I have not gone back yet, but I understand that it is better here now because I am safe.

15-17 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

As the war persists, youth report that the sense of uncertainty they feel makes it challenging to plan and make decisions related to their current and future needs.

4.2 What do youth need?

This Youth Needs Assessment highlights several needs of youth refugees from Ukraine in Romania and Moldova. Youth identified language, economic, social, emotional, and childcare support as priority needs displayed in Figure 2.

Researchers identified these needs through the thematic and saturation analyses which included the frequency by which youth explicitly mentioned various needs. For each of these identified needs, there is a table with disaggregated data reflecting youth's priorities by country, age, and gender. See *Annex 2: Youth Needs Disaggregation* for additional disaggregated data.

Figure 2: Youth needs by priority
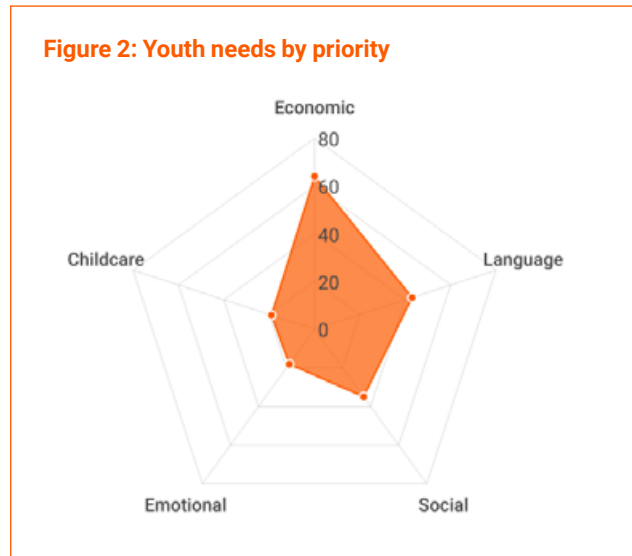
4.2.1 Youth need accessible language courses

Table 2: Disaggregated youth priorities - Language support

Rank	Romania	Moldova
1	15-17M, 18-24F, 18-24M	n/a
2	25-35M	15-17F, 15-17M
3	25-35F	18-24M

Language is an overarching need that highly affects everything in youth's lives. This report begins with this need, as opposed to economic needs which is the most highly cited by youth, because of the barriers created by the lack of language skills.

Overcoming language barriers is a need that, when met, can unlock opportunities for economic inclusion, host community integration, in-person education, and accessing healthcare. While this affects refugees in both Romania and Moldova, it is more challenging in Romania. In Moldova, a portion of the host community speaks Russian, which many Ukrainians also speak. 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.

Language affects access to the labour market

Many youth without local language fluency expressed challenges in accessing the labour market. When they do access employment, they are often in roles at a lower skill level and pay than they held previously in Ukraine.

> *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**

In addition, female youth, in particular those that are mothers, reported being affected by not speaking Romanian, including by the challenge to finding employment.

> *It's hard to be alone without a husband because everything with the family, the car, all of it is on you. Because I can't speak Romanian very well, it's hard to find a good job.*
>
> **25-35 Female, Timișoara, Romania**

> *I came here with my mom, and it was difficult for her to find a job at first, since it's hard for Ukrainians to find a well paid job here. And sometimes, of course, she has language problems and wasn't treated fairly at work.*
>
> **15-17 Female, Timișoara, Romania**

Provision of accessible language classes is critical to eliminating barriers for employment, as well as expanding refugees' ability to access other support services and integrate in Romania and Moldova.[6, 7, 11, 23, 24]

Language affects integration in host communities

Many youth expressed gratitude to host communities for welcoming and supporting them. When they have the opportunity, youth enjoy interacting with host community members.

> *Romanians happily accept us and help us with everything. But still, it's a foreign country, where you don't know some of its rules, you don't know the language, and that's the hardest part. It's hard to ask a Romanian for support when there's a language barrier. It's even sometimes hard to find common points in English.*
>
> **15-17 Female, Bucharest, Romania**

> *Mostly I communicate with Ukrainians...I also talk to Romanians. I visit events, play sports, and go to church where there are Romanians. I only don't talk with them a lot. It is hard for me to communicate with them due to not knowing the language.*
>
> **18-24 Female, Timișoara, Romania**

It is clear, however, that the lack of common language between youth and the host community is a barrier to meeting peers from the host community. When they do, youth express that it is difficult to maintain and deepen those friendships, which can contribute to youth feeling socially isolated.[33]

Language affects where youth choose to go to school and where they send their children to school

There are a number of reasons for youth not enrolling in local schools including the uncertainty of their return date to Ukraine and language barriers. In one survey from August 2022, language was cited as the primary reason for not enrolling children in school by 90% of Ukrainian refugee respondents.[7]

Largely due to language barriers, the vast majority of youth choose to continue secondary and tertiary education online. Attending online school is one of the primary reasons refugee families are not enrolling in host country national education.[12]

I am studying in a college in Ukraine online, and I did not even think about transferring somewhere because it was only in Romanian. And it was too hard to adapt. I can't even imagine how you can learn Romanian from scratch.

15-17 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

Youth also report that online schooling is time-consuming, limiting the amount of time to attend needed language courses and to engage with peers outside of the home. The lack of opportunities to study and interact with peers in person can exacerbate youth's feelings of social isolation.[31]

For youth that are parents of children, language is a consideration for whether or not to enrol their children into local schools, when there is space. Parents have concerns over children not receiving credit, falling further behind because of the language barriers, and the uncertainty regarding how long they will be in the country.[27, 34]

We love our school in Ukraine. I can't take my son away from his teachers and classmates. I'm not even considering taking him to school here in Moldova. Because here, I have to choose, either I'm dealing with the child or I'm working. I'm tired and he's tired. Nine months already in this mode, how much more can we last? I don't know.

25-35 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

The challenge to accessing language courses

As previously noted, the need for accessible language courses is important to support youth navigate daily life in their host countries.[6, 7, 11, 23, 24]
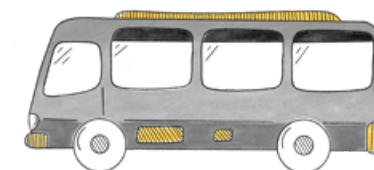
Here I can't even buy a ticket for the tram without a translator.

25-35 Male, Bucharest, Romania

Participants reported there are many language course providers in Romania and Moldova, and some youth are accessing them.[34] However, many youth reported not attending language courses due to the lack of time to go to them because of online education, the lack of childcare, financial barriers as some courses cost money, and the need to work.

Well, there's just not enough time. This does not mean that the class times are inappropriate. There is work, and there are still many things that I have to manage. Also, I don't know if I will stay in Romania to live, and therefore, I don't know if I will need Romanian.

25-35 Male, Timișoara, Romania.

4.2.2 Youth need income now

Table 3: Disaggregated youth priorities - Economic support

Rank	Romania	Moldova
1	18-24M, 25-35M	15-17M, 18-24F, 18-24M, 25-35M
2	18-24F, 25-35F	25-35F
3	n/a	15-17F

Economic support is one of the most important needs identified by youth. Several barriers exist to accessing economic opportunities including the lack of language and predictable legal status, low wages, the need for professional experience, and suitable childcare. Many refugees from Ukraine in Romania and Moldova are unemployed - including most who participated in this needs assessment - and are reliant on their savings and humanitarian assistance, while others are working in fields outside of their education and professional experience.[7, 11]

Importantly, if their economic needs are not met, youth may return to Ukraine before it is safe to do so.

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

Some youth find employment in their host countries while others are continuing some forms of work online with employers in Ukraine. However, it is unclear how many youth are working remotely.[33]

Challenges to finding employment

As previously described, there are language barriers to finding employment opportunities. This impacts youth in Romania more so than Moldova, but it is still an issue in Moldova.[34] In addition, youth who are engaged in online schooling expressed a lack of time to obtain and hold a job. Further, youth recognize that employers may be hesitant to hire them because of the uncertainty of their stay in the host country.

I tried to find a job, but they do not want to take me. I understand, because as refugees here we do not know where we will be today or tomorrow.

25-35 Female, Căușeni, Moldova

Those that are fortunate enough to find employment struggle with the low wages, particularly in Moldova, as well as with the kinds of work offered.[28, 33] Many of the youth who are working are engaged in manual labour or are doing work that they feel is below their skill level.

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.

In Moldova, minimum wage is almost equivalent to the amount allotted in cash assistance for refugees currently.[27] Further, Moldovans themselves struggle to find employment, particularly in rural areas.[11, 27, 28, 34]

Youth also expressed that it is hard to break into the labour market with many employers wanting youth with work experience, however, many of the younger youth do not have it. **As a solution, youth suggested courses and support to integrate into the labour market, with specific emphasis on skills that they can learn and apply quickly (e.g. confectionery, cosmetology, barbering), job fairs, and paid internships.** Importantly, youth expressed that the modality and timing for these courses should be flexible.

The lack of economic opportunities is a stressor which negatively impacts youth's mental health and can push youth to feel a greater burden to find employment.

I can't get a job with the locals. And I need money. If my father suddenly gets fired, then I will definitely need to look for some work urgently. So as not to take away the savings of my parents, then there will be problems.

18-24 Male, Bucharest, Romania

Future employment is one of the major hopes for youth. Some youth are involved in humanitarian organisations either through paid or volunteer work to contribute to the community and feel like they are doing something with their time.

4.2.3 Youth need social connections and emotional support

Social connections and emotional support are highly interrelated needs. Most youth find emotional support for their mental health and wellbeing through social connections with friends and family, engaging in sports and other recreational activities, and participating in social gatherings. The need for social connections and emotional support outside of home is strong, and youth that are able to access youth centres find them to be important to addressing these needs.

Social connections are important for all youth

Table 4: Disaggregated youth priorities - Social support

Rank	Romania	Moldova
1	n/a	15-17F
2	15-17F, 15-17M	18-24F, 18-24M
3	18-24F	15-17F

Social connections are an important need identified by all youth. Youth frequently mentioned the desire to reunite with friends and family.

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

However, friends and family are dispersed. Becoming a refugee disrupted and reduced youth social circles and altered the ways in which youth socialise. These realities make it difficult for youth to process their experiences, both from the war as well as daily stressors of being a refugee. In order to feel connected to home and maintain their social connections, youth maintain relationships with family and friends online. While some youth feel this shared experience of staying connected online allows them to maintain their relationships, others feel their social circles have reduced. For most, their social needs are not fulfilled, and they feel isolated.

Many youth rely on their immediate family for social connection and also have the desire to make friends. Because of their shared experiences as refugees and a common language, youth feel most comfortable forming friendships with their peers from Ukraine. However, given the transient nature of refugees in host countries, this is challenging.[33]

I've been here for a month already and everyone I have met either leaves in two weeks or two days. So I haven't found any friends I can communicate with regularly yet.

15-17 Female, Tulcea, Romania

The need for social connections with peers, both from Ukraine and host communities, is challenged by the uncertainty of the situation, language barriers, attending online school, and some experiences of discrimination. In addition, a few younger female youth experienced restrictions from their parents on social activities outside of the home due to perceived fears around human trafficking or sexual exploitation.

I'm looking for friends online. I find some and they call me to go out, but I'm kind of scared. My parents have warned me that I could be raped, cut, or sold for organs in a foreign country.

15-17 Female, Bălți, Moldova

Emotional support is vital for youth to deal with the challenges of being a refugee

Table 5: Disaggregated youth priorities - Emotional support

Rank	Romania	Moldova
1	15-17F	n/a
2	n/a	25-35M
3	18-24F, 25-35F	25-35F

Emotional support is vital for youth's mental health and wellbeing. **Many youth are resilient and express hope for the future despite the experiences of conflict, fleeing their home country, and day-to-day life in a foreign country.**

Some youth also shared how traumatic experiences have affected them, including suffering from nightmares, finding it hard to concentrate, and being triggered by loud sounds. In addition, many youth have a sense of uncertainty about the future. They do not feel that they have control over their lives and have feelings of isolation. Further, some youth feel as if they do not have their own personal space as they are sharing their rooms with multiple family members, which can also alter family dynamics.

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

To cope, many youth find solace in their immediate family members and friends, and while many recognise the need for mental health support, some do not want explicit psychological support for themselves.

No, I do not need to see a psychologist. I'm strong enough morally and physically. We say that we have so many professions, and I have to be strong. And this is what I am doing.

18-24 Female, Bălți, Moldova

Those that did express the need for psychological support for themselves are predominantly females and youth parents. Youth that are parents often desire some form of psychological support for their children and prioritise this over their own needs. Youth identified that there are mental health services available for their children, but some have issues accessing them due to language barriers, distance to providers, and financial limitations to pay for such services. That said, many find some emotional support through social activities such as gathering at youth centres.

Yes, I know, there are some organisations, there are also courses, and psychologists. But what I like about this youth centre is that we can come to learn not only Romanian, we can come just to meet girls, and discuss some questions we have easily… It's great that we can gather.

25-35 Female, Suceava, Romania

Youth centres are safe spaces for social connections and emotional support

One challenge to youth mental health and wellbeing is a lack of safe spaces to socialise in positive and constructive ways as well as participate in activities and events.

Because when you're meeting other people, you form new connections, new relationships. Having acquaintances is always better than being alone. Someone can give you advice and support you if necessary.

25-35 Female, Bucharest, Romania

Youth find centres instrumental to forming social connections with others, gaining skills to support their daily lives in host countries, their mental health, and integration into the host community.[29, 30, 32] Many youth made Romanian and Moldovan friends and appreciate them.

The youth centre is the reason I have closer relationships with Moldovans.

15-17 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

However, not all youth are able to access these centres. Younger youth have time limitations because they are engaged in online education, but want to find opportunities at different hours to connect with others. Older youth who are parents and often sole female care providers, express the need for suitable childcare so they can connect with their peers and access other services.

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

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 - it's a great centre. There is English, Romanian, sport, psychology, this is all that we need.

25-35 Female, Suceava, Romania

Through youth centres, youth find the social connections and emotional support they need. **Many youth express the desire to continue and expand programming at youth centres.**

4.2.4 Youth parents need suitable childcare options

Table 6: Disaggregated youth priorities - Childcare support

Rank	Romania	Moldova
1	25-35F	25-35F
2	n/a	18-24F
3	n/a	n/a

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.[6, 7, 11, 13, 23, 25] The vast majority of refugees from Ukraine travelled to a host country with at least one child.[7] Without suitable childcare options, caregivers have difficulty accessing services, language courses, livelihoods, and integrating in host communities.[6, 7, 13, 23, 25]

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

25-35 Female, Căușeni, Moldova

The language barrier to accessing childcare is important.

I have two daughters, 4- and 6-years old. Unfortunately, they are in Ukraine, because they do not know the Romanian language, and there was no place to arrange them, neither in school nor in kindergarten.

25-35 Male, Suceava, Romania

Some youth parents do not want to send their child to a non-Ukrainian speaking kindergarten over concerns of the child being isolated and forgetting their native language. Those that do want to send their child to a childcare centre or kindergarten, reported limited options and space, particularly in rural areas.[11] In Moldova, youth stated there are some Russian-speaking kindergartens, but the spaces are limited.

The lack of suitable childcare options is also a barrier to accessing other forms of social support.[33] Youth mothers expressed feeling isolated with a lack of family and friends to rely on and the lack of activities to do with their children outside the home. This is an additional mental load for female youth.

I can't leave the child without a family, without a father, and still without myself.

25-35 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

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

4.2.5 Roma refugee youth have similar needs to all refugee youth 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.[9, 11, 27] Roma refugee youth have similar needs to other Ukrainian refugee youth. Most expressed feeling safe and grateful for being in host countries. Some are studying online. Many stated challenges to accessing livelihood opportunities and expressed a desire for social connections and emotional support in various forms - see **Figure 3**.

Figure 3: Roma refugee youth needs by priority

What is striking from the data is that most Roma youth refugees felt that the conflict will not likely end soon. Interestingly, no Roma youth expressed an interest to stay in Moldova, but acknowledged that they will

likely not return to Ukraine for some time. Some did not feel as if they had control over their future.

Although their general needs are similar, all external stakeholders identified Roma communities as one of the most marginalised groups who face ongoing discrimination that can reduce access to services and humanitarian aid.[27, 28, 29, 33, 34] Importantly, Roma youth refugees described youth centres as important safe spaces to connect with others and engage in programming with less fear of discrimination.

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.
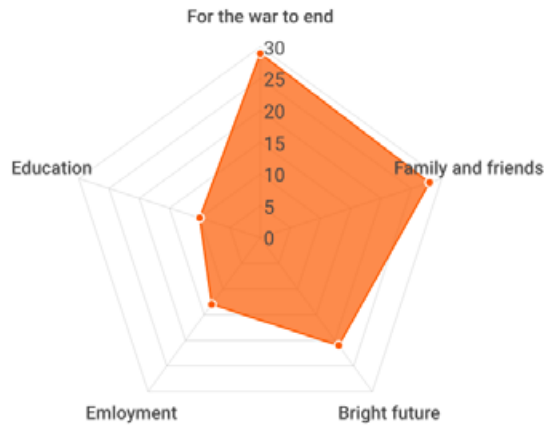
18-24 Male (Roma), Glodeni, Moldova

4.3 Youth have hope

Youth have immense hope for the future. This hope keeps them going despite the challenges they face. They want the war to end, and most want to return home and reunite with friends and family - see **Figure 4**.

Figure 4: Youth hopes for the future

*I have hope for the future - a beautiful one.*

15-17 Female, Chișinău, Moldova

Their hope extends beyond the war with youth having aspirations of learning new languages, getting degrees, jobs, and starting families. Youth that are parents have hope for their children.

This hope helps youth persevere through the challenges, but also contributes to their 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
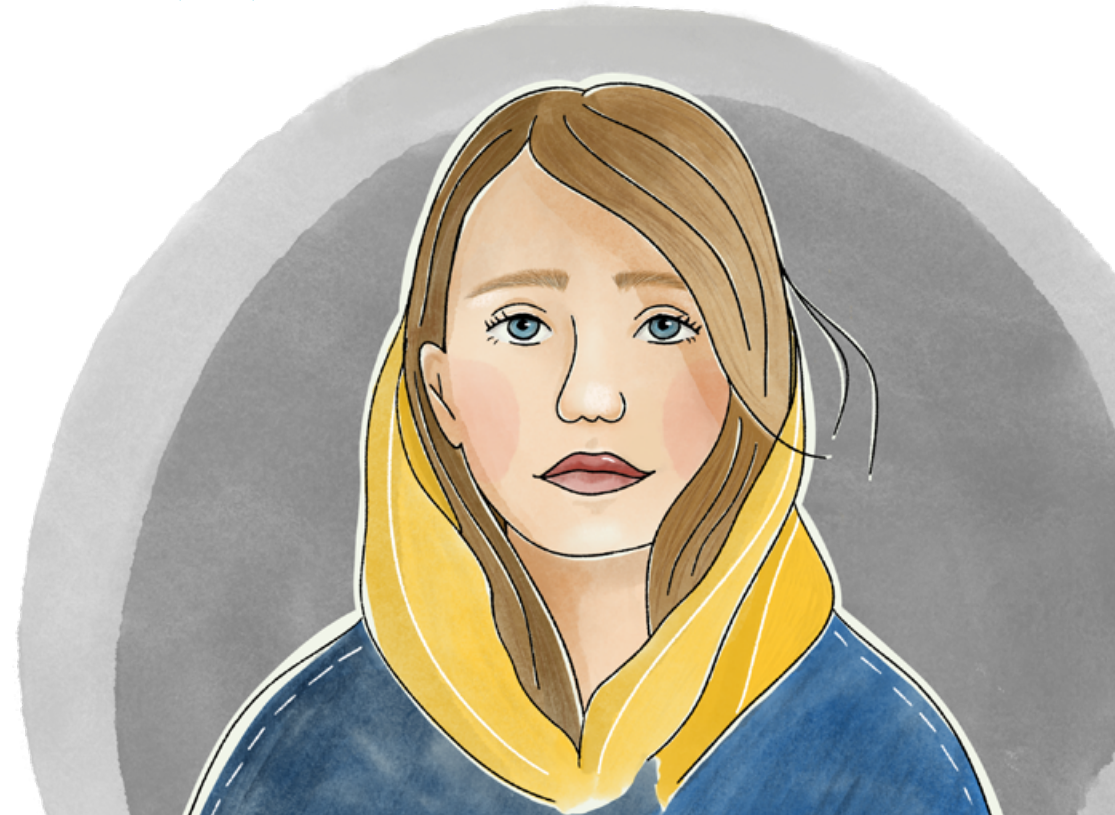
Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings, voices of the youth, and expertise of the external stakeholders that participated in this youth needs assessment.

Organisations working with and for youth in Romania and Moldova

Youth voice and participation:

- Share the findings and recommendations of this youth needs assessment with youth for their feedback and to further inform programming that supports youth refugees from Ukraine.

- Collaborate with youth to identify the appropriate duration and modalities that ensures all interested youth can access programming.

- 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 including youth, education, livelihood, and protection sectors.

- Invest in and support Ukrainian youth to co-lead youth-specific working groups and involve youth in other working groups when developing youth-relevant data collection activities, advocacy messages, and programme strategies.

- Continue and expand funding mechanisms for youth-led initiatives that support language acquisition, economic integration, social connections, emotional support, education, and social cohesion.

- Collaborate with Roma refugee youth to develop programming both within local centres and mobile approaches to address Roma-specific needs.

- Include youth-led and youth-focused information and services at coordination mechanisms working with and for refugees from Ukraine.

Overall youth programming:

- Continue, and expand where needed, the use of youth centres as youth find them vital to having social connections and emotional support as well as for accessing language and other relevant education programming.

- Expand youth programming to underserved rural areas with outreach and mobile programming. For example, utilise the network of over 2,000 libraries in Moldova, most of which have computer and internet access.

- Provide suitable childcare options to ensure equitable access for youth who are parents that want to access programmes and services in youth centres. This childcare could be in the form of programming for children simultaneously with programming for youth.

- Fund and expand coordination and harmonisation of programming across youth, education, livelihood, and protection sectors to ensure all youth are aware of and can access existing services to meet their needs. Where appropriate, these groups should include private sector representatives and other relevant stakeholders to holistically support youth.

Economic support:

- Provide certified online courses in partnership with recognized service providers [e.g. International Computer Driving Licence (ICDL)] to support youth who may be transient but still need skills to access the workforce including online opportunities. Where appropriate, partner with existing initiatives that prioritise temporary employment for refugees from Ukraine in the 'gig economy'.

- Provide complementary non-formal education programmes that support skills youth can learn and apply quickly, professional language and life skills training for work readiness, job fairs, and paid internships. These should be shorter in duration, and support the continued engagement of transient youth. When and where possible, link the vocational skills to certified providers, which can include existing Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers that are part of the formal education system.

- Create new or utilise existing connections with local businesses that want to work with and employ youth refugees including paid apprenticeships and other work experience schemes.

- Provide opportunities for youth to set up their own businesses along with financial and mentoring support.

Recommendations

- Advocate for the Romania and Moldova governments and host community businesses to recognise and accept Ukrainian professional qualifications for youth to transfer into local labour markets.

- Continue and increase employment opportunities for youth refugees from Ukraine with humanitarian response actors.

- Provide information on rights of refugee employment under host country's existing legal framework for refugees to youth and host country employers in all languages.

Language support:

- Continue free Romanian and English language courses with alternative modalities and schedules to accommodate youth that are parents, youth who are studying online, and employed youth. These can include certified levels of language acquisition to further support economic inclusion and integration.

- Engage volunteers from both host and refugee communities that speak Romanian and either Ukrainian and/or Russian to support services for refugees. This builds on the work of local organisations who were responders in the first phase of the crisis.

- Update and continue to provide information to youth in Ukrainian and Russian on their rights as refugees in host countries including legal protection, access to employment, education, and healthcare. It is important to digitise this information and utilise the platforms that youth use (e.g. Telegram) to disseminate the information.

Psychosocial support:

- Provide opportunities for youth to organise events, clubs, and recreational activities at youth centres, and within their wider communities, in order to form meaningful social connections and receive emotional support from their peers.

- Provide youth access or referrals to Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking and professionals that can provide non-specialised psychosocial support, and when needed, refer youth to specialised services. This also includes referrals to support children of young parents.

- Work with education and child protection actors to support education providers mainstream practices that support refugee students' wellbeing, including psychosocial support.

Education support:

- 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.

- Provide information and support for youth that want to access higher education in host countries and the EU. This can include connections with existing scholarship opportunities.

- Continue and expand the provision of information and referrals to local education providers including both state and private.

- Advocate for the Romania and Moldova governments and host community businesses to recognise degrees and certifications from higher education institutions and TVET providers in Ukraine.

Integration:

- Provide social cohesion programming to allow for shared understanding of host communities, refugees, and in particular, Roma youth refugees to share their experiences, needs, and hopes to reduce discrimination and mitigate social tensions. Some programming examples include joint employment and entrepreneurship activities, youth-led initiatives, and recreational activities.

Protection mainstreaming:

- Ensure youth workers are prepared to respond to reports of human and sexual trafficking. This includes an understanding of confidentiality, do no harm, and the use of existing functional referral mechanisms.

- Examine and advocate for durable solutions for refugees from Ukraine. This can include legalising refugee's stay in Romania and the EU in an effort to reduce the sense of uncertainty that youth feel.
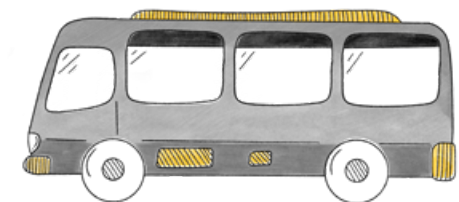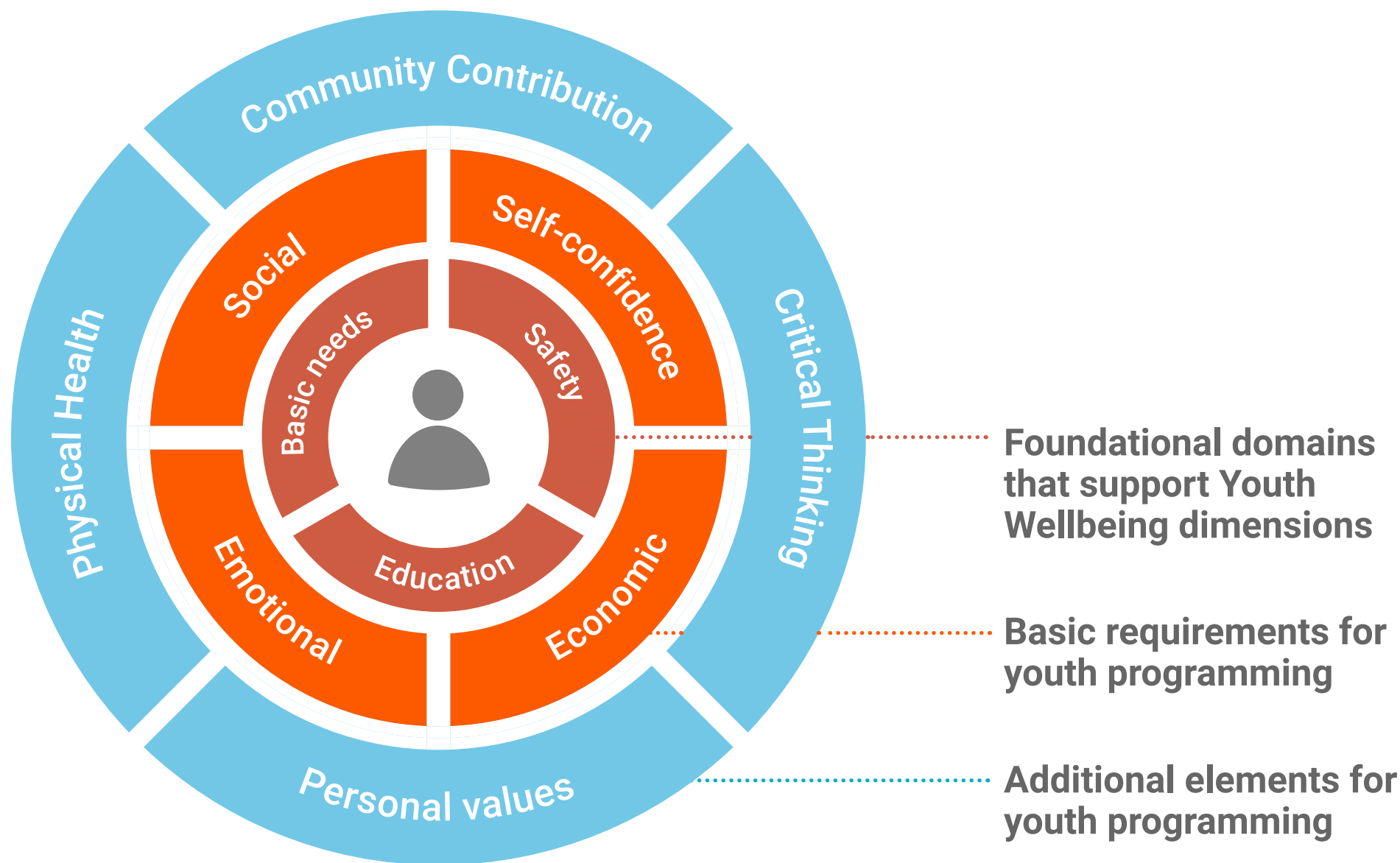
Recommendations

Donors

- Continue and expand investments in youth programming that respond to youth needs 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 reduce the stress of unemployment.
- Invest in longer-term funding for programming to support refugee youth's needs including economic integration and social cohesion.
- Invest in programmes for vulnerable host communities, including social cohesion programming that supports both refugees and host communities.
- 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 including youth, education, livelihood, and protection sectors.

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NRC Youth Wellbeing Framework

Foundational domains that support Youth Wellbeing dimensions

Basic requirements for youth programming

Additional elements for youth programming

NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Foundational domains that support Youth Wellbeing dimensions

NRC only implements programmes when it is safe to do so. NRC youth programme participants will prioritise the safety and basic needs for themselves and their family members prior to engaging in programmes that support their learning needs. NRC can only support the eight wellbeing dimensions once youth are safe and have access to basic needs. These Foundational Domains are essential to any NRC programming. While many Country Offices (COs) already have procedures in place to ensure the safety of youth, these are a reminder of why the Foundational Domains are important, and what actions NRC can do to support these Domains.

Foundational Domain	Youth Statement	Why is this important?
Safety	**I am safe.**	• Safety is foundational for any NRC programme. The youth programme should only operate when it is safe to do so. This means youth are free from harm, violence, or abuse. • In some contexts, refugee or internally displaced youth may face greater risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse due to their status. • Beyond physical safety, the youth programme should provide an emotionally safe place for youth to express their thoughts, emotions, and dreams. If youth feel NRC staff are supporting them, they are more likely to be active participants and learn.
Basic Needs	**I have clean water, shelter, and food.**	• Basic Needs are important as they are essential for sustaining life without injury or illness. • Many vulnerable youth in difficult circumstances focus heavily on their lack of basic needs for their family to survive long-term.
Education	**I have access to learning opportunities, no matter my background.**	• All youth, regardless of age, identities, gender, displacement status, or disability, should exercise their right to quality education. • Due to the challenges of losing years of school due to war, poverty, lack of stability, economic and family pressures, many youth are not able to exercise their right to education. In some contexts, young women have more domestic responsibilities and young men have to contribute financially to the household, preventing them from accessing any form of education. • NRC and other education service providers should temporarily fill this gap for youth and support all youth to reconnect with or join an education pathway or develop the skills to identify employment and/or entrepreneurship opportunities.

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Basic requirements for youth programming

All COs should work towards the Basic Requirements for Youth Programming to promote participants' wellbeing. This is done through direct programme activities, no matter the response phase (e.g. acute, protracted, recovery).

| Wellbeing Dimension	Youth Statement	Why is this important?
Social	I have friends and am part of a community.	• Youth typically get most of their support from their friends. • NRC should allow for ample time and opportunities for participants to connect with their peers. • Eventually, youth will support each other inside and outside of programme activities.
Emotional	I can deal with difficult emotions.	• Youth need the knowledge and skills to recognize and manage their emotions and stress. • If youth can manage their emotions and stress, they are more likely to learn. • NRC should provide participants with these skills and time to practise them in a safe place.
Self-confidence	I can do what I set my mind to.	• Youth need self-confidence to speak up for important issues that affect their lives. • NRC should provide a safe place for youth to express their opinions without judgement. • Youth should have many opportunities to experiment, try again, and succeed at skills they are learning to support youth self-confidence.
Economic	I can support my family's basic needs.	• Youth have to support their family's basic needs. • NRC should provide appropriate life skills and technical skills to support youth employment or entrepreneurship. • This dimension may not be contextually appropriate if there are strict government restrictions against the employment of refugee or migrant communities, or the context is in a severe economic collapse.

Additional elements for youth programming

Some COs can support other wellbeing dimensions through direct programme activities, partnerships, and referrals.

NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Wellbeing Dimension	Youth Statement	Why is this important?
Community Contribution	I contribute to my community with my time, knowledge, and skills.	• Youth need to see themselves as a part of their community. • Their community needs to see youth as active contributors. • NRC should work with the community to identify opportunities for youth to apply knowledge or skills learned in the programme to benefit the community, including youth-led actions.
Critical Thinking	I can solve challenging problems in my life.	• Youth need skills that they can use to identify and solve challenges in their everyday lives and at work. • NRC should provide these skills with many opportunities to experiment, try again, and succeed in a safe place without judgement. • Youth that learn these skills will have them for the rest of their lives.
Physical Health	I am healthy.	• Youth and their families should have access to medical support. • NRC should ensure there are functional referrals to external organisations. • Youth should be aware of ways to keep themselves and their families healthy. • NRC should ensure youth receive appropriate public health information.
Personal Values	I can practise my religion or personal beliefs without discrimination.	• Some youth find emotional and spiritual support through religion. • NRC should ensure that youth can practise these religious beliefs without discrimination during programming. • Some youth have different identities and/or values that are not always accepted by their family, local community, or host community. • NRC should support vulnerable youth's identities and beliefs, and encourage empathy and perspective taking amongst peers.

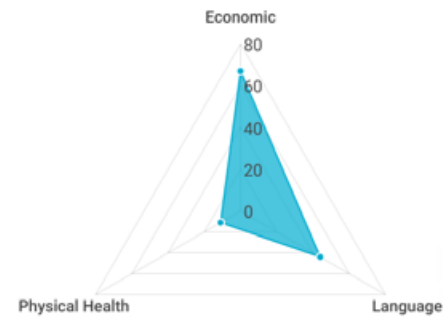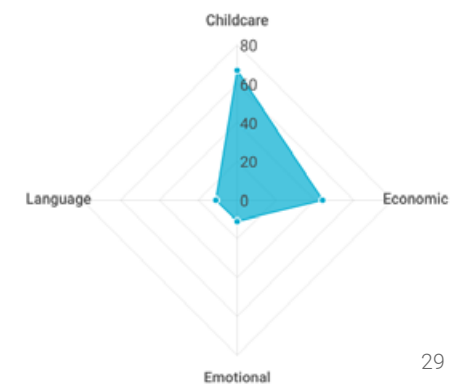# Disaggregated youth needs by priority: Romania
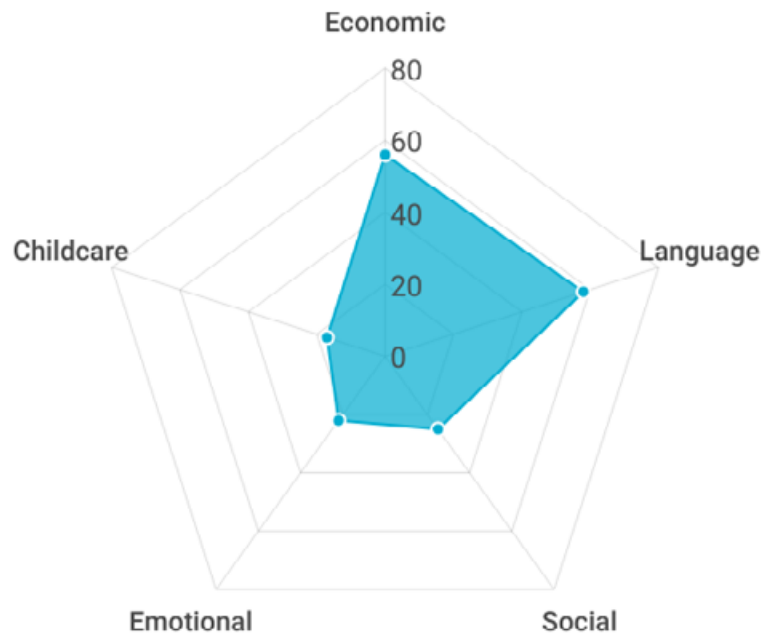
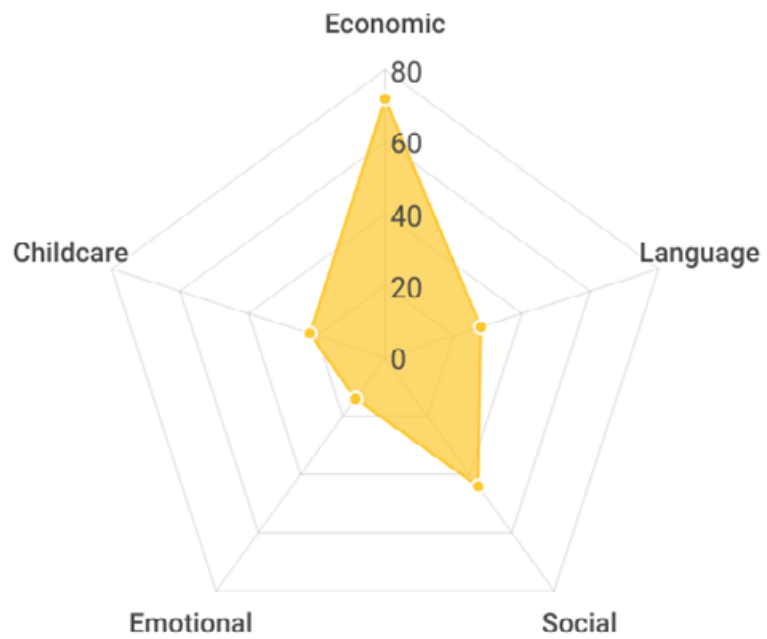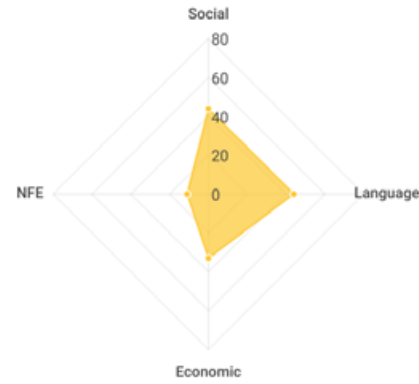# Disaggregated youth needs by priority: Moldova
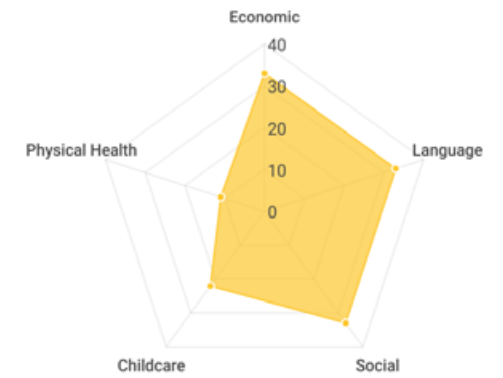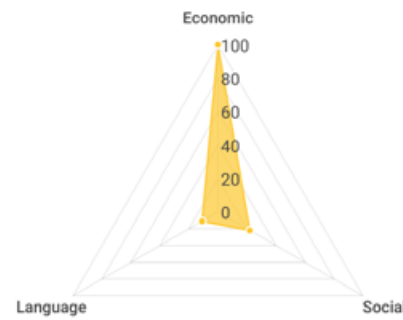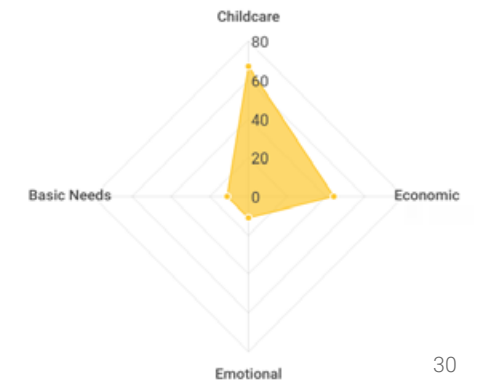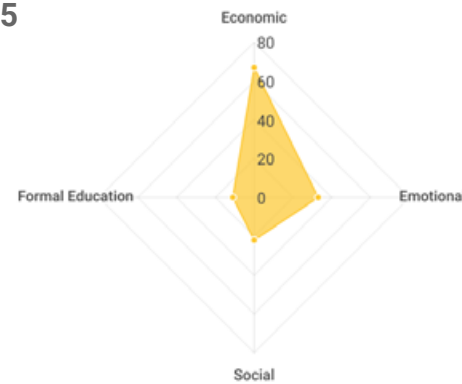
Disaggregated Youth Priorities

These tables indicate and rank youth's priorities relative to the top five needs in the findings section as identified by the saturation analysis: language, economic, social, emotional, and childcare. They are disaggregated by country, age, and gender. For Moldova, there is further disaggregation for rural and urban settings.

At times, the saturation analysis identified two priorities that were the same level of priority. For example, social connection and emotional support for 18 to 24 year-old females in Romania are the same level of priority. There were other instances where the priority of a specific disaggregated youth group was not explicitly one of the top five needs, and researchers were able to incorporate those additional needs into the findings and recommendations. For example, 15 to 17 year-old males and females identify non-formal education programming as a priority need, and there are findings and recommendations that speak to these priorities. The figures in the preceding pages of Annex 2 provide these additional priorities.

Language Support

RANK	Romania	Moldova	Moldova (Urban)	Moldova (Rural)
1	15-17M, 18-24F, 18-24M	n/a	18-24F	n/a
2	25-35M	15-17F, 15-17M	15-17F, 15-17M	15-17M
3	25-35F	18-24M	18-24M	n/a

Economic Support

RANK	Romania	Moldova	Moldova (Urban)	Moldova (Rural)
1	18-24M, 25-35M	15-17M, 18-24F, 18-24M, 25-35M	18-24M, 25-35M	15-17M, 18-24M, 25-35M
2	25-35M, 18-24F	25-35F	25-35F	18-24F, 25-35F
3	n/a	15-17F	15-17F, 18-24F	n/a

Social Connections

RANK	Romania	Moldova	Moldova (Urban)	Moldova (Rural)
1	n/a	15-17F	15-17F, 15-17M	15-17F, 18-24F
2	15-17F, 15-17M	18-24F, 18-24M	18-24M	25-35M
3	18-24F	15-17M	n/a	15-17M

Emotional Support

RANK	Romania	Moldova	Moldova (Urban)	Moldova (Rural)
1	15-17F	n/a	n/a	15-17F
2	n/a	25-35M	25-35M	25-35M
3	18-24F, 25-35F	25-35F	25-35F	n/a

Childcare Support

RANK	Romania	Moldova	Moldova (Urban)	Moldova (Rural)
1	25-35F	25-35F	18-24F, 25-35F	25-35F
2	n/a	18-24F	n/a	n/a
3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a