



# ROMA MINORITY AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AS REFUGEES IN UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA IN 2022-2024:

Supporting Life and Human Rights through  
Civil Society and Sparking Activism:  
The Deaconess Foundation's and Partners'  
Results Report

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Foundation

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One of the refugee shelters in West Ukraine.  
Photo: Meeri Koutaniemi



# Foreword

The war in Ukraine has already lasted for more than two years. The humanitarian crisis is constant. Ukraine has millions of displaced people in dire need of assistance. Among the most vulnerable are the Roma minority, internally displaced persons (IDPs), persons with disabilities (PWDs), people who lack IDs, and women and girls. The Deaconess Foundation, in collaboration with its local partners, has provided essential aid and assistance to the most vulnerable populations since the beginning of the war. Through our joint efforts, food, medical supplies, shelter, and other essential services have been provided to more than 130,000 people.

The Deaconess Foundation has worked in Ukraine since 2019. When war broke out, it was clear that we are needed more than ever and our activities need to be redirected and adjusted to serve the needs of the people in the midst of crisis. Wars always have repercussions on surrounding countries. Moldova has faced one of the highest influxes of refugees from Ukraine per capita, but its capacity to host them is very limited. Because we have also been working in Moldova since 2014, we were able to extend our humanitarian aid to Moldova as well.

For us, it is important to build a sustainable future for Ukraine despite the reality of martial law. Hence, our approach is built around a humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding nexus. This means that we combine development work and humanitarian work in both Ukraine and Moldova. We strive for structural change and support institutional capacity building for fundamental and human rights protection and fulfilment, and we work on combating hate speech and hate crime, with the aim of achieving a peaceful society and peaceful interethnic relations at the same time as we address humanitarian needs.

The work of the Deaconess Foundation and its partners demonstrates the power of collaboration. Joint efforts have made a significant impact on the lives and dignity of the most vulnerable. Unfortunately, the war has not come to an end and continued work is essential in mitigating the impact of the crisis.

This report compiles the results of the project 'Provision of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable communities in Ukraine and Moldova 2022–2024'. It provides an in-depth look at the accomplishments of the project, obstacles encountered during implementation, lessons learned, and the current needs of those whose lives and rights are at risk. In addition, this report sheds light on the Nadija Children's Hospital project. The Deaconess Foundation is a founding member of a newly created Nordic foundation that is planning to establish a hospital, research unit, and virtual hospital in Ukraine specialising in children's war traumas. When the war is over, traumas will need to be treated for years to come. Treating and especially researching war trauma has far-reaching implications for all of us.

We hope that this report will provide valuable insights into the humanitarian efforts in Ukraine and Moldova and that it demonstrates how joint efforts create rays of hope in the midst of war. Our wish is that this inspires further action to support those in need.

We wish our Ukrainian and Moldovan partners renewed energy in their important work in the midst of constant battle.

Maija Hyle  
Director, Non-profit operations  
Deaconess Foundation.

# I. Acronyms

<b>ASD</b>	Autism spectrum disorder
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organisations
<b>EAWBPD</b>	European Association Without Borders for Persons with Disabilities
<b>ID</b>	Identification document
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>Moldsolidaritate</b>	Roma Women and Girls Network in Moldova–Moldsolidaritate
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>PALSC</b>	Association Partnership among Women Elected in Local Authorities for Community Support
<b>PWD</b>	Persons with disabilities
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



## II. Executive summary

The ongoing war in Ukraine has severely impacted fundamental human rights, including the right to life, safety, health, shelter, equal treatment, income, and livelihood. Basic services face disruptions, leaving many without access to safety, healthcare, shelter, and economic opportunities. The women and men, girls and boys of Ukraine face the largest humanitarian and human rights crisis in Europe since World War II. The humanitarian crisis has extended beyond Ukraine's borders, affecting neighbouring countries like Moldova, which have become critical in providing refuge and support for those displaced by the war. Moldova, facing an influx of refugees, struggles to accommodate and support the displaced populations, which is stretching its resources and infrastructure to the limit.

The war disproportionately affected the Roma minority, Roma women and girls, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, and people who lack identity documents, as their rights and social protections were already not fully implemented before the war.

In March 2022 the Deaconess Foundation started the project 'Provision of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable communities in Ukraine and Moldova 2022–2024'. Together with our long-term partner, the Roma Women Fund Chiricli in Ukraine, we started to provide support for evacuations, information and advice, food and essential supplies, and later shelter, especially for the Roma minority, often internally displaced without valid identity documents. In Moldova, together with our long-term partner, the Roma Women and Girls Network in Moldova—Moldsolidaritate, we started to organise a refugee centre focusing on refugees with disabilities and Roma families. The centre was established in the Greblești commune in co-operation with its administration. The commune provided premises for the centre and actively promoted the inclusion of refugees in the life of the local community.

This report covers the results of the project 'Provision of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable communities in Ukraine and Moldova

2022–2024'. The data for this report was obtained from 13 implementation reports, 13 interviews, and 3 focus groups with the project beneficiaries, team members, and collaborators/mediators. The interviews and focus groups were conducted online and then transcribed and analysed to document the main accomplishments of the project, obstacles encountered during implementation, lessons learned, and the current needs of the rights holders.

Within this project, more than 132,922 people have received humanitarian support since March 2022 in Ukraine and April 2022 in Moldova. In order to provide immediate relief from the armed conflict, 2,635 people received financial support and advice for evacuation, 52,700 people obtained information about state and municipal humanitarian support, martial law, and possibilities to evacuate, 400 Roma women and girls received emergency cash, 445 IDPs (100 Roma women and 345 children) received psychological support, and 600 Roma IDPs were provided shelter in Ukraine and 1,551 Ukrainian refugees in Moldova. Meanwhile, 71,180 vulnerable IDPs received hot meals and food aid, 2,000 people received support during the day at heating points, and 90 IDP children participated in art therapy and 500 in Christmas celebrations throughout Ukraine. Important steps were also taken in supporting Roma from Ukraine to obtain or renew their documents and/or obtain IDP status by providing direct assistance to 150 beneficiaries as well as general legal and social assistance to another 1,100 vulnerable people. Finally, more than 30 meetings were held with Ukrainian public authorities and International Organisations to inform them about the needs of the Roma minority and advocate for their rights.

Reaching those in need of assistance and achieving these results was possible because the partners have a long history of expertise in working with Roma communities and persons with disabilities at the local level. Chiricli works together with grassroots Roma organisations and up to 40 Roma mediators located in 12 regions in Ukraine (Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kirovohrad, Sumy, Vinnytsia, Volyn, Odesa, Transcarpathia, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Cherkasy, and Lviv), which

made it possible to operate throughout the country. The Roma Women and Girls Network in Moldova—Moldsolidaritate, together with the European Association Without Borders for Persons with Disabilities (EAWBPD) and the Association Partnership among Women Elected in Local Authorities for Community Support (PALSC), coordinated the action locally in Moldova and had experience in working with Roma people and PWDs but not in providing 24/7 assistance to vulnerable people who had lost almost everything.

The project was locally- and minority-led and implemented. The 'localisation' of the work meant, for example, that Chiricli responded to the requests of mediators, Roma activists, and small Roma NGOs that implemented the emergency responses in their localities. The local actors have been Roma activists and NGOs in both Moldova and Ukraine, and they included disability activists in Moldova. In both countries the collaboration with local governments in charge of emergency work was also very significant.

All partners had to expand their knowledge in order to respond to new humanitarian needs. They also had to expand and consolidate their collaborations with public authorities and International Organisations or other CSOs in order to provide effective relief and have a sustainable impact. In Ukraine Chiricli joined the efforts of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Religious Affairs, the State Regulator on the Media, the State Migration Service, and employment centres to improve the situation of the internally displaced and Roma women and men. In Moldova the partners worked closely with the Be an Angel e.V. organisation, UNHCR Moldova, the Law Center of Advocates, and IOM Moldova.

Strong local ownership of all the actors involved, as well as multisectoral collaboration between relevant duty bearers, both humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors, has been continuously developed, which made it possible to provide emergency assistance and assure the transparency and accountability of the work. The project also empowered local actors and networks that will function and operate beyond the programme.

The Deaconess Foundation connected this project to its development co-operation programme in Eastern Europe, especially in Belarus, Kosovo, Moldova, and Ukraine. By combining development co-operation, emergency support, and combating discrimination, hate speech, and violence ('nexus approach'), we

addressed urgent needs as well as policies and services that might bring about change in the unequal access of Roma and refugees with disabilities. Co-operation with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights has been crucial to advocating for policies and action plans for Roma who lack identity documents and are displaced.

Transnational co-operation between the countries in the region proved its strength when the partners managed to support and communicate with Ukrainian refugees as they moved to different countries. The Deaconess Foundation has two partners in Kosovo, the Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians organisation and the Kosova Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims, that have recent and regional experiences dealing with wartime and post-war trauma, gender-based violence, access to justice for victims, and housing, and they began to communicate about these topics with the partners in Ukraine.



# III. The humanitarian situation

Over the past two years, Ukraine has faced a massive humanitarian and human rights crisis following the full-scale armed attack launched by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022. The war has caused severe human rights violations among civilians, such as forced displacement, death, trauma and violence, loss of home and livelihood, destruction of infrastructure, and restricted access to services and education<sup>1</sup>. It is estimated that more than one third of the population had to leave their home and 14.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>2</sup>. Roma and other vulnerable groups, such as PWDs, homeless people, women and girls, undocumented people, and IDPs, have been particularly vulnerable to this humanitarian crisis as they were already subject to poor access to the protection of fundamental rights.

It is estimated that 200,000 to 400,000 Roma people live in Ukraine, scattered all over the country. They are a heterogeneous group and it is challenging to record their precise number because a significant portion of them lack identity documents<sup>3</sup>. The absence of ID documents prevents Roma women, men, and children from fully accessing their fundamental rights and in wartime from moving freely inside and outside the country in order to seek refuge. They remain trapped in areas that experience escalating conflict or are impacted by heavy fighting. Lack of ID documents, housing, and employment are becoming key issues for Roma IDPs. A significant number of Roma women and men, girls and boys have difficulties with accessing education and social rights, civic participation, housing, and equal treatment in society.

The Roma minority in Ukraine also face additional obstacles, such as severe poverty, discrimination and prejudice, limited access to healthcare (more than 50% of Roma women reported being discriminated against in hospitals<sup>4</sup>), limited access to education (only 73% of Roma boys and 75% of girls attend elementary school [ages 6–10] and 65% of boys and only 59% of girls continue education in high school [ages 11–15])<sup>5</sup>, limited access to employment, and precarious housing conditions. Many Roma people are unable to buy a home (due to the lack of identity documents or financial resources as well as, in some cases, rejection by the majority population): thus, they can rent a home, access social housing when available, occupy premises unlawfully, or live on the streets or in railway stations. Given the regular energy cuts, winter months were very difficult for many people in Ukraine, especially the most vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, Roma people, single mothers, and families of serving soldiers. Roma women in Ukraine often face additional burdens, including early marriages, and are victims of intersectional discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and social status, which increases their vulnerability. Due to the Russian invasion, many Roma and other Ukrainians fled their homes, going either from East Ukraine to the western regions, where they lack shelter and housing, or to other countries. As of February 2024, it is estimated that 3.7 million people were IDP<sup>6</sup> in Ukraine and 6.5 million people left the country (especially to Poland, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania), while 14.6 million require humanitarian assistance<sup>7</sup>. Refugees face significant risks of violence, human trafficking, and exploitation.

1 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Ukraine, 'Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2023 to 29 February 2024', 26 March 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-december-2023-29-february-2024>. Accessed on 06 July 2024.

2 The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Humanitarian Crisis Analysis 2024—Ukraine, 31 March 2024, <https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2024/04/22142813/Ukraine-HCA-2024.pdf>. Accessed on 06 July 2024.

3 Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights and Council of Europe, Kyiv International Forum on Roma Inclusion 2021, Issue 1 – August 2021, p. 3, <https://rm.coe.int/almanac-kyiv-international-forum-on-roma-inclusion-eng/1680a3ba57#:~:text=According%20to%20various%20estimates%2C%20the%20Roma%20community%20in,identity%20documents%20in%20a%20significant%20number%20of%20Roma>. Accessed on 20 April 2024

4 UN Women, The Rights of Roma Women in Ukraine, 2018, p. 23, [https://ukraine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/Country/Ukraine/ROMA\\_eng\\_Final-compressed.pdf](https://ukraine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/Country/Ukraine/ROMA_eng_Final-compressed.pdf)

5 Ibid., p. 25–26.

6 According to UNHCR, internally displaced people (IDPs) are people who remain within their own country but have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, persecution, or disaster.

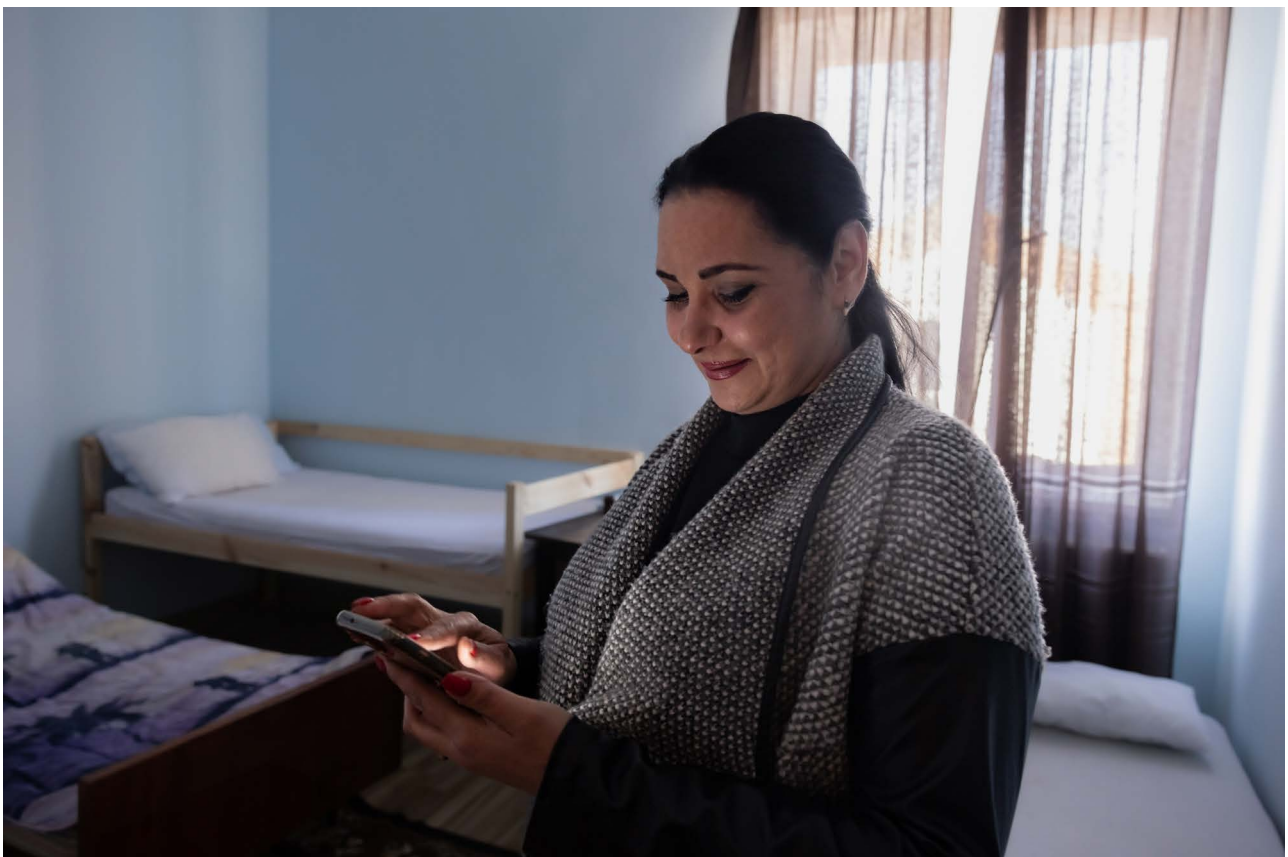
7 UNHCR, Ukraine Emergency, <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/ukraine/>. Accessed on 20 March 2024.

Also, armed conflict has intensified the existing inequalities faced by the Roma population and opened a path for new forms of discrimination against Roma. According to CSOs and other observers, Roma faced discrimination in accessing transportation for evacuation, at border crossing points, and upon their arrival in neighbouring countries. They also had to cope with discrimination and segregation in accessing humanitarian assistance as well as water and food deprivation and inadequate living conditions<sup>8</sup>. Despite this situation, some Roma families are choosing to return home because they also face barriers and/or discrimination in other European countries in accessing social services, housing, and employment.

One of the main destinations for Ukrainian refugees is the Republic of Moldova, a neighbouring country that gained its independence in 1991 but remains one of the poorest in Europe despite having made significant progress towards development and the integration of its

economy with the European Union. Moldova has faced one of the highest influxes of refugees from Ukraine per capita, but its capacity to host them is very limited. Moreover, some of the Ukrainian Roma who fled to Moldova have experienced racism and discrimination when attempting to access shelter or other forms of assistance.

Ukrainian refugees, Roma, travelling to Moldova faced discrimination in public shelters—they were either not accepted or, when accepted, provided with inferior accommodation in comparison with refugees from the majority ethnic group, and in some cases were even addressed with derogatory statements. Meanwhile, PWDs housed in public shelters were held in very poor conditions and could not leave the premises, either because they were not allowed to do so or because the centre lacked the necessary amenities to facilitate their mobility.



*Rada Kalandia used to work as a Roma mediator in the Donetsk region. Because of the war she moved to West Ukraine where she manages the shelter for Roma women and IDPs. Photo: Meeri Koutaniemi*

<sup>8</sup> European Parliament, 'Russia's war on Ukraine: The situation of Roma people fleeing Ukraine', [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729411/EPRS\\_ATA\(2022\)729411\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729411/EPRS_ATA(2022)729411_EN.pdf). Accessed on 06 July 2024.

# IV. The Deaconess Foundation's priorities in Ukraine and Moldova



*The Deaconess Foundation and its partners work in the following countries in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans: Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine.*

The Deaconess Foundation has been present in Moldova since 2014 and in Ukraine since 2019. We have a history of more than ten years of working in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans countries with vulnerable communities, the Roma minority, returnees, asylum seekers, IDPs, women and girls, and survivors of trauma, violence, and mental distress. Our countries of intervention include Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia. The specific expertise in targeted sectors, long presence in the region, regional approach, and cross-country co-operation and exchanges (for example, Belarus–Moldova–Ukraine–Romania and Kosovo–Ukraine) give the Deaconess Foundation a comparative advantage.

Ukraine and Moldova are priority countries for the Deaconess Foundation's global work and development co-operation programme. Since the escalation of the war in 2022, we have been continuously expanding

our work in these two countries through the emergency and humanitarian interventions presented in this report. Our work in Ukraine and Moldova combines development co-operation, emergency assistance, European co-operation and development, and human rights advocacy work. Three simultaneous and complementary projects have been implemented since 2019, as follows: 1. Strengthening the Roma minority's participation in policy and decision-making in Ukraine 2021–2024; 2. Provision of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable communities in Ukraine and Moldova 2022–2024, and 3. Roma Women's Power 2019–2025.

Our aim in Ukraine and Moldova is to contribute to more democratic, equal, and peaceful societies, grounded in the rule of law and fundamental rights. We focus especially on the fundamental rights of women, ethnic minorities (especially Roma), IDPs, and PWDs.

We work through three thematic areas:

- 1. Minorities' Rights:** Enhancing the protection of the rights and freedoms of the Roma minority, especially equality before the law, the right to IDs, the right to civic and political participation, the rights of women and girls, the right to peaceful assembly, and social and economic rights.
- 2. Democracy and the Rule of Law:** Enhancing human rights monitoring by human rights institutions and civil society. Monitoring discrimination, including compounded and intersectional discrimination, hate speech, antigypsyism, and racism. We support actions that document war crimes against Roma.
- 3. Emergency Support:** Delivering emergency food, cash assistance for evacuations and acute needs, and night shelter to the most vulnerable, especially Roma women, girls, and families as well as PWDs. Informing Roma minorities about martial law and other relevant war and mobility legislation and policies. Strengthening the access of Roma and PWDs to humanitarian assistance. Advocating with relevant stakeholders in order to make humanitarian assistance accessible.

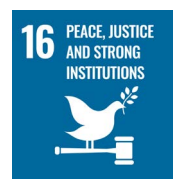
Gender, Disability and Decent Income are cross-cutting themes.

Our key partners in Ukraine are the umbrella organisation Roma Women Fund Chiricli, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, and the State Service for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience. Chiricli works through and with local NGOs and Roma mediators towards the localisation of development co-operation and emergency assistance. In 2024 we worked in Zaporizhzhia, Volyn, Odesa, Zakarpattia, Chernihiv, Chernivtsi, Poltava, Vinnytsia, Kyiv, Dnipro, Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, and the Sumy region. We also work closely with the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the European Commission, as does Chiricli.

Our key partners in Moldova are the Roma Women and Girls Network in Moldova—Moldsolidaritate, the European Association Without Borders for Persons with Disabilities (EAWBPD), and the Association Partnership among Women Elected in Local Authorities for Community Support (PALSC).

The work of the Deaconess Foundation contributes to Ukraine's commitment to implement the Law on National Minorities; the National Roma Strategy and the National Roma Action Plan; the State Programme 'Unity in Diversity'; the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages; the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; and supports the implementation of EU requirements for Ukraine in the EU negotiation process.

It also contributes to Finland's Ukraine Country Programme 2021–2024 and to the following Sustainable Development Goals: 5, 10, 16.



# V. Results by goal area

The humanitarian intervention came as a prompt response to the pressing needs of the most vulnerable in Ukraine who were fleeing battle zones or living in areas affected by war, starting from the second week of the war in March 2022. The intervention included emergency assistance for vulnerable people affected by the war in Ukraine as well as shelter and assistance for vulnerable Ukrainian refugees in Moldova.

The emergency assistance provided in both countries was developed very quickly in order to address the pressing needs of the people in the context of the war. Therefore, the intervention was based on previous knowledge and input from mediators.

Chiricli's large network of mediators involved in grassroots work with Roma communities ensures that the organisation had a constant presence in and connection with the communities. Although the context did not allow for a structured consultation process with the beneficiaries of the services, the intervention in both countries was tailored to their needs and constantly adjusted following feedback from the people benefiting from it.

Through this emergency assistance project, from March 2022 until April 2024 we were able to provide humanitarian support to more than 131,371 people in Ukraine and 1,551 people in Moldova.

**Figure 1: Results of the project 'Provision of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable communities in Ukraine and Moldova 2022–2024'**

RESULTS BY GOAL AREA		
Ukraine	<b>Goal Area 1: Every Roma woman and man, girl and boy is protected from war violence, exploitation, and human rights abuses</b>	
	Number of people who received financial support and advice for evacuation	2,635
	Number of people who received information and individual consultations about state and municipal humanitarian support, martial law (restrictions for citizens), and possibilities to evacuate or cross borders	52,700
	Number of Roma people provided with shelter	600
	Number of Roma women and girls who received emergency cash	400
	Number of Roma families supported in renovating their homes	4
	<b>Goal Area 2: Every Roma woman and man, girl and boy has access to food, essential supplies, healthcare, and psychosocial support</b>	
	Number of people (Roma and non-Roma, especially IDPs) who received hot meals and food aid	71,180
	Number of people who received support during the day at heating points	2,000
	Number of IDPs (Roma women and children) who received psychosocial support	445
Number of IDP children who participated in art therapy	90	
Number of IDP children who participated in Christmas celebrations	500	

RESULTS BY GOAL AREA		
	<b>Goal Area 3: All citizens of Ukraine have a valid ID</b>	
	Number of vulnerable people supported in obtaining IDs or IDP status	150
	Number of vulnerable people provided with legal and social assistance	1,100
	<b>Goal Area 4: Central and local public authorities, as well as International Organisations, mainstream minority rights and minority issues in their work and are aware of the needs and circumstances of minorities</b>	
	Number of meetings with International Organisations and public authorities, spreading information about the situation of Roma communities and advocating for their rights	30
	<b>Goal Area 1: Ukrainian refugees, particularly Roma and persons with disabilities, have access to a community, social and health support, and shelter</b>	
Moldova	Number of Ukrainian refugees supported through the refugee centre in Moldova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 671 persons with disabilities</li> <li>• 339 personal assistants for persons with disabilities</li> <li>• 541 Roma people</li> </ul>
	Number of refugee shelters	1 in Moldova (Grebleşti) and 1 in Ukraine (Mukachevo)
Total	Number of people who received humanitarian support	132,922

In Ukraine support was provided with the active contribution of Roma mediators as well as through direct support for families. Most of the mediators who provide humanitarian support in Ukraine are Roma women (85%). The rest are either men or women of Ukrainian ethnicity who have experience in working with Roma communities and enjoy a good reputation in these communities. In Moldova the team that administered the shelter was composed of 17 members including both staff and volunteers, out of whom more than 75% are women. In total, 35% of the team members are people of Roma ethnicity. The administrative consortium was composed of one Roma organisation and two women's organisations.

Moreover, in Ukraine Chiricli joined the efforts of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to address the issue of the registration of IDs to ensure that all IDPs can exercise their rights. Another important institution with which Chiricli has established co-operation was the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Religious Affairs, which is directly responsible for the implementation of the Roma strategy in Ukraine. This institution played an important role in drafting

policies involving the Roma population, equality, and diversity.

Also, Chiricli provided expertise for the State Regulator on the Media in the development of a new standard on how to publicly communicate about minorities, with the aim of combating hate speech.

In order to perform humanitarian action, our Ukrainian partner collaborated closely with the State Migration Service of Ukraine (SMS) on issues related to passports and IDs, as well as with departments within local administrations on matters related to education, medical services, and social assistance.

Finally, the partner also worked closely with employment centres that organise professional training for Roma people, which agreed to grant an exception so that the beneficiaries of this project could participate in the training. According to Ukrainian law, people who have not completed secondary education cannot register as looking for employment and thus do not have access to these courses free of charge.



In Moldova Moldsolidaritate, EAWBPD, and PALSC collaborated with various actors in order to provide the refugees from Greblești Center with all the necessary services and address their complex needs. Roma refugees and persons with disabilities were transported from the hottest spots in Ukraine by the international CSO Be an Angel e.V. Meanwhile, the Motivation organisation provided special adjustments for the transportation of refugees with disabilities from the shelter when they had to visit state institutions to obtain or renew their documents, reach the hospital for medical services, or travel to Ukraine and back for the necessary documents.

At the same time, UNHCR Moldova assisted in the relocation of refugees from Greblești Center to other countries by organising special flights and escorts and the Moldovan Ministry of Health provided emergency medical care and hospital admission on numerous occasions on a regular basis.

Finally, the three CSOs that coordinated the project in Moldova established co-operation with the Law Center of Advocates, which provided legal support for the beneficiaries and visited the shelter twice a week, as well as with IOM Moldova, which provided legal support and assistance in obtaining temporary protection status and refugee status.

In addition to its great impact on the lives of thousands of refugees, this intervention was an important learning experience as it was the first humanitarian assistance project implemented by both the Deaconess Foundation and its partner organisations in Ukraine and Moldova.

## • Results in communication and advocacy

The project provided information about the needs of Roma communities and Roma refugees and refugees with disabilities to relevant public authorities and International Organisations operating in Ukraine and Moldova and more widely in Europe. Strengthening co-operation with the Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council of Europe was also crucial to successful advocacy work.

In 2022–2023 six articles were written and published on the Deaconess Foundation's website in relation to humanitarian work in Ukraine and Moldova. The articles were viewed by almost 1,600 people. 25 social media posts in the Deaconess Foundation's channels reached more than 60,000 people, sharing information about the needs of people in vulnerable situations in Ukraine as well as the ways in which they have been helped. Also,

three events related to the humanitarian project were organised in Finland in 2022–2023 in collaboration with the Finnish Human Rights Centre, the University of Helsinki's Rule of Law Centre, and the Finnish Advisory Board for Romani Affairs.

As a result of the project's communication campaign, people in Finland, and in other European countries as well, became more aware of how the war affects vulnerable and minority groups, such as Roma and PWDs. This is extremely important because during past wars in Europe the struggles, contributions, and activism of Roma remained invisible. This affected the way in which Roma were compensated and supported after the wars and the extent to which their needs were included in reconstruction plans. It also made them invisible when the history of the wars was written.

## 1. Results in Ukraine

Humanitarian assistance in Ukraine was performed in close co-operation with other Roma organisations and initiatives providing humanitarian aid to IDPs from vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, single mothers, and families of serving soldiers.

The project covered residents and IDPs from the following regions and cities: Bakhmach, Berehove, Chernihiv, Dnipro, Ivano-Frankivsk, Izmail, Kamianske, Kharkiv, Kherson, Khmelnytskyi, Kiliya, Kirovohrad, Kreminna, Kropyvnytskyi, Kyiv, Luhansk, Lutsk, Lviv, Myrhorod, Mukachevo, Nizhyn, Odesa, Pryluky, Pantaivka (in the Kirovohrad region), Pereiaslav, Sumy, Torchyn, Toretsk, the Transcarpathia region (Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Berehove, Vynohradiv), Vinnytsia, Volyn, and Zaporizhzhia.

In Vinnytsia, Lutsk, and Kirovohrad humanitarian support was distributed in close co-operation with the local municipality.

A separate category of beneficiaries was that of Roma families from territories occupied and controlled by the Russian Federation. A total of 90% of the requests from such territories concerned evacuation and covering petrol and transportation fees for drivers. Some requests concerned access to food and hygiene products as well as covering fees for temporary housing. Assisting this group was only possible up to the end of 2022. After this time, all legal avenues for sending money to support evacuations were cut due to Russia's forceful actions in imposing the RUB currency and the ban on Ukrainian banking systems and mobile operators. Furthermore, it became very dangerous to continue communication with people from these territories.

## Goal Area 1: Every Roma woman and man, girl and boy is protected from war violence, exploitation, and human rights abuses

### • Evacuation assistance

Vulnerable people were assisted to evacuate from conflict regions either internally, from one region to another, or abroad. Mediators and volunteers often took vulnerable people (the elderly, Roma, persons with disabilities) from checkpoints that were under the control of Ukrainian forces. People moved from one place to another without any money. At checkpoints Russian forces checked all the belongings of those wishing to leave. Most families reported being checked repeatedly by Russians and having their money confiscated. Therefore, IDPs could only carry small bags with documents. There was an urgent need for money for travel in addition to food, medicine, and basic hygiene items.

The evacuation assistance covered the costs of transportation for around 2,635 evacuees, mostly women and children. Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia are just some of the regions that were left behind by vulnerable people seeking refuge. At least nine of these people were persons with disabilities, some of whom were helped to go to other European countries for medical treatment and urgent surgeries.

#### *The story of Kateryna*

*A young Roma woman, Kateryna from the city of Melitopol in the Zaporizhzhia region, was assisted to leave for the Ukrainian-controlled city of Zaporizhzhia. She is the mother of three children and she realised that she had to escape occupied Melitopol as soon as possible. The city was occupied just a few days after the invasion in February 2022. When the explosions slowed down, the family returned home from the school that was being used as a bomb shelter. They changed clothes and fed the children. Hearing the shots, the children went to the door and stood ready: 'Well, let's run to the shelter again?' This happened every night. Kateryna lived with her children in the captured city for four months. Then they decided to leave, but they were stopped halfway and turned back due to gunfire. However, the woman did not stop trying to evacuate and in a few days, with the help of private drivers, she reached Zaporizhzhia together with her children. At that time, the journey from Melitopol to the regional centre cost 5,000 hryvnias per person (for comparison, before the*

*full-scale war it was 200 hryvnias). Through this intervention, we provided the money for the woman's evacuation and she paid for herself and her eldest daughter. The other children are still quite small, so they did not require a separate seat. Kateryna continues to receive food and hygiene packages from our mediators and she remains hopeful that she may return to her hometown soon.*

### • Consultations and information support

Consultations and information support were provided for more than 52,700 people about state and municipal humanitarian support, martial law (restrictions for citizens), and possibilities to evacuate or cross borders. Both Roma mediators and other Roma organisations played a key role in conducting the needs assessment and providing relevant information.

Within this project, other CSOs received support for targeted activities informing Roma IDPs from occupied territories about their rights in Ukraine and assisting them in accessing healthcare and employment services.

### • Temporary housing and associated services

In order to support vulnerable Roma people and IDPs, the project provided heating checkpoints in close co-operation with other partner organisations and mediators. Such heating points are often organised on the premises of schools, nursery schools, administrative buildings, cultural institutions, or churches and are designed to keep people warm and provide them with food when they lack heating in their house and cannot cook due to electricity cuts. These locations are heated by generators so that they are not energy dependent. Such heating points were supported through this initiative in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, Berehove, and Lutsk by covering the costs of utilities. More than 2,000 people were able to receive support during daytime at heating points.

Moreover, the project actively supported more than 600 Roma IDPs in Kyiv and the Kyiv region, the Odesa region, Dnipro, Kirovohrad, Zaporizhzhia, Vinnytsia, Lutsk, Lviv, and Transcarpathia by providing them with temporary accommodation in shelters. The costs of utilities were covered for three Roma refugee shelters located in Berehove, Uzhhorod, and Mukachevo. The last of them was opened in March 2023 and is

dedicated to Roma women, children, and persons with disabilities in Mukachevo with a capacity of 42 people. Out of the 40 people currently living in the shelter, 16 are children and the rest are women. None of them have an education and only two people can write their own name.

This centre also hosts women of ethnicities other than Roma. Many of the women have expressed their desire to attend at least primary education and learn some basic skills, such as operating a sewing machine, that could help them secure employment. The lack of education and skills among Roma women is related to several structural factors including poverty and the tradition of early marriages.

In the Transcarpathian region where the centre is located, there are few employment opportunities even for the majority population and those holding a degree due to the general economic situation of the region. The situation is even more dire for Roma because they generally lack education and/or identity documents.

The administrator of the centre is an IDP herself, originating from the Donetsk region. Rada Kalandia also added the following, 'I represent those people who lost everything, who left for the Transcarpathian and started from scratch.'

At the shelter in Mukachevo women and children receive hot meals as well as art therapy, psychological support, and legal and social counselling. According to Rada, 'When the shelter was opened, Roma women did not understand why they needed to talk to a psychologist. We explained that we are all in psychological distress. The psychologist helped them. Every time that women attended these meetings, they were more positive and felt like there can be life after the war.' At the shelter there is a facilitator providing art therapy to children and 90 children benefited from this activity in February and March 2023.

By the end of 2023 the shelter had hosted approximately 200 women and children. Meanwhile, the shelter in Berehove accepted 190 women with children.

### **The story of Malvina**

*Malvina is a 29-year-old Roma woman who comes from the city of Sloviansk in Donetsk Oblast, which is under constant shelling. She has no ID documents or professional/higher education. However, she educated herself about nursing (how to care for patients, change bandages, give injections, fill medicine droppers, and so on). Before the invasion, Malvina lived with her mother, with whom she had a very close relationship.*

*Malvina fled Sloviansk (in the Donetsk region) in order to seek refuge soon after the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion and moved to the Transcarpathia region. There she was hosted in a compact living place for IDPs that was very crowded (300 people in one place).*

*Despite being surrounded and helped by many people, she felt lonely and abandoned because she had lost her mother and now had no friend or relative with her. However, some volunteers visited the shelter where Malvina lived and told her about our Roma mediators in Zakarpattia Oblast. Malvina called one of these mediators and had a warm conversation. She was surprised that the mediator agreed to accept her into a shelter even though she did not have an identification document.*

*Malvina moved into a shelter supported by the project and said that the mediator who brought her there has been a substitute mother. Malvina was so inspired by the mediator's actions in helping people that she too decided to offer help to others. Malvina said, 'Thank you for what you are doing. It helps to keep the light on. And it is also a good example for others who want to help but do not know how or where to start.'*

*With the support of this project, Malvina obtained her first passport and has managed to move out of the shelter and live independently with her partner.*

## Goal Area 2: Every Roma woman and man, girl and boy has access to food, essential supplies, healthcare, and psychosocial support

### • Hot meals and food aid

The hot meals initiative targeted both Roma people and other vulnerable groups and was implemented in a large number of regions: Berehove, Chernihiv, Chernivtsi, Dnipro, Ivano-Frankivsk, Izmail, Kamianske, the Kharkiv region, Kherson, Kyiv, Lutsk, Lviv, Melitopol, Mukachevo, Mykolaiv, Nizhyn, Odesa, Pantaivka (in the Kirovohrad region), Pereiaslav-Khmelnyskyi, Poltava, Sumy, Uzhhorod, Vinnytsia, Vyshenky, and Zaporizhzhia.

More than 71,180 people (residents and IDPs) received food aid/packages or hot meals, including at least 280 persons with disabilities.

This type of assistance was delivered with the help of Roma mediators and volunteers who have direct contact with the families of IDPs or those who remain in war zones.

In Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, and Odesa and the Kyiv, Lviv, and Odesa regions, hot meals were provided in close co-operation with the organisation Food for Life.



Picture 1: Hot meals provided by volunteers

*A Roma family consisting of a wife, husband, and two children (15 and two years of age) was in Kramatorsk (in the Donetsk region) when Russia began a full-scale invasion. Before the invasion, this family lived happily and had a lovely relationship with all non-Roma neighbours. When the invasion began, they witnessed military actions, shelling, and bombing. There was a church next to their house whose basement they used to hide in during shelling. With a little baby, it was difficult to stay in the cold cellar for even one or two hours. One day they decided to leave the city and seek safety in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. The Roma family gathered with their Ukrainian friends and used three vehicles to flee the city. Driving away, they witnessed shelling and bombing again. Today the family stays in Kamianske (in the Dnipropetrovsk region). There they registered as IDPs. Locals gave them the phone number of our Roma mediator. They needed accommodation, money, food, and other basic items. Within this project, they received humanitarian assistance to cover essential needs, including food packages, winter clothing, and childcare items.*

### • Financial aid and in-kind support

In addition to hot meals and food packages, the project provided Roma and other vulnerable people in Ukraine with financial support and other types of in-kind support as IDPs often could not bring many items with them and electricity cuts posed significant challenges, especially during winter. The in-kind support was provided to 400 women and consisted of blankets, sleeping bags, clothing, hygiene products, medicine, childcare products, small gas stoves, gas cylinders, and firewood.

Meanwhile, financial aid was granted to cover the costs of temporary accommodation and utilities or medical treatment (in the case of two IDP women).

Moreover, 40 children received school stationeries in the Odesa region.

*A Roma family from the village of Kamianka (in the Zaporizhzhia region), consisting of the spouses and a five-year-old, decided to flee their village when Russian forces had already fully occupied it. Their car was stopped many times at checkpoints to verify their documents and luggage. The occupiers eventually allowed them to leave the occupied territory. Today they are staying in Kamianske (in the Dnipropetrovsk region) in a flat owned by their relative. They also registered as IDPs there and locals gave them the phone number of one of*



our Roma mediators. They needed everything as they could not take many things with them. The mediator helped them to integrate into the local community and provided them with the necessary assistance.

- **Financial assistance, psychological support, and community life**

In December 2022 a total of 500 Roma child IDPs from Ukraine participated in small Christmas celebrations organised by mediators within the framework of this project. They also benefited from psychological support together with their families. This activity was organised in the regions of Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Odesa, Transcarpathia, Kirovohrad, Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn, and Vinnytsia.

In January 2023 a Roma settlement in Zaporizhzhia was destroyed by a missile attack by the Russian Federation. Within the project, financial support was provided to four Roma families so that they could renovate windows and stoves. They were also given winter blankets and food packages.

Ten young Roma interns from the village of Pantaivka in the Kirovohrad region were also engaged in providing humanitarian relief from 31 October to 20 December 2022.

- **Community integration and professional development**

In close co-operation with local mediators from Zaporizhzhia and other organisations, fast training courses were developed so that people from vulnerable groups could have the chance to be trained in a profession and earn money in order to provide for their families. Several courses were provided for professions including hairdresser, makeup artist, and nail artist. A total of 43 people participated in these courses in 2023. As a result of this, 18 people started their own business and two of the young Roma women were hired. Their employer reportedly changed his previously negative opinion about Roma people.

'People feel human when they make their own money. Not like a person of lower value who receives money from the state in order to survive.' (Larisa Domchenko and Alexey Padchenko, local mediators)

### **Goal Area 3: All citizens of Ukraine have a valid ID**

- **Social and legal assistance**

One of the main legal problems faced by Roma people in Ukraine is the lack of identity documents (birth certificates, passports, etc.). Without such documents people cannot obtain IDP status or any social benefits



International Roma Day celebration organized by Chiricli in April 2024

and neither can they access education, find legal employment, or leave the country. Moreover, they also cannot have property rights or prove that their houses were destroyed during the war in order to obtain any compensation for rebuilding their life.

Starting from 2023, with the help of local mediators, we have assisted people to obtain documents: 40 passports, 10 international passports, and 20 birth certificates. 80 people were helped to obtain their IDP status. Housing, ID documents, and employment are becoming trend issues for Roma IDPs. Unfortunately, mediators also have to work with victims of violence, which requires a special set of skills.

Another 1,100 vulnerable people received legal and social assistance related to other aspects.

*A Roma family of five members, two grandparents, two grandchildren, and one young woman, was living in the Kyiv region in very dire conditions. The woman has serious health issues and needs medical treatment. None of the family members could work and there is no social support for them as they lack passports. The family did not have money to conduct DNA tests for birth certificates and passport registrations, nor did they have money to buy wood or cover the medical treatment of the young woman. Within the project, support was provided to cover the DNA test, wood for heating during winter, and medical treatment.*

## **Goal Area 4: Central and local public authorities, as well as International Organisations, mainstream minority rights in their work and are aware of the needs and circumstances of minorities**

- Collaboration with public authorities and advocacy for Roma rights**

Within this humanitarian intervention, project staff worked closely with the Ukrainian police, army, and military by participating in the dissemination of information about martial law among members of the Roma community, with the co-operation of police officers on the ground. Many people were not aware of the provisions of this new law, which included the imposition of curfew and restriction of the freedom of movement. The lack of knowledge resulted in accidents and posed the risk of alienating citizens from the state. Therefore, project staff mediated the dialogue between these state institutions and the Roma population while also informing state institutions about the situation of Roma communities.

Project staff participated in more than 30 meetings with international partners and organisations (OSCE, UN, CoE) and national and local authorities to inform them about the situation of Roma communities in Ukraine during



Rada Kalandiia, manager of the shelter, participates in ID registration work



the war. The project contributed to the operational assessment of the needs of Roma women and men together with UN Women Ukraine and will continue to co-operate with public authorities regarding the needs of Roma and the challenges they face. Moreover, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine was informed about the situation, needs, and human rights violations of Roma and other vulnerable people in the context of the war.

The humanitarian response in Ukraine also supported the advocacy agenda in promoting human rights (e.g. advocacy for the adoption of the National Strategy for Roma Integration). Project staff collaborated closely with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights in supporting the monitoring and protection of human rights for the Roma minority. Their collaboration also led to a pilot project that aimed to facilitate the issuing of identity documents in one city and streamline the procedure for obtaining such documents at the national level.

## 2. Results in Moldova

In response to the large wave of refugees who crossed the border into the Republic of Moldova during the first several weeks after the beginning of the war, the discrimination faced by many Roma people in public shelters, and the poor conditions in which persons with disabilities were hosted, a shelter was opened in order to host these vulnerable refugees. The Centre for Ukrainian refugees was established in April 2022 and was operational until April 2024. It was locally coordinated by the Roma Women and Girls Network in Moldova—Moldsolidaritate together with the European Association Without Borders for Persons with



*The mayor of Greblești Aliona Chircu and project manager Elena Sili arranging the furniture at the refugee centre*

Disabilities (EAWBPD) and the Association Partnership among Women Elected in Local Authorities for Community Support (PALSC). The centre was located in Greblești, a village in the centre of the Republic of Moldova, situated approximately 40 kilometres north of Chișinău.

### **Goal Area 1: Ukrainian refugees, particularly Roma and persons with disabilities, have access to a community, social and health support, and shelter**

The refugee centre established in Greblești (Moldova) provided shelter as well as other complex forms of assistance for certain groups of refugees who had no other place to go: Roma people (including infants and children) and persons with disabilities and their personal assistants.

The shelter was the only one in the country specifically dedicated to refugees with disabilities and Roma refugees and the only one to take up the responsibility of providing support for the most vulnerable categories of refugees on an ongoing basis. Spaces were equipped to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities, including an accessible ramp at the entrance and special medical beds that could be adjusted depending on the needs of the residents. Constant medications and medical attention were also provided. In some cases, minor surgical interventions were even performed at the centre, while more severe cases were treated at nearby hospitals.

The centre was located in a public building whose use was granted by the municipality for this purpose free of charge. The building previously hosted a nursery school but was no longer occupied when the war began. The shelter had six spacious rooms, a kitchen, bathrooms, and a large garden. The residents accommodated there were provided with food and relevant information as well as medical, psychological, and legal assistance and basic necessities (clothing adapted to the season, baby food, diapers, seasonal items, blankets, bed linen, personal care products, prams, cribs, etc.). Generic medications were provided that do not require a doctor's prescription. Hygiene products, masks, gloves, and other protective equipment were also provided in order to prevent infectious diseases.

The team also assisted refugees with paperwork and the asylum application process and informed them about employment opportunities and the educational alternatives available to children. Psychological and psychiatric assistance was also provided for those



*The refugee centre from Greblești*

suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, and other conditions. Individualised food menus were provided with the help of a dietician in order to respond to the dietary needs of some of the beneficiaries.

From April 2022 until April 2024, 1,551 refugees were accommodated in the shelter, out of whom there were 671 persons with disabilities, 339 personal assistants for persons with disabilities, and 513 Roma people, including children, women, girls, the elderly, and persons with severe medical conditions or disabilities. Some of these people also had other vulnerabilities, such as drug addiction. Many of the residents, especially those with severe disabilities, the elderly, and pregnant women, required special assistance. Some of the refugees required permanent assistance because they could not leave their bed due to a medical condition. Each refugee has their own story and specific needs. Some also brought their pets, which required special assistance. Certain residents lacked identification documents or had to renew them, particularly members of the Roma minority, or had only an internal ID and could not travel across borders. They were assisted by the team in obtaining the necessary documents from the Ukrainian embassy.

However, the shelter offered more than just basic services for the most vulnerable refugees. It also brought them a sense of community, facilitated by small celebrations and group activities meant to give them a sense of normality and distract their attention from the war. As Aliona Chircu, the mayor of Greblești, explained, 'Here at the centre people [fleeing the war] had time to calm down and assess where they could go next.' Many of the centre's residents had undergone traumatic experiences before departing from Ukraine, such as

living in constant fear and sleeping in basements in order to be safe from shelling.

The managing team has collaborated with other International Organisations, CSOs, embassies, and public authorities in order to assist refugees, especially for the procurement of all the items necessary to accommodate them at the shelter and for facilitating their departure to other European countries. However, sending refugees abroad, especially the most vulnerable, has become increasingly difficult over time due to the limitations of the capacity to host them.

The centre was closed in April 2024 as part of the process of integrating refugees into society and mainstream medical and care facilities. Its last beneficiaries were those who could not be integrated into the community given their extreme vulnerability, which was related to lack of education (many Roma beneficiaries were illiterate), childcare responsibilities (Roma people tend to have large families and women are the only ones looking after children as men were not allowed to leave the country), disability, and age. Most of these refugees were transferred to other shelters in the country, while a small number migrated to other European countries and were assisted in this process.

As part of the transition process, project staff also assisted the receiving shelters in adjusting their infrastructure and adapting their services to cater to the needs of these vulnerable refugees. The medical beds from the centre were also donated as part of this assistance.



*One of the three bedrooms of the refugee centre from Greblești*

### **The story of Vasilij and Lyudmila**

Vasilij and Lyudmila arrived in Moldova from Zaporizhzhia one and a half years ago. They had left behind their home, seeking safety and a fresh start in a new country. During the first month, they stayed in a refugee centre where they were met with relief and uncertainty. Despite the challenges, they were determined to build a new life for themselves.

They knew that to successfully integrate into Moldovan society they needed to learn the local language and acquire new skills that would make them employable. After much consideration, they decided to enrol in courses to become certified massage therapists. Simultaneously, they began attending Romanian language classes. Learning the language was challenging, but they were committed to it. Every evening, they would practise speaking, reading, and writing in Romanian, helping each other with pronunciation and vocabulary. Their determination was fuelled by the understanding that mastering the language was essential in order to fully integrate into their new community.

After completing the classical massage course, Vasilij and Lyudmila decided to take advanced courses in therapeutic massage. Their journey was not without its challenges. The rigorous training schedule, combined with their ongoing language studies, often left them exhausted. However, their determination never wavered.

As they completed their courses and became certified therapeutic massage therapists, Vasilij and Lyudmila managed to find jobs at a reputable clinic where they were welcomed warmly by colleagues and patients alike. Vasilij specialised in sports massage, helping athletes recover from injuries, while Lyudmila focused on therapeutic massage for patients with chronic pain and mobility issues. Their expertise and compassionate care quickly earned them a loyal clientele.

### **The story of Victoria**

Victoria, a 42-year-old psychologist and therapist from Odesa, relocated to Moldova due to the war in Ukraine. Despite the turmoil, she found a welcoming and serene environment at our shelter. She was then supported in finding individual housing in Chişinău, where the greenery and the kindness of the locals gave her a sense of comfort and hope. Having over a decade of experience with working with children with developmental disorders, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Victoria was determined to continue her life's work in her new home. She had always been passionate about helping children, understanding that early intervention and specialised care could significantly improve their quality of life.

Upon arriving in Chişinău, Victoria quickly realised that there the need for such services was just as critical, if not more so, than in Odesa. The parents of children with developmental disorders faced long waiting lists for consultations at the overcrowded centres. It often took more than six months to get an appointment, a delay that could severely hinder the progress of children who required timely intervention. Seeing that the situation was dire, Victoria was inspired to open her own centre for children with ASD in Chişinău.

Victoria needed assistance with creating a solid business plan and evaluating the feasibility of her project. She sought guidance on everything from securing funding to navigating local regulations and marketing her services. She was assisted in connecting with local organisations and fellow professionals for support and found a community that was eager to help, recognising the immense value her centre would bring to the city. But her journey was not without its challenges. There were many details to consider, from finding a suitable location to ensuring the necessary resources.

She worked tirelessly, driven by her passion and the urgent need she saw in the community. As a result of her efforts, Chişinău would soon have a new centre dedicated to helping children with developmental disorders, ensuring that they received the timely and specialised care they so desperately needed. Victoria's centre will not only provide therapy but also support and education for families, creating a comprehensive network of care.





*A Delegation of Ukrainian Roma women and representatives of the Deaconess Foundation met with Mr. Mikko Puumalainen, member of Council of Europe's Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*

### 3. Responding to the needs of women and girls

In both countries, the project contributed to combating gender-based violence and promoting gender equality by helping women—including Roma women, women with disabilities, and single mothers—and girls to evacuate from war zones and providing a safe refuge for them. In Ukraine refugees were picked up from checkpoints by mediators and volunteers, while in Moldova they were provided safe transportation to the centre and shelter. This shielded women and children from potential violence within Ukraine and trafficking at the Ukrainian-Moldovan border.

Women and children represented the majority of occupants in IDP and refugee centres in Ukraine and Moldova. Once admitted to shelters, women received psychological support and medical assistance, including childbirth and newborn support, as well as necessary medicines and personal hygiene items. Young children were provided childcare in shelters, while school-aged children in Moldova received the necessary technical support for continuing their studies remotely. In Ukraine Roma women were successfully supported by mediators, with the support of the ombudsman, in fighting discriminatory practices by kindergartens that refused to admit Roma children.

In Moldova many of the shelter's occupants received permanent care and medical support due to old age,

various medical conditions, or disability. This type of care work has traditionally been seen as women's work and would have otherwise represented an additional burden for women in their families. Moreover, some of these women were unable to care for their family due to their own sickness or disability.

Roma women in Ukraine also participated in training courses for occupations such as hairdresser, makeup artist, or nail artist and in internship programmes. Some of them also managed to find employment or became self-employed. During training, they benefited from childcare services in order to be able to balance their professional development with domestic responsibilities. The training has empowered these women not only to provide for themselves and their families but also to have a voice in their community and combat gender and ethnic stereotypes among employers.

The planning, management, and delivery of the project activities was ensured by a team in which women amounted to more than 50% of the personnel (even 80% in the case of mediators, who were also majority Roma). Therefore, the intervention was designed to include women's perspective(s). Also, IDPs and refugee Roma women could feel comfortable and freely discuss gender-sensitive aspects with female mediators and volunteers.

## 4. The nexus approach in practice

In both Moldova and Ukraine, the partners implemented the humanitarian interventions reported in this publication and at the same time carried out development and policy interventions and human rights work. In practice this meant that they implemented different projects and activities. Each project was centred around one of the three nexuses: development, humanitarian, and good ethnic relations. Yet since the approach of the work is bottom-up, working with communities and individuals and addressing their needs, the three elements were combined when working with communities and also during advocacy and policy work.



*The representatives of Chiricli, Deaconess Foundation and the NGO Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo participate to the conference International Conference Roma as Integral Part of Society of Ukraine on June 14, 2023 in Berlin*

The work was done in co-operation and coordination with CSOs, International Organisations, and authorities specialised in humanitarian, development, and peace work. In Moldova, for example, UNHCR provided psychosocial support at the refugee centre and advised staff and refugees on issues related to access to rights. In Ukraine co-operation with the OSCE, UN, and CoE was crucial to advocating for the rights of internally displaced Roma (IDPs), while at the same time those who needed humanitarian packages and shelter received them through the project or other humanitarian and municipal actors.

In both countries it was important to promote good ethnic relations between displaced Roma and non-Roma. In both Ukraine and Moldova, Roma are at risk of experiencing hate speech and even hate crimes. Such work was done by raising awareness about the situation of Roma, reporting hate speech and discrimination to relevant institutions, monitoring the human rights of Roma, and correcting misinformation through media statements. Especially in Ukraine, there were some incidents in which Roma were used for the purposes



*Chiricli participated in event dedicated to access to ID registration organized by the Council of Europe and the European Union*

of misinformation and Chiricli had to make public statements about them. In this work co-operation with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Religious Affairs and the State Migration Service in Ukraine, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Police in Ukraine was crucial.

Our finding is that work with Roma and more widely with minorities can benefit tremendously from the nexus approach. Many Roma in Ukraine and Moldova lack basic sanitation, housing, and food, and therefore humanitarian forms of support are needed in order to engage in long-term development and policy work. At the same time, hate speech and hate crime remain a challenge and peace work can provide tools to promote security, protection, and good relations between Roma and non-Roma. Roma CSOs do not have extensive experience with the nexus approach, and it would therefore be useful to provide training and peer-to-peer learning. The plan is to connect the partner in Ukraine with the Deaconess Foundation's actors in Kosovo, who have worked on resettlement and supporting the victims of sexual war violence and trauma after war.

### **The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus also called the Triple Nexus**

In 2019 the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) adopted the Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Its implementation is binding for all OECD DAC countries and its progress is monitored.

Since then, the Recommendation became a standard and a recognized framework for effective interventions in conflict affected places. The Nexus approach means strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development, and peace efforts and the engagement of diverse actors in interventions, to respond more effectively to the needs of those in need and to make better progress with the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development.

Deaconess Foundation uses and promotes the Triple Nexus framework in its international work.

# VI. Management and capacity building

## 1. Organisation and general management

The Deaconess Foundation is a social foundation group. Together with the Rinnekodit service operator, the Foundation provides social welfare and health services. The Foundation's operations are divided into profit-making and non-profit-making activities. The Diaconia and Social Responsibility department represents the non-profit activities of the Deaconess Foundation. The self-financing of the department's project-based operations is covered by the profit obtained by the Rinnekodit service operator and return on capital as well as the income from fundraising carried out by the Foundation. Of the Diaconia and Social Responsibility department's funding, 60,5% is estimated to be covered by project financing, 36% by the Foundation's operating income and return on capital, and 3,5% by other fundraising income.

The Deaconess Foundation's administrative bodies are the Board of Directors and the Managing Director. It also has a delegation that is responsible for appointing board members. The Board of Directors and the Managing Director are responsible for issuing financial statements, presenting truthful and adequate information in accordance with the auditing standards in force in Finland, and ensuring that they fulfil all statutory requirements. The Board of Directors and the Managing Director are also responsible for the internal control to draw up financial statements that do not contain any material inaccuracy deriving from malpractice or falsehoods. In Finland the Deaconess Foundation's development co-operation programme Equal, Inclusive and Reconciled Societies 2022–2025 is administrated, coordinated, and implemented by the International Affairs Unit, which functions under the Diaconia and Social Responsibility department.

This project was implemented by the International Affairs Unit team of the Diaconia and Social Responsibility department.

The progress of the project and the project results were reported regularly to the Board of Directors and the International Affairs Unit.

## 2. Project management and the team

The core team of the project consisted of 8 employees who worked part- or full-time on the project. The team in Finland included the Programme Coordinator and the Senior Civil Society and Human Rights Adviser, in Ukraine the Project Manager and the Accountant, and in Moldova the Project Manager, the Manager of the Centre, the Accountant, and the Project Assistant. The personnel costs for the Helsinki office over both years amounted to 14,945 euros (16% of the total accrued costs), whereas the costs for locally hired employees in the project countries were 76,103 euros (84% of the total accrued costs).

The project team collaborated with humanitarian organisations in their respective countries to expand their knowledge on implementing this work in times of war and crisis. In Finland the Deaconess Foundation was part of the coordination group for the work of Finnish NGOs in Ukraine and Moldova led by Safer Globe. Safer Globe also provided mentoring to Chiricli on the topic of Do No Harm.

## 3. Financial management

The total accrued costs for all three countries amounted to 591 585 euros. This sum covers the period from March 2022 to December 2023 for Ukraine and Finland, and from April 2022 to April 2024 for Moldova. This total includes funding from the Deaconess Foundation, which was acquired through both its own funding and fundraising. Self-funding accounted for 32% of the total, while fundraising contributed 68%.



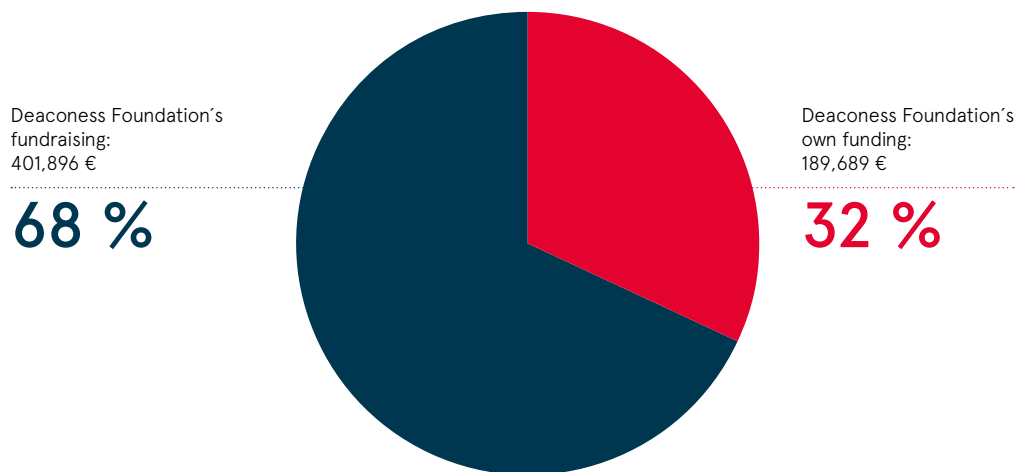


Figure 2 – Funding of the project

The overall financial project management and support was supervised in Helsinki by the Programme Coordinator and in the project countries by financial and project personnel. Additionally, the Financial Unit of the Deaconess Foundation provided support for financial matters related to the project.

The budget covered three budget categories: 1) project costs, which included expenses for implementing activities in both countries, 2) personnel costs in Ukraine, Moldova, and Finland, and 3) communications, advocacy, and monitoring costs in Finland.

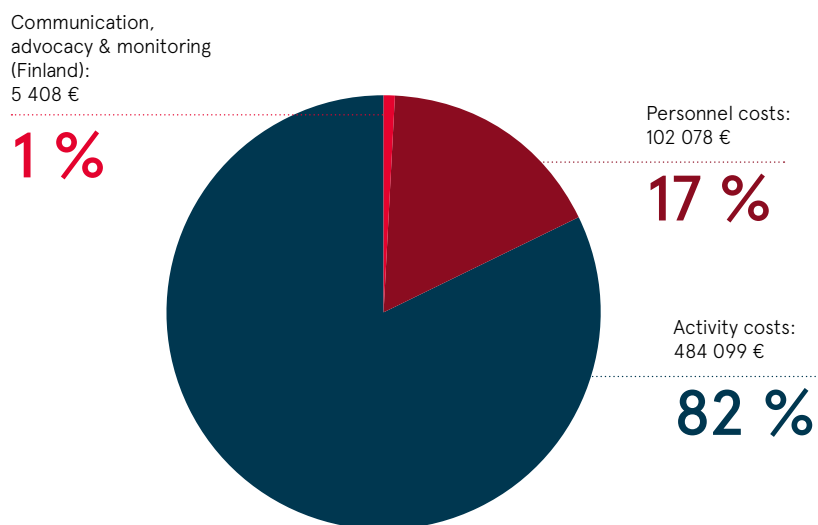


Figure 3 – Distribution of costs

Bookkeeping was conducted both locally in the partner countries and in Helsinki. All locally accrued expenses were entered into the Deaconess Foundation's bookkeeping system monthly, based on financial documents complying with the standard accounting principles. A double-entry bookkeeping system was used and expenses were recorded when they accrued, ensuring close monitoring of the financial situation. The Deaconess Foundation's financial department provided the framework for accounting procedures in Helsinki, assigning a unique cost centre and project number to this project. Costs were reported using expenditure categories both locally and in Finland.

At the local level, separate bank accounts were opened for each partner to ensure transparency and accountability. Local bookkeepers carried out day-to-day bookkeeping and submitted monthly

financial reports to the Deaconess Foundation that were approved by local coordinators. At the end of the project cycle, project finances were audited by auditors in the target countries. These auditors were carefully selected by the Finnish programme coordinator through a tendering process and followed the guidelines provided by the Deaconess Foundation. A copy of the field audit reports was submitted to the Deaconess Foundation for final approval.

Monthly meetings were organised with partners in both countries to monitor progress. The Deaconess Foundation visited Moldova for monitoring purposes twice and we met with the representatives of Chiricli yearly in Strasbourg, France. The Director of Diaconia and Social Responsibility visited Kiev in December 2023.

## VII. Key challenges

The main obstacles faced during the implementation of this initiative were the following:

- Difficulty of estimating all the necessary goods and services and the total amount of funding required for the intervention from the beginning, given the limited experience of partner organisations in providing humanitarian assistance during war time.
- Limited access to funding (especially stable funding) given the rise in the prices of communal services: the costs of electricity, gas, water, and sanitation approximately tripled over the implementation period in Moldova. The costs of food, medicine, and clothing also increased by 30–60%.
- Limited access to medical services for vulnerable refugees in Moldova (persons with disabilities, the elderly, pregnant women) due to the fact that public medical services in this country only cover emergency cases.
- In Ukraine one of the main challenges was ensuring the personal safety of team members on the ground as well as of project beneficiaries. The Chiricli staff had to temporarily relocate from Kiev and were not sure whether they would be able to return.
- Reluctance to request an ID by certain Roma communities in Ukraine as men risk being conscripted in the context of the war.
- Electricity cuts were another significant challenge in Ukraine. From October 2023 until the end of January 2024, locals experienced blackouts on a daily basis. The situation has not stabilised, but local staff continue to use special equipment.
- Partners in Ukraine had to balance making visible authorities' abuses and ensuring that Russian propaganda does not misuse such information or turn it into fake news.

# VIII. Lessons learned

- **Ukraine**

## Multi-stakeholder co-operation

Advocating alongside human rights state authorities, international institutions, and other CSOs has significantly amplified the results of our intervention. This partnership approach ensures swifter human rights protection and sustainability, allowing stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the situation of local and IDP Roma across Ukraine. For human rights institutions, partnering with CSOs helps them reach rights holders and improve their understanding of these communities. Meanwhile, CSOs gain valuable insights into fundamental and human rights as well as policy work.

## Leveraging international support

Partnering with International Organisations has brought additional resources and expertise to our efforts. These collaborations have also provided a platform for raising awareness about the plight of Roma communities in Ukraine on a global scale.

*Public discussion about the human rights situation in Ukraine organized by the Rule of Law Centre, the Human Rights Centre, Deaconess Foundation and Roma Women Fund Chiricli in June 2023, with the participation of the Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights*



*Project coordinator Julian Kondur attending a meeting on the situation of the Roma IDPs together with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights*



## Flexibility in providing aid

Flexibility in terms of providing aid based on evolving needs and trends has been essential. Conducting regular needs assessments has allowed us to adapt our support to the most pressing necessities. We observed that migration patterns changed, with increased movement when conflict intensified in the east and south of Ukraine as well as some seasonal migration patterns. Our ability to swiftly adjust our support to these shifts has been critical in addressing the dynamic needs of Roma communities.

## Maintaining impartiality and co-operation

While many CSOs express open support for Ukraine in its efforts to defend itself, co-operating with state authorities while maintaining a clear boundary to avoid politicisation has been crucial. This approach has allowed us to maintain our impartiality and provide objective criticism where necessary. It has also ensured that our work remains focused on humanitarian needs and human rights monitoring rather than on advancing political agendas.

## Focus on sustainability

While emergency aid is crucial, focusing on long-term sustainability has been equally important. This involves developing projects that not only provide immediate relief but also build resilience and self-sufficiency within Roma communities. We have engaged in dialogue with state institutions and international donors during all international recovery conferences for Ukraine, which provided a wide range of new partnerships for future co-operation and potential long-term projects.

## Access to legal aid

Providing legal assistance has been essential in helping Roma individuals navigate the complexities of displacement, documentation, and access to services. This has included support in obtaining identity documents, accessing social benefits, and addressing discrimination.

## Improved communication channels

Establishing clear and effective communication channels has ensured that Roma communities are informed about available assistance and their rights. This includes utilising various media channels, community networks, and trusted local leaders to disseminate information.

## Holistic health approaches

Addressing not only the physical but also the mental health needs of Roma communities and other vulnerable IDPs and refugees has been critical. Offering psychological support services alongside medical aid has helped to mitigate the trauma experienced due to the conflict.

## Training and education

Providing training and education to both Roma communities and our own staff has been instrumental in building capacity. This includes training on human rights, legal aid, and advocacy techniques, which have empowered Roma individuals to advocate for their own rights and provided our staff with the skills needed to support them effectively.

- **Moldova**

## Enhanced understanding of community needs

Managing the refugee centre for PWDs and Roma communities has provided invaluable insights into their unique needs. PWD refugees require tailored support services, including accessible facilities, medical care, and psychological support. Roma communities, often marginalised, require additional educational and employment opportunities to integrate sustainably into society.

## Building trust and engagement

Developing trust within the Roma community has been crucial. This has been achieved through consistent engagement, transparency, and involving community members in decision-making processes. Regular community meetings and feedback sessions have significantly improved participation and satisfaction.

## **Importance of cultural sensitivity**

Understanding and respecting cultural differences is essential. Training staff in cultural competence and hiring from within the community have improved service delivery and strengthened relations. This approach has minimised misunderstandings and increased co-operation by the community.

## **Requirements for ensuring sustainability**

Reaching and supporting Roma communities sustainably requires an Inclusive Programme Design, long-term support mechanisms, and continuous evaluation and adaptation. Programmes must be designed with input from Roma community members to ensure that they meet actual needs. This includes educational initiatives that respect cultural traditions and vocational training aligned with market demands. Sustainable support involves more than immediate aid. Developing long-term strategies, such as scholarships for Roma children and microfinance for small businesses, fosters independence and community growth. Programme effectiveness must be regularly evaluated and the strategy must be adapted based on the feedback received. This iterative process ensures that support remains relevant and effective.

# IX. Sustainability and localisation

The sustainability of the work carried out in this project will be ensured by the following results:

1. Strengthened capacity of Roma people to obtain their IDs and access displacement and other public services, following the work carried out together with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to address the issue of the registration of IDs to ensure that all IDPs can exercise their rights. Access to IDs and other services has also been supported by the legal assistance provided to 150 people in obtaining or renewing IDs and to 1,100 people in relation to other aspects;
2. Enhanced protection of Roma rights and improved anti-discrimination policies, as a result of advocacy efforts carried out with the State Service on Ethnic Policy and Religious Affairs in Ukraine for the implementation of the Roma strategy as well as the expertise provided for the State Regulator on the Media for the development of a new standard on addressing ethnic minorities and combating hate speech;
3. Increased capacity of Roma people and grassroots Roma CSOs from Ukraine to advocate for their rights, as a result of the training in human rights, legal aid, and advocacy techniques provided for Roma communities and project staff;
4. Improved access to employment for Roma people from Ukraine, deriving from co-operation with employment centres and granting Roma people who participate in the project the opportunity to access professional courses free of charge, which they would otherwise not be eligible for. Also, fast training courses to obtain qualifications, such as hairdresser, makeup artist, and nail artist, were provided in close co-operation with local mediators from Zaporizhzhia and other organisations;
5. Increased wellbeing of Ukrainian Roma and PWDs and strengthened capacity to overcome trauma caused by war, as a result of the psychological support provided both in Ukraine (for 445 IDP Roma women and children and 90 children in the form of art therapy) and at the refugee shelter in Moldova;
6. Consolidated co-operation with state institutions in Ukraine and international donors, leading to amplified results and, as a long-term impact of the project, improved understanding by these institutions of the situation of local and IDP Roma across Ukraine, paving the way for potential long-term joint projects.



# X. Future strategic direction for Ukraine and Moldova

The Deaconess Foundation will continue to operate in Ukraine and Moldova at the nexus of development practice, humanitarian efforts, psychosocial support, and peace. We will continue to address basic needs and advocate for participation, rights, and equality among minorities, persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, undocumented people, and those in need of psychosocial support. We look into possibilities for strengthening co-operation with human rights institutions. We will work together with civil society organisations (especially minority and disability organisations), human rights institutions, and other relevant institutions and international actors. The work in Ukraine and Moldova will continue to intersect with and benefit from the Deaconess Foundation's Eastern Europe and Western Balkans work and European Union work.

Future work will be organised around four thematic areas:

## 1. Minority and IDP protection and fundamental and human rights

- Enhance protection, participation, equal treatment, psychosocial wellbeing, and economic and social rights for Roma and Roma IDPs.
- Enhance the right to housing for IDPs.
- Enhance the right to ID papers for stateless people.
- Empower Roma CSOs and activists and protect civic space.
- Support national and local Roma CSOs and institutions to develop, implement, and monitor the National Roma Strategy and its Action Plan.
- Work together with Chiricli and the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor and advocate for the implementation of the National Roma Strategy and International Human Rights Law.
- Work together with Chiricli and the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor the human rights situation of Roma.

## 2. Peace and security

- Support actions that promote dialogue and peaceful interethnic relations.
- Support CSOs and institutions, especially the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, to strengthen their expertise in combating discrimination, also compounded and intersectional discrimination, hate speech, antigypsyism, and racism.
- Support actions that document war crimes against Roma.
- Support experience exchanges between Roma and women's organisations in Kosovo and Ukraine on the themes of supporting IDPs, resettlement and access to housing, and supporting survivors of sexual violence.

## 3. Emergency support

- Deliver emergency food, cash assistance for evacuations and acute needs, and night shelter.
- Inform the Roma minority about martial law and other relevant war and mobility legislation and policies.
- Strengthen access by Roma to humanitarian assistance delivered by humanitarian actors.
- Advocate with relevant stakeholders to make humanitarian assistance accessible.

## 4. Supporting the newly established Nordic Foundation

- Continue to support the work of the Nordic Foundation. The Deaconess Foundation is one of the founding members of the newly established Nordic Foundation that is planning to establish a hospital, research unit, and virtual hospital in Ukraine specialising in children's war traumas. The project is initially funded by a number of European foundations and the private sector.

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