

# Ungheni mobile team assists refugees and survivors of violence directly in their communities



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Marina Gorincioi, Ecaterina Boboc and Angela Ciobanu, after discussions with refugees from Ukraine settled in the village of Hîrjauca, Călărași.

Every Thursday for the past five months, Ecaterina, Angela and Marina have gone to the localities of Ungheni and Călărași districts where they try to find solutions to the challenges of refugees from Ukraine and the women affected by gender-based violence in those communities. Ecaterina is a psychologist, Angela is a lawyer and Marina is a social worker. They are the mobile team operating out of the Centre for Social Assistance of Family and Child “CREDO” in Ungheni, where they provide the same services when they are not in the field.

While there is a social worker in practically every locality, consulting a psychologist or a lawyer is still a luxury for many people, especially in rural areas. That's the opinion of Constantin Stratulat, the director of the Centre, who has noticed after years of working in the social field that this “luxury” is not just a financial one, although this is a common obstacle.

*“Our beneficiaries, unfortunately, often can't even afford to access free services if they have to travel to them because they can't afford to pay for transport, although in most cases the situation is much more complex: information poverty, lack of education, prejudice and much more.”*



Psychologist Ecaterina Boboc and social worker Marina Gorincioi discuss gender-based violence with beneficiaries from the city of Călărași.

“Most of the women we met with were talking to a psychologist for the first time in their lives, maybe even the only one, even though they are in dire need of these services,” says Ecaterina Boboc, a psychologist from the mobile team, which would be one of the main observations about community visits. “Women are also unaware that they can benefit from state-guaranteed legal aid,” says Angela Ciobanu, the team’s lawyer. “When we hear their stories, we realise that there is still a lot of work to be done and



that the situation is more critical than we think,” adds Marina Gorincioi, a social worker.

### **Mobile team — extending services to the beneficiaries at home**

The mobile team, created with the support of UNDP Moldova and the German Government, is for Ecaterina, Angela and Marina something completely different from working in the office. The motivation that helped them to set up this new activity was the thought that there, in the villages, they can reach the people who perhaps need their help the most, and these meetings could give them the opportunity to change or improve someone's life. “Even if one person can change something for the better in their life after talking to us, it is already a great success, but I think this is inevitable,” says Angela.





Hîrjauca from Călărași district is one of the communities assisted by the Ungheni mobile team.

“When existing services cannot cover the needs of all potential beneficiaries, the mobile team works as an extension of some services. It’s a universal tool, good for many situations when different types of beneficiaries need assistance. It is relatively easy to organise, flexible, can provide a wide range of services and covers different categories of beneficiaries and communities. It’s easy to access, and working with beneficiaries in their homes brings certain benefits, including saving people costs,” explains Vitalie Frecăuțeanu, coordinator of the UNDP Moldova project, where, with the support of the German Government, five mobile teams have been set up in different regions of Moldova, including this one in Ungheni.

And if the mobile teams are part of an existing social service, such as a centre, when the funding ends, the professionals continue their basic work, and when new projects appear, no matter for which category of beneficiaries, the work of the mobile team is easy to revive because there is institutional memory — everyone knows what to do and how best to organize the work so as not to start everything from scratch.





## **Refugees and survivors of violence — different challenges, same services**

The five newly created mobile teams provide services to both refugees from Ukraine and survivors of gender-based violence. The Ungheni team understood from their first meetings that the information sessions with these two categories of beneficiaries, even if they take place in the same community, are better organised separately for several reasons, including that the topics of discussion are too different.

The team goes at least twice to the localities with the highest number of refugees in Ukraine, where they have information sessions followed by individual consultations with both refugees and women who face, or are at increased risk of facing, situations of gender-based violence. The mobile team explains that the contact person is usually a social worker in the



community who invites people and acts as a kind of thermometer for the situation in their locality. “It depends a lot on how involved and dedicated the social worker is, how well they know the problems of the people in their community and how they talk to us to find solutions to them,” says Angela.



Angela Podgurschi (right), social worker from Hîrjauca, Călărași in discussion with the mobile team.

Angela Podgurschi, a social worker from Hîrjauca, Călărași, a town where ethnic Ukrainians are the main residents and where 15 Ukrainian refugee families have settled, knows each case in detail. He says that violence is also not a phenomenon foreign to the three villages in the community he serves. He asked the mobile team to come up with more information sessions on gender-based violence.

### **Mobile team services complement the state's service offering**

The services of the mobile team are identical and offered equally to both categories of beneficiary, complementing the offering of the state. In addition to information and social aid (food and hygiene products, medical vouchers), the mobile team's assistance also includes economic support, which can involve finding a job and assisting with employment, paying for professional training, or digital literacy and entrepreneurship courses. It also includes the possibility of financing business ideas so that people can secure a minimum income and be financially independent.

As a result of discussions during community information sessions, the mobile team outlines a list of people interested in and eligible for these services. Some refugees have already applied for employment.



The mobile team during the first group meeting with refugees from Ukraine settled in the village of Hîrjauca, Călărași.



*“There is a big difference between refugees settled in villages and those in cities. In the district of Călărași there seems to be another contingent of refugees — those interested in getting a job, getting employed; many are integrated into the community,” observed Angela.*

“It’s harder in the villages further away from the cities. There are no jobs except as day labourers in the hot season. We see that in Ungheni there is the free economic zone, and there are more job opportunities. It has a lot to do with where you live,” adds Marina, who is convinced that small businesses are a solution even for people in more remote rural areas.



## **Survivors of violence: information poverty, fear of change and the need for communication**

Solutions that would lead to financial independence are vital for survivors of gender-based violence. Many of the people the mobile team met did not know about existing opportunities or that the territorial employment subdivisions could provide them with further training or retraining. “It’s an environment in which door-to-door discussions with someone who is insufficiently informed or knowledgeable predominate — an environment

that is poor in information. And the fear of change is great, which I think comes from ignorance,” says Ecaterina.



The mobile team discusses gender-based violence with beneficiaries from the city of Călărași.

Sessions with local women often take much longer than planned, involving emotions and stories, and for most, it is the first opportunity to talk about the violence at home, although this is still misunderstood. If, at the beginning of the discussion, there seems to be resistance under the pretext that “everything is fine with us, we don’t have such problems,” when the psychologist starts to explain about the phenomenon, about who can be subjected to violence and the forms of this abuse, the women start to thaw out. They come with reactions or examples, impersonally or on behalf of someone else. But by the way they speak and the details it is obvious that the



phenomenon described is not foreign to them, that they have experienced those emotions and events.

*“At one point, it seemed to me that there was such chaos; they were all talking to each other, as if we were extra. They needed so much to communicate, we were just the reason that brought them together so they could interact and pour out their bitterness,” says Ecaterina, who admits she was pleasantly surprised by the openness and courage with which the women discuss their experiences, despite the fact that most of them come from an environment that predisposes them to think that violence is normal.*

The first support centre providing accommodation for survivors of gender-based violence is to open in Ungheni thanks to a project funded by the Government of Japan through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The Ungheni shelter, which is intended to be a regional one, will provide multidimensional services, including accommodation for up to half a year, legal and social assistance, and psychological and vocational counselling.



As part of the same project, professionals who are part of the mobile teams have been trained on how to assist their beneficiaries with the tools offered by the “Common Elements Treatment Approach” counselling programme, which offers a unique treatment perspective for multiple mental health challenges.



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