



# LEARNING BY LISTENING

The Ukraine crisis as a case study in shifting power to local humanitarian actors

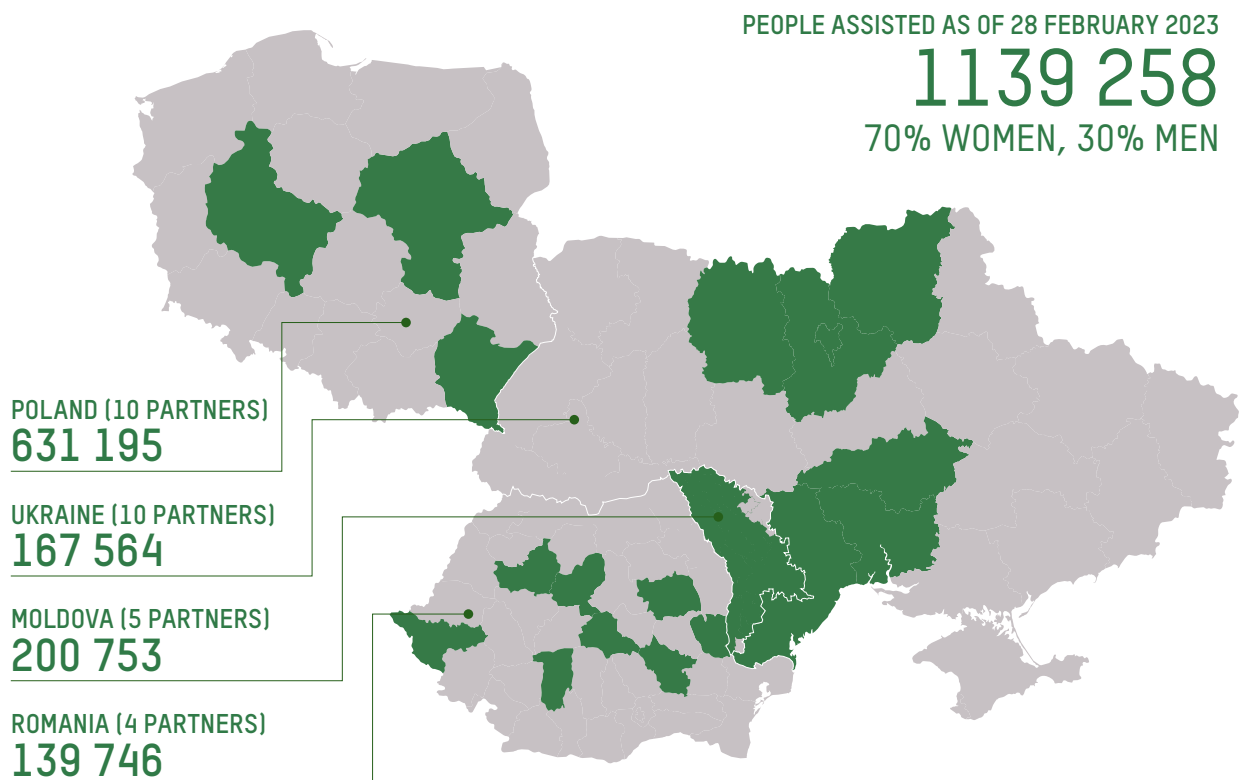


OXFAM

## A HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE LED BY LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

“Oxfam understands partnerships as mutually empowering relationships, which are aware of power imbalances and focused on mutual growth, organizational development, institutional strengthening and above all, on achieving impact. We believe that programs implemented in partnership increase the collective knowledge, skills, reach and experience applied to an issue or challenge.”

Oxfam’s Partnership Principles



Sixteen months ago, war escalated in Ukraine, causing a mass displacement of civilians unprecedented in Europe since the Second World War. Within a few weeks, millions of Ukrainians crossed the border to Poland, Romania, and Moldova, while millions more fled the fighting within the country.

The war triggered a geopolitical and humanitarian crisis. Both are still with us. Across the globe there was an outpouring of public concern and solidarity. The breadth and depth of human suffering was instantaneously apparent. It threatened to overwhelm those countries suddenly forced to respond and help.

The global humanitarian system – broadly: volunteers and communities, international and local civil society, state entities, the UN and multilateral agencies and donors – reacted, fast – relying on established protocols and relationships and experience, amid the inevitable confusions that crises-at-scale bring.

International agencies are always faced with hard decisions about what humanitarian crises they can or cannot respond to, driven by many different reasons. Some for instance, like Oxfam, did not have established teams or offices in Ukraine or neighboring countries, which threw up an immediate operational challenge.

“People cannot imagine how it was one year ago, nothing was working, no products, no services, no transport. We didn’t know when the supermarkets were open or even working. There were long queues in front of stores and elderly people were not able to stand for so many hours. We organized a transit shelter at the office and volunteers’ groups to go out to find, buy and distribute food to people. Without volunteering we would simply not have survived.”

Anna Leonova, Executive Director of Gay Alliance Ukraine

However, because the scale of suffering was so large and threatening, most agencies, like Oxfam, decided very quickly to mobilize in support. The immediate question Oxfam among others had to answer was: how could we best move, at speed, to provide the most appropriate support to those people who needed it most urgently?

We decided that the most principled and sustainable approach was to build a humanitarian response that was led by local civil society organizations on the ground in Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Moldova. Oxfam would complement that by direct implementation where we all agreed that would be more appropriate and efficient.

We considered that our response to the Ukraine war had to be consistent with the central tenets of the sector-wide reform to ‘change’ the way that international aid agencies work – shifting the balance so that local and national organizations are in the lead. This would be us “walking the talk”, as we are already doing in other contexts in which we operate.

In October 2022 Oxfam was one of five international non-government organizations to sign the “**Pledge for Change**” which included three core commitments:

- To forge equitable partnerships, for example, to directly implement only when Oxfam can add value to ensure people’s needs are met;
- To avoid portraying aid recipients as helpless victims – something that Oxfam has moved away from for some years now;
- To use our influence to change the power imbalances within the larger aid ecosystem.

We recognized that local and national actors had the best understanding of the complicated political, cultural, and geographical context. Most of them have the closest connection to ordinary people, because they are part of the communities themselves. This proximity helps them to respond in a quicker, more cost-effective and appropriate manner.

### Local leadership as a foundational pillar of Oxfam’s new humanitarian approach

This strategic change in approach is not new, but it is maturing.

Oxfam had previously signed up to the **Charter for Change** and the **Grand Bargain** in 2016 and 2017 respectively. This was our public commitment to create a more fair, effective, and sustainable system of humanitarian response by shifting power, resources, and hard skills to local and national humanitarian actors.

In 2018 we adopted a revised humanitarian approach that centers equitable partnering and local humanitarian leadership, along with gender and feminist principles, and prioritizing safe programming, stronger safeguarding and community engagement practices.





Refugees from Ukraine at the Medyka border crossing into Poland, March 2022. Photo: JB Russell/Panos/Oxfam

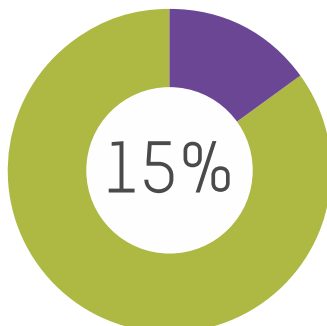
These commitments guide Oxfam's ways of working. They reflect our recognition that the power imbalance between international and local and national humanitarian actors means that these actors have often been underfunded and undervalued by the

humanitarian system. Despite their knowledge, experience, and skills, they are often treated as subcontractors rather than as true partners whose thinking and leadership is crucial from Day 1 and throughout an emergency response.

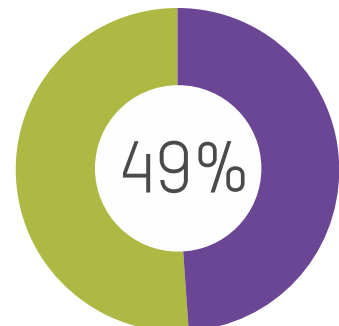
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ONE OF THE GRAND BARGAIN COMMITMENTS IS TO INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FUNDING THAT IS  
CHANNELED TO NATIONAL AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO 25%.

In 2022  
Oxfam's global  
humanitarian  
spend  
transferred  
to local and  
national NGOs/  
CSO was **15%**<sup>1</sup>.



From February 2022 to February  
2023, we spent **€17.7 million** in  
our humanitarian response to  
the Ukraine crisis.  
**49% has been spent** by  
national and international  
partners in Ukraine, Poland,  
Romania, and Moldova.



<sup>1</sup> Oxfam's global average is calculated on the basis of submissions by the following affiliates: Oxfam Great-Britain, Oxfam Novib (Netherlands), Oxfam Intermon (Spain), Oxfam America and Oxfam Australia.

Oxfam works in strong partnership in many other parts of the world. As an organization we are learning how we and our partners can best support each other in an effective and fair way. This learning has been adapted for the Ukraine context, as in each country that we work in, the context – and consequently, our partner relationships and collective program – is different.

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### The key principles of a partner-led response

#### ► Joint responsibility

Partners and Oxfam take mutual responsibility in setting the priorities of intervention based on humanitarian needs and have mutual accountability. Risks are proportionally shared and not just transferred.

#### ► Co-creation

Partners move from a role of implementing Oxfam's plan to a role of leading in designing and prioritizing the interventions based on evolving needs of the affected populations.

#### ► Flexibility and adaptability

As partners are leading the implementation of programs, they have the liberty to adjust targets, budgets, and timelines according to changing needs – provided we are aligned on operational modalities and quality standards.

#### ► Complementarity

Oxfam acknowledges that local and national organizations have strong capacities. Where partners are less familiar with humanitarian work, we provide financial and technical support as required, to ensure quality and accountability of the response.

#### ► Equity

Oxfam behaviors and practice in this response shift from a contractual partnership to an enabling way of working that is built on trust. The focus is on relationships as much as on contractual obligations.

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### A responsible and flexible response

In setting up a humanitarian response in Ukraine based on this equitable partnership model, Oxfam had to be genuinely flexible.

We had to ensure that the response met all the correct standards and commitments that make up our humanitarian mandate, and remain accountable to the affected communities, our partners, our donors and the many people who support us in our work.

We have had to adapt our ways of working as we go, transforming our systems and procedures and work on simplifying and lightening our processes, as much as we can. We focused on partnership conversations and invested in quality relationships – by scoping mutual interests, understanding the strengths and complementarities we each bring, identifying gaps, co-creating standards for the joint response, and enabling mutual assessment.

This takes time. We have had to accept that there have been inherent delays in establishing partnerships on a truly equal basis. We strove for mutual respect, trying not to impose our views on partners but instead be open to being challenged. We have tried to welcome dialogue and debate around our collective goals, results and impact. We have tried to recognize and respect differences, and we believe that this makes our collective response stronger.

"Thanks to Oxfam, we've been able to broaden the scope of our work, improve its quality and diversity, and strengthen our capacities. We can now provide a wide range of assistance to these people: cash, shelter, transport services, psychosocial and legal support, distribution of basic products. We are very grateful to have the opportunity to collaborate with Oxfam and to engage in a real partnership, not just funding relations."

Tetiana Kutas, Project Manager,  
The Tenth of April, Ukraine

In Poland and Ukraine, we filled an existing gap with our technical expertise and experience in water and sanitation. Where there were potential partners we took a different role – of facilitator and broker – to support with their own funding requirements and capacity building.

We believe that our partnership model has collectively allowed for the most effective way to get our resources to those people who most needed help. We have established partnerships that range from long-standing civil society organizations, community-based organizations and foundations to local authorities and government entities.

We have tried to work with our partners in a way that aligns with our feminist principles and ensuring that our programmes are impartial and inclusive. We actively sought out partners who support marginalized or vulnerable groups that are most at risk of discrimination such as LGBTQI+ associations or Roma-led organizations. We aimed to work particularly with women's rights and women-led organizations, to ensure that the rights of women and girls were given a central place in our collective response.

We brought not only resources, but also our own experience and knowledge. We contributed our expertise and lessons from other migration responses, and from our own history of delivering water and sanitation programmes in times of humanitarian crisis.

We brought our understanding of protection, focusing on gender rights, and how best the collective response might deliver cash and livelihoods assistance to people.

We responded to feedback from our partners to provide them with a support that has been tailored to their needs and helped them expand their work and strengthen their capacities and reach.

From March 2022 to February 2023, our partners have provided food, hygiene products, legal and psychosocial and cash assistance, organized safe transport and shelter, repaired damaged homes and restored livelihoods.

**Together we have supported more than 1.1 million people with vital humanitarian assistance across Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Moldova.**

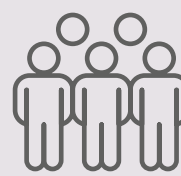
In the first year of the response Oxfam has worked with 29 organizations in Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Moldova, whose core missions are to provide support to the most vulnerable populations, such as legal aid, social assistance and integration activities. Among these organizations are:



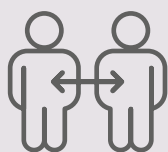
**4 Women-led organizations and women's rights organizations**



**2 Anti-trafficking organizations**



**3 Community-based organizations**



**2 LGBTQI+ organizations**



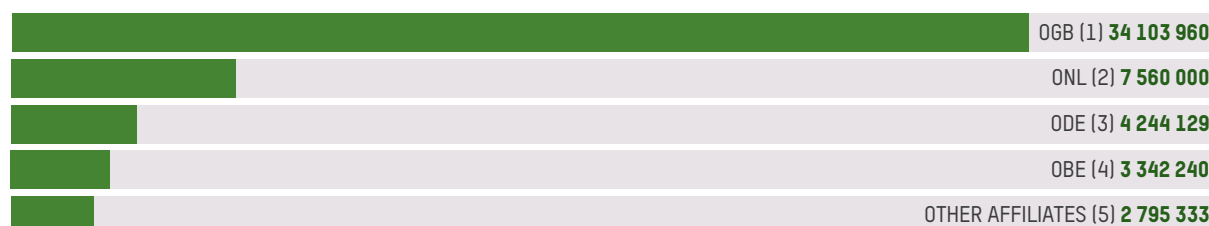
**2 Roma-led organizations**



**1 Youth organization**

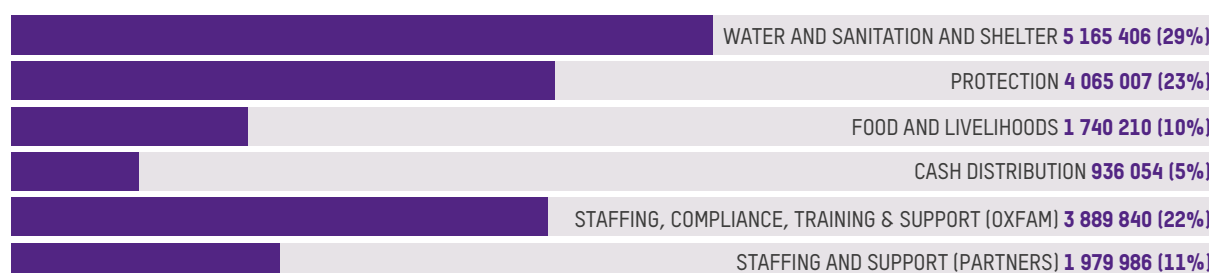
## FUNDING AND EXPENDITURE

Total funding for 3 years (2022–2025) **€52 045 662**



Total expenditure as of 28th February 2023 **€17 776 504**

Oxfam: 9 153 593 (51%) Partners: 8 622 910 (49%)



(1) Oxfam Great Britain's contribution includes funds received through the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) (€31.3m) and Ukraine Response Appeal Funds (€2.7m).

(2) 100% of Oxfam Novib's contribution comes from funds received through the consortium appeal fund Giro 555.

(3) Oxfam Germany's contribution includes funds received through the consortium appeal fund BEH (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft).

(4) 100% of Oxfam Belgium's contribution comes from funds received through the consortium appeal fund 12-12.

(5) Other affiliate contributions came from Oxfam Australia, Oxfam Quebec, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Intermon, Oxfam Denmark, Oxfam France, Oxfam New Zealand, and Oxfam America.



One year  
of collective  
impact





## RESTORING WATER

The war has broken or damaged large parts of Ukraine's water system. Water supply has been sporadically cut and water quality has deteriorated in many regions. Around 16 million people were in need of emergency water, sanitation and hygiene assistance last year alone.

In order to restore these essential services and minimise public health risks, Oxfam partnered with **Vodokanals** (public companies responsible for water systems) to ensure that a continuous water supply and sewage system were maintained throughout the conflict in affected communities and cities.

We have supported communal enterprises in Kyiv Oblast by providing water pumps, tanks, sewage cleaning machines, hand and power tools and other equipment necessary to improve water and sanitation services in their communities.

In the **Mykolaiv Oblast and city**, the main water source intake was destroyed, and the water distribution network damaged in several locations. We focused on setting up water stations to provide clean drinking water in collaboration with municipality authorities. These stations are situated in large housing complexes and in some institutions and municipality buildings.



Oxfam water points in Mykolaiv. Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam



70,000 people served  
by 33 water stations in Mykolaiv



€958 152  
total funding

Upon the return of the first families to Chernihiv Oblast, Oxfam also supported households in Novoselivka – one of the most destroyed communities – with 100 wooden latrines. These were urgently needed because people's homes had been damaged or in some cases destroyed totally, with no access to sanitary facilities as a result.

"Me and my husband live here in Mykolaiv. There were some water tanks nearby but the Oxfam water is much closer now. We had taps at home but the pipeline was damaged and we were cut off from the water. We had water trucks at the beginning. The piped water is now salty so we can't drink it. I come down to the water point once every two – three days. I have ten bottles at home that I keep refilling. We use this water for cooking and drinking and use the tapped water for washing."

Larisissa, 67, who lives in Mykolaiv.

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"There are 43 people under our care in our home, plus our employees, so about 70 people, who use this drinking water every day. We have a small neighbourhood here. People in need, especially the elderly, are coming to us. We share this water with local residents, we allow them to use it too. The water goes from a powerful stand-alone filter to the taps, so we use it by turning on those taps and that's it, the water is running. We've never had that before. We were not used to drinking water of such great quality from the tap."

Volodymyr Yakovlev, director of the St Nicholas House of Mercy Care Home, in the outskirts of Mykolaiv, where Oxfam has supplied a water treatment unit to provide safe drinking water.

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## SUPPORTING FARMERS AND SMALL BUSINESSES

According to the World Food Program estimates, 11 million people are food insecure in Ukraine.

The war has disrupted the country's agricultural supply chains and, alongside rising food prices, significantly impacted the livelihoods and food security of the population, with profound shocks on rural households that rely exclusively on agriculture. Over half of Ukraine's 14.7 million households are involved in small-scale agriculture production. They are increasingly affected by the conflict with many forced to scale down or abandon agricultural activities.

Since the onset of the conflict, **Rural Women Business Network** (RWBN), a local NGO supporting the empowerment and entrepreneurship of rural women, has endeavoured to protect rural livelihoods and support agricultural production to help ensure a continued supply of agricultural products to communities and markets.

Their aim is to support women's cooperatives in southern Ukraine and enable displaced women and men farmers who lost their income because of the war to restart their livelihoods.



Greenhouse supported by Oxfam partner Rural Women's Business Network (RWBN). Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam





€871 470

Rural Women Business Network's budget



€1 million

Bank Lviv and Oxfam's total budget to support 40 small businesses

Oxfam believes that one of the quickest and most effective ways of assisting Ukrainian people to rebuild their lives is via a thriving local economy. Through a unique partnership program with **Bank Lviv**, we support small businesses, selected on their ability to provide critical goods and services and job opportunities to vulnerable Ukrainians affected by the war, with micro-grants. Nine businesses from different sectors (including a bakery, a farm, a private clinic, and a printing company) are currently providing meals, shelter, medical care, educational activities and employment to displaced persons in Lviv and other locations in the west part of Ukraine. Cooperation with Bank Lviv is the first initiative for Oxfam in Ukraine in offering humanitarian support through social entrepreneurs in partnership with a commercial bank.

In Domenivka, in the North of Odesa, RWBN is distributing seeds and agricultural equipment to 1,000 local farmers and displaced people, so that they can grow their own vegetables and sell them on the local markets, which could benefit approximately 5,000 people from the community.

In partnership with Oxfam, RWBN also supports a local agricultural cooperative which manages four large greenhouses. Depending on the season, farmers there grow radishes, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbages and greens, some of which are used to supply schools and hospitals.

RWBN plans to install twelve more greenhouses soon and will support local growers with technical trainings on agronomy and organic vegetable production.

"It was very intensive contact with Oxfam in Ukraine. We spent some weeks developing the joint project idea and the Oxfam team was very responsive. Our core values and approach – to empower rural people, keep their dignity, and hand them proper instruments – led us to develop a partnership, and our idea was relevant to the mission of Oxfam in Ukraine. It's real partnership. We work like equal organisations."

Iryna Volovyk, Project Manager at RWBN

## REBUILDING HOMES AND LIVES

In the North of Ukraine, Oxfam collaborates with the **Anika Foundation, Because We Can and Rebuild Makariv**, three grassroots organizations that formed to support vulnerable families affected by the war.

Made up of neighbourhood volunteers and residents, they each coordinate the distribution of food and basic necessities and are engaged in rehabilitating and repairing destroyed homes. Rooted in their communities, their members are able to mobilize volunteers quickly to help because they have good knowledge of their community's needs, impacted locations and actors already on the ground.

These initiatives are organised through local community's work called "*tolokas*", a Ukrainian tradition of helping out neighbours, relatives and friends. *Toloka* is a process of free "one-time" working together in order to get a big task done most quickly, outside the working hours of volunteers.

Community-based organizations use *tolokas* to help people clear the ruins of bombed houses, replace windows and doors, repair roofs, fit electricity and undertake other repair works that don't require a big financial or material outlay.



Ana and her son Serhiy (name changed). Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam



858 windows and doors installed  
by community-based organizations during  
the winter period in Ukraine



18,500 people assisted  
with cash in Ukraine and Poland

As winter began and many families had lost their livelihoods, some their homes completely shattered or severely damaged, community-based organizations responded to the urgent need for replacement of damaged windows and doors as well as small repairs for the families already living in the damaged facilities.

“My house was completely destroyed on 12 March. I just had a strong feeling that day that I needed to leave, and I went to a friends’ shelter. The next day at 4am my house was destroyed. It was a very difficult situation when I saw the house, it was as if I had died but was still here. I had to just look at my child and care for him. He was crying he wanted to go home. We are back home now thanks to Anika, they helped with new windows and a door. It’s amazing to be back home but I’m so worried it could happen again.”  
Ana

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Providing **cash** in an emergency, instead of food, for example, enables people to prioritise their own needs and can help them recover faster. It’s the most dignified way of support that puts affected populations at the centre of the humanitarian response. In Ukraine, Oxfam prioritizes cash assistance as much as possible and through a partner-led approach. Our partner **Caritas Odesa** is providing cash to the most vulnerable families – people with disabilities, elderly, women-headed households etc. – who live in rural, isolated, or underserved areas outside the city of Odesa. Once selected and registered, they receive 2200 UAH (or €54) per month and per person for 3 months, through a direct transfer to their bank account. With this support they can access safe and nutritious food and meet other critical needs such as health and education.

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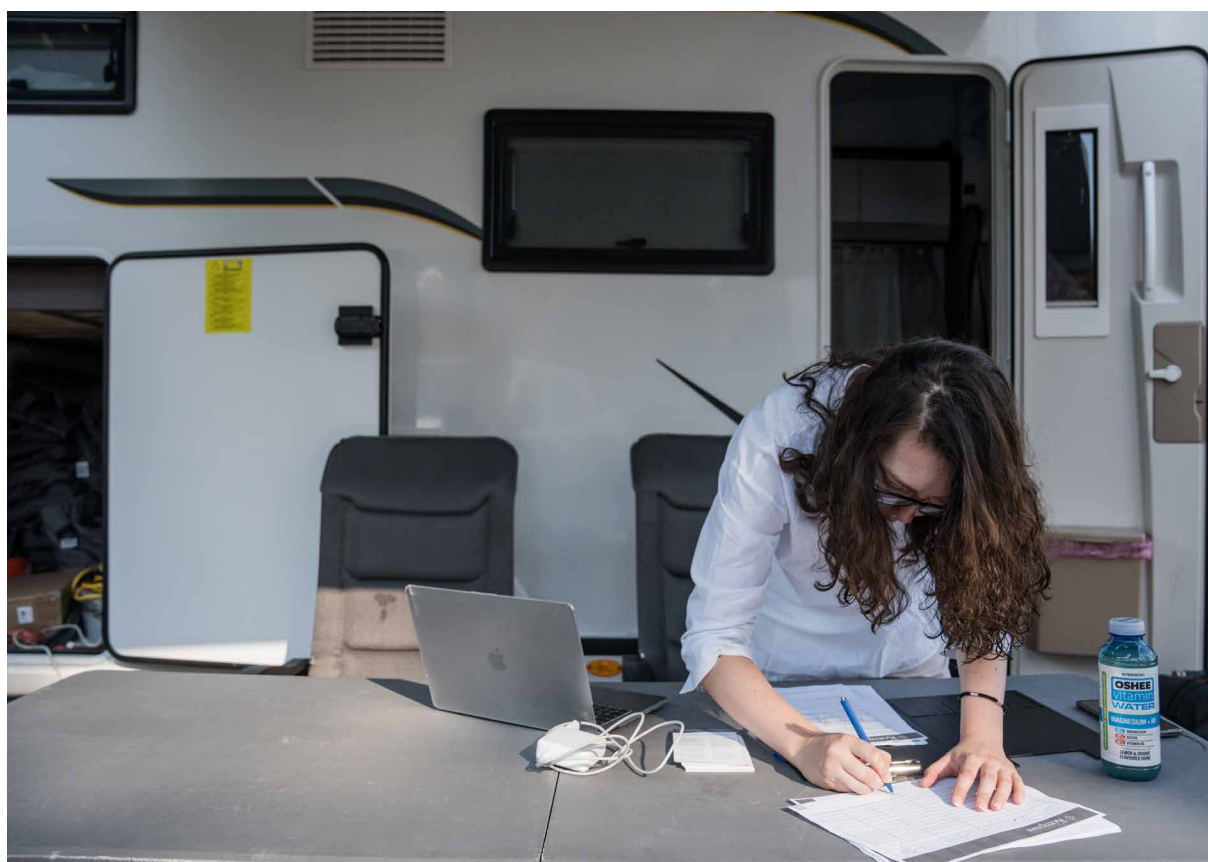
## PROTECTING WOMEN, GIRLS AND LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES

Women and children make up around 90 percent of Ukrainian refugees, and 60 percent of all internally displaced people in Ukraine.

One year after the escalation of the conflict, they continue to face life-threatening protection risks inside and outside Ukraine, including gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation and abuse and human trafficking. Risks of GBV are exacerbated in

informal shelters, reception and transit facilities, refugee accommodation centres, private accommodation and as women are forced to travel.

In Poland, which has one of the most restrictive laws on abortion and emergency contraception, refugees can struggle to access GBV, sexual and reproductive health services, safe shelter, affordable and adequate housing, childcare and livelihoods. Oxfam's partner



Tetiana, a 35-year-old social worker from Kyiv, is working with eLiberare, a Romanian association fighting against human trafficking and sexual exploitation. eLiberare has a mobile unit meant to travel around the country offering counselling sessions and prevention training to Ukrainian refugees in Romania. Photo: Ioana Moldovan/Oxfam



70% of total people assisted  
are women

In Poland, LGBTQIA+ refugees face barriers to finding jobs, housing, and other services because of gender discrimination and language obstacles. Oxfam local partner **Lamda Warszawa** — an organization with 26 years of experience working with LGBTQIA+ communities — has created a work center in Warsaw where these refugees can safely apply their skills as hairdressers, nail stylists, and tattoo artists. On weekends, the center transforms into a meeting place where queer individuals from Poland and Ukraine can share stories and experiences—a vital connection to community and mental health support.

**Fundacja Feminoteka**, an organization with 18 years of experience in Warsaw, provides safe shelter, psychological, therapeutic and medical support to refugee women and girls who have experienced violence, especially sexual violence.

In Moldova, our partner **La Strada** provides legal counselling and psychological support for women and children survivors of human trafficking and sexual violence, including refugees from Ukraine, through its mobile teams and hotlines. The organization also conducts specialized trainings for regional police to strengthen their capacities to respond to cases of sexual violence.

“The population that’s coming in are mainly women and children, and human trafficking is violence against women and children. Then we must consider the fact that these people don’t have their circles of safety anymore. If they get into a situation that they feel is risky, they would not be able to call someone for help. They don’t have their families and community because again, people were displaced.”

Ioana Bauer, President of the board at eLiberare

## SAFE ROUTES

Close to six million people are currently displaced within Ukraine.

Most people have been living away from their homes for more than six months. This can put them in a precarious financial situation as they are forced to eat into their life savings. Those still residing in collective centres and those separated from their families are among the most vulnerable.

People who have been forced to leave their homes – out of fear, insecurity, or if their houses have been damaged or destroyed – face losing their jobs. They

become more food insecure. This is made worse if entire close or extended families have been forced apart. Others face challenge with integration into the communities who host them.

The **Tenth of April** (TTA) is an organization that provides free legal aid, social and psychological assistance to refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons. With capacity strengthening support from Oxfam, they help internally displaced people to find safe routes away from danger, mainly from the south-east of the country. They provide people with cash



Yana, 34, lives in a shelter for displaced persons in Mykolaiv oblast. The Tenth of April helped to evacuate her and secure her a place in the shelter where she lives with her children. Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam





128,000 travel boxes distributed  
to refugees fleeing from  
southern Ukraine to Moldova



2,345 subscribers to the  
Kompas Telegram page

Romania is mainly a transit country for people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine. Many people will be crossing several borders, some without a clear sense of destination or without safe contacts waiting on the other side. This makes them more vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. Our partner **eLiberare** developed **Kompas**, a model of intervention that is assessing these risks and is designed to provide people on the move with constant information about available services, safe shelters, risks, emergency numbers, and hot lines until their final destination. The online service aims to ensure people's safety against trafficking and to map all refugees' movements in order to set up safe routes.

assistance, transport services, psychological aid, food and hygiene when needed, and ensuring safe and dignified accommodations at transit locations and access to documentation.

They also organise the management of collective shelters and provide small refurbishments to accommodation. One of these shelters is in Mykolaiv oblast, where around 200 people are currently living, including 60 children. Tenth of April provides all kinds of services for free, including food and hygiene products. They accompany families until they are settled in a place where they can feel safe, find reliable sources of food, and be more securely and safely settled, including helping them with papers and transport.

"I am from the Kherson region. I have three young children. We spent nine months there under occupation, we couldn't leave at all, because there was shelling and we were living in the basement. We were constantly afraid. We hardly ever went out and our children didn't go out either. We had to leave our village under fire. People from our village gave us the Tenth of April's phone number. They have helped us a lot, providing accommodation, food, bedding, everything we needed for basic necessities."

Yana

## SAFE SPACES

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, 8 million people have sought safety in other countries in Europe, including 1.7 million in Poland, Romania, and Moldova.

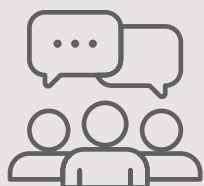
This refugee crisis has been first and foremost a protection crisis, with specific concerns about unequal treatment of refugees who are from certain minority groups, like the Roma, marginalized communities like LGBTQIA+ or those facing particular vulnerabilities, such as people with disabilities, elderly and women survivors of gender-based violence.

Our partners have focused on providing specialised and dignified assistance to these vulnerable groups, ensuring they have access to protection and support to meet their basic needs. They have helped people with social integration, by creating livelihood opportunities and facilitating cultural access.

In Moldova, the **Women's Law Center** has deployed mobile teams – covering approximately 70% of the country – providing multidisciplinary services to refugees staying in host communities, including individual legal counselling, psychosocial, social and



Laura, Roma refugee from Ukraine, Moldova. Photo: Lottie Stevenson/Oxfam



11 mobile teams operating  
throughout Moldova



36,031 people assisted with  
multi-support across the 4 countries

cash assistance. This work not only helps refugees to integrate both in the medium- and long-term, but also to prevent and respond to cases of gender-based violence.

In Bucharest, our partner **Carousel** manages a shelter for refugees who are presenting compound vulnerabilities, and who no longer possess the financial means to sustain themselves. They provide housing, food, clothing, and hygiene items. Through its mobile teams, Carousel is also supporting refugees living in private accommodation and who need basic necessities and specialized support.

"We didn't have time to take any memories. We were very scared. We just ran. I left in what I was wearing. I just wanted to save my kids. I brought just one bag with our documents in and another small bag with food and clothes for the youngest. I didn't take anything else for the other children because there were bombs, and rockets, and shooting."

Laura

Since the onset of the war, the Warsaw-based **Towards Dialogue Foundation**, has actively provided different kinds of help for Roma refugees. Due to discrimination, language barriers and cultural differences, they face more challenges getting the help they need than other displaced people, including unequal access to accommodation and other reception services. With Oxfam's support, the Foundation runs a day centre, which provides Ukrainian Roma refugees with psychological, legal, and administrative support, job search assistance, cultural and learning activities. The organization has built a network of experienced volunteers, social assistants, and cultural mediators, who understand the Romani cultural context and help them feel safe and respected.



# Partnerships as a mutual learning process



**Partnerships lie at the core of how Oxfam understands the world and our role in working for change. They provide a continuous opportunity for systematic shared learning, increasing our collective knowledge, skills, experience and impact.**

Learning, used wisely, can help us to improve the quality of our programmes, our coordination and collaboration with others, building up our understand of the factors that condition successful partnerships and ensuring that we are collectively providing appropriate and timely assistance.

Learning can also help us to self-reflect as an organisation and as a sector, about what we need to change, not only in the short term but also to ensure that we are truly living in line with humanitarian principles and our organisational values.

Partnerships can be challenging. We strive to learn from them, in the hope that they evolve and grow stronger.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Setting up a partner-centered response to the Ukraine crisis – whilst needing to be swift in a region where Oxfam did not previously have staff or offices – hasn't come without operational challenges.

Despite these, we have set up four country programmes and established formal partnerships with 29 different local civil society organizations in less than a year, whilst embracing a rich diversity of mandates and expertise. Working together with such a variety of actors, in a wide range of areas and in a diverse set of relationships requires resources and flexibility on multiple levels.

We strive to respect the mandate and space of our partners. We recognize that they bring different capacities and resources and accept that they may not share all our views, all of the time. For instance, some of our partners can have a broader focus of longer-term humanitarian needs, with a stronger emphasis on rebuilding resilient communities.

While respecting these differences, sufficient common ground must be found for our partnerships with others to be viable and built on shared vision, values and objective to assist those affected by the

ongoing conflict. We need to get the balance right between respecting the institutional autonomy and independence of each partner organization and ensuring that we stay committed to our own mandate and principles as a global organisation.

Accountability is extremely important to us. By listening to feedback from our partners, we can ensure that we complement each other in an agile way and are able to make changes that facilitate their work, such as more flexible reporting and more tailored planning for ways of working together. This learning can also help us to improve the way that we work globally.

*"Oxfam has been an understanding partner, understanding the context, also understanding the fact that the situation on the ground is changing. This partnership with Oxfam has been a learning curve and trying to better shape the type of response that we have, maximise the intervention and cover the needs that these refugees have."*

Vlad Levente Viski, Executive Director of MozaiQ, Romania<sup>2</sup>

Working with a wide range of partners brings a depth and richness to the humanitarian response to the Ukraine crisis, but it is also demanding as we need to tailor our support to partners based on their needs. This can mean a range of different bespoke ways of working, which requires a lot of flexibility from Oxfam.

Some of our partners did not have humanitarian experience before the war. They decided to leap into a steep learning process, while massively scaling-up their own work to cope with the large numbers of displaced people they were required to help. They too had to adapt their response to the often fast-changing needs and conditions on the ground.

<sup>2</sup> MozaiQ is a community organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life for LGBTQIA+ people in Romania and has been supported by Oxfam from May to August 2022.



We offered support in our core sectors of expertise, but we also need to increase our resources, capacities and skill sets in our teams to support our partners in a way that suits them and facilitates their work. This can be challenging in areas where we don't have the technical expertise.

**SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM IMPACT:  
OXFAM'S SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIPS**

Flexibility as an essential condition to successful partnerships also means for Oxfam the ability to adapt to a changing context. We are required to exit from our leadership and operational roles in humanitarian interventions as soon as knowledgeable and responsible local and national actors can take them on, while remaining committed to provide longer term support and continuity for partner organisations.

While our partners in Romania have focused over the past year on providing basic humanitarian assistance, people's needs have evolved since the beginning of the crisis and mainly now relate to social integration and cohesion, and inclusion of refugees from Ukraine in the host countries' public social protection systems.

This change of context and scale of the response has driven Oxfam to prepare for a gradual phase-out from Romania, with all programs to close by August 2023. We have involved our partners in the co-design, development and implementation of an accountable and efficient exit plan. We will support them to strengthen their humanitarian response and networks and institutional capacities. This will help us establish a model for a responsible humanitarian phase-out from the other response countries.



Nadiya Pavlenko, 75, assesses the damage caused by shelling and bombardments in Novoselivka village, Chernihiv oblast, north of Ukraine.  
Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam

Our objective is to ensure our partners can sustain the long-term impact of their programs with refugees and vulnerable people, regardless of our presence in the country. In Romania, we aim to leave behind a positive humanitarian footprint and a strengthened civil-society network, establishing the foundation for longer-term resiliency. Oxfam will remain prepared to re-scale our programming in the country if the conflict in Ukraine intensifies and refugee numbers resurge.

Oxfam's humanitarian response in Ukraine and neighbouring countries is the first large-scale partner-led response of its kind in a region where Oxfam had no presence before, covering four countries and involving 29 partners. This response has already reached more than 1.1 million people in the first year, compared to the initial ambition of reaching 1.5 million in a three-year response.

We applied different partnership modalities, lightened our processes, adapted our ways of working, and learned from the challenges we encountered at each stage. But we need to go further, move towards a more long-term and structured approach and invest in making our partners stronger and more sustainable.

Local and national organizations in Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Moldova were the first to respond when the conflict escalated in Ukraine. They remain the main providers of humanitarian aid today. Their future as agencies is an area of concern because they have had to restructure, and grow quickly, and operate at a scale they had never reached before. Humanitarian donors need to increase their investment in the institutional and organizational capacities of local organisations so they become more robust and can

continuously improve their role and share in the overall global humanitarian response.

"In a few months, we went from an organization of 20 people to 120 people. This means finding new offices, more paperwork, more training. Unfortunately, the basic needs of an organization are not a priority for donors and international players. If we want to continue to provide high quality aid, we must stabilize ourselves and we don't have money for that. We need more institutional support."

Viktoriya Gora, Project Manager,  
Caritas Odesa, Ukraine

This means advocating for more direct access to funding for national and local organizations, increasing the amount of our own humanitarian funding that is channelled directly to these organizations and introducing them to our own donors for direct financial support. Strengthening their participation and representation in international coordination mechanisms is also essential so they can contribute to shape the humanitarian debate and priorities.

In February 2023 Oxfam co-organized a **national conference on localization of the humanitarian response** held in Kyiv. The workshop brought together representatives from over 200 local and national civil society actors, volunteer networks, international non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, donor governments and Ukrainian authorities. It represents an effort to engage more



**One year of war in Ukraine.** 24 February 2023 marked the first year since the war started in Ukraine. A year that shattered the lives of Ukrainians and forced millions to flee. But a year that also built an incredible solidarity between citizens, supported by the dedication of local civil society organizations and volunteers, who had to scale-up their work quickly in the most challenging of conditions. One year on, Oxfam **heard the stories** of those who have been at the forefront of the response to this crisis from day one.



diverse national and local actors in a dialogue on localization in general, as well as a desire to raise awareness about specific global commitments that donors and international agencies have made to empower locally-led humanitarian responses.



Oxfam organized the **webinar “We are not alone”**, which connected national and local women’s organizations from Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina to share experiences from their work during war. The conversation covered three topics: solidarity and networking amongst women’s organisations; decision-making and spaces for influence; increase in gender-based violence and access to services. It has contributed to encouraging local humanitarian leadership and empowering local women’s voices in decision-making processes, as well as improving the way the humanitarian system interacts with and supports local organizations in Ukraine.

The discussions and outcomes of the conference were compiled into a joint statement, which included key recommendations about how to strengthen support for local and national non-governmental actors engaged in humanitarian action across Ukraine. The main priorities included establishing a structured approach to facilitate direct dialogue between international actors and local civil society groups, and the importance of increasing flexible and decentralized support to local organizations.

Having a partner-centered response to the Ukraine crisis was a principled and ethical decision in line with Oxfam’s localization commitments and our vision of local humanitarian leadership. This demanded a significant change in the definition of our role and ways of working, in order to promote a more inclusive and representative humanitarian system and address the unequal balance of power and access to funding between international and local actors.

If we want this role to be successful in supporting genuinely equitable collaborations among international and local actors, the Ukraine crisis cannot be the only occasion to do things differently. Oxfam believes that this humanitarian response model must be replicated everywhere to support sustainable recovery and preparedness for future crises, and to encourage a more resilient, independent, and diverse civil society that works in real solidarity with international organizations.

## OXFAM'S PARTNERS IN UKRAINE, POLAND, ROMANIA AND MOLDOVA\*

### UKRAINE

#### Women's Consortium of Ukraine (WCU)

The WCU unites 45 women's non-governmental organizations and has 15 branches in Ukraine. It plays a coordinating role in advocacy, training, and education initiatives aimed at strengthening the principles of equal opportunities for women and men, as well as child rights, in the country.

#### Rural Women Business Network (RWBK)

The purpose of the RWBN is to protect the rights and interests of rural women, to support their empowerment, equal economic participation, leadership, access to education and health care, and participation in local governments' decision-making processes.

#### Caritas Odesa

Caritas Odesa is the Ukrainian member of the organizations Caritas Internationalis and Caritas Europe. With more than 30 branches in the country, its purpose is to assist the most vulnerable, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, social status or other characteristics.

#### Gay Alliance Ukraine (GAU)

The main purpose of Gay Alliance Ukraine is to increase the level of tolerance in Ukrainian society, to promote the full realization of human rights for the LGBTIQ+ community in Ukraine and beyond, and to promote the establishment of equality of all people and respect for people's freedom.

#### The Tenth of April ("Desyate Kvitnya")

The mission of The Tenth of April is to ensure access to rights for everyone in need and make laws and international obligations work. It has been providing free legal aid to refugees and asylum seekers, in partnership with the UNHCR, as well as psychosocial support and cash grants to people whose safety is at risk.

#### Because We Can, Anika Foundation and Rebuild Makariv

Community-based organizations that provide support to people directly affected by the war in the Chernihiv and Makariv regions. They help clean the ruins of destroyed or severely damaged homes, rebuild houses, repair roofs and install windows, and provide families in difficult conditions with everything they need to survive the winter.

#### Rokada

An organization that has been involved in supporting refugees and asylum seekers and since February 2022 has extended their support to displaced people and other population affected by the conflict. They provide with inclusive social and other protection services, community engagement activities, basic needs and shelter.

#### Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv

An organization supporting people in need in Kharkiv city and oblast with hygiene kits, food and non-food items and hot meals. The organization operates four humanitarian centers, in which they also provide psychosocial support and other relevant services such as warm places in winter time for people affected by destruction of infrastructure.

## POLAND

### Homo Faber Association

Homo Faber is a human rights organisation specialized in anti-discrimination and integration of migrants. They have two main programmes, which focus on providing legal advice to migrants and asylum seekers and integration for migrants in Lublin.

### Fundacja Centrum Badań Migracyjnych (Migrant Info Point – MIP)

Migrant Info Point is an information clearing house and assistance program for immigrants living in Poznan and vicinity. MIP offers legal advice as well as integration activities such as Polish language courses and professional counselling and training.

### Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej (SIP)

SIP is a human rights organisation which supports refugees and migrants, including held in detention centres. They provide legal aid and advice and seek social cohesion by promoting the equality of all people in the face of the law.

### Stowarzyszenie Lepszy Świat (The Better World)

Better World provides social assistance, supports education and offers volunteer support. They have been involved in pro-migration activities since 2013, supporting refugees in Poland and around the world.

### Fundacja w Stronę Dialogu (Foundation Towards Dialogue)

Towards Dialogue is a Roma-led organization working on integration and awareness raising related to Roma issues. They assist Roma and other marginalized and vulnerable groups at risk of exclusion and create educational programs about minorities.

### Fundacja Feminoteka (Feminoteka Foundation)

Feminoteka is a feminist and gender-based violence response organization. They run a helpline for women experiencing violence, offer free legal, psychological and therapeutic support and campaign to change the law and society.

### Ukrainian House Przemysl

Ukrainian House is supporting the integration of migrants into Polish society. They work to preserve the cultural identity of Ukrainian minority, promote Ukrainian culture, organize language trainings, and offer legal support to Ukrainians arriving in Poland.

### Fundacja Aktywizacji i Integracji.

FAI is member of a federation of organizations which works on integration and mobilization of people at risk of social exclusion (people with disabilities, seniors, people at risk of homelessness) and addresses the issue of homelessness for refugees.

### Migration Konsorcjum

The Migration Consortium is a group of 9 organizations giving support to immigrants and refugees in different regions throughout Poland by providing legal and integration support, advocacy work and campaigns.

### Stowarzyszenie Lambda Warszawa (Lambda Warsaw Association)

Lambda Warszawa has been active in supporting and creating a positive image of the LGBTQI+ community in Poland since 1997. They are working on providing LGBTQI+ Ukrainian refugees with safe working space and opportunities through an integrated protection program.

## ROMANIA

### eLiberare

eLiberare is involved in prevention, early detection and awareness raising around human trafficking. It helps build the capacities of local authorities and civil society organizations to prevent and respond to cases of human trafficking.

### The Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania (PATRIR)

One of the leading centres of expertise in peacebuilding and peace education and is involved in gender-based violence and anti-trafficking counselling, training and prevention.

### Carusel

A human rights organization promoting and ensuring that the most vulnerable people receive both immediate and long-term support, enjoy equal opportunities and become visible to society.

### easyECO

An inclusive and feminist organization combating any form of exclusion and discrimination and focusing on responding to the needs of women, Roma and LGBTIQ+ individuals and communities residing in state-run shelters.

## MOLDOVA

### Women's Law Center (WLC)

The WLC's mission is to contribute to the promotion of gender equality and to prevent and combat gender-based violence in Moldova by raising public awareness, building the capacity of relevant actors, providing services to assist and protect women, and conducting research and analysis.

### Amici dei Bambini (AiBi)

The AiBi Association's mission is to support abandoned children and to promote every child's right to a family through adoption. Over the past 15 years, it has been developing socio-educational programs in order to contribute to the integration of children from disadvantaged families and boarding schools.

### Centrul de Drept al Avocatilor (CDA - Law Center of Advocates)

The LCA's mission is to promote respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international protection, stateless persons, people at risk of becoming stateless, and foreigners in need (including foreigners in detention).

### La Strada

La Strada is a non-governmental human rights organisation that supports the rights of women and children to stay free from violence through research, legal expertise, counselling and representation, capacity building programs and development of toolkits, with a special focus on anti-trafficking strategy in Moldova.

### Y-PEER Moldova

Y-PEER Moldova is a youth led organization and the Moldovan member of the Y-PEER global network. Its mission is to promote youth health education, especially reproductive and sexual health education, youth leadership and global citizenship education, targeting both rural Moldovan host community and refugee youth from Ukraine.





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Front cover photo:

Refugees arriving at a registration center, Poland.

Photo: Tineke D'haese/Oxfam

Page 8:

Oxfam water points in Mykolaiv, Ukraine.

Photo: Kieran Doherty/Oxfam

Page 21:

Jenya, Ukrainian refugee, working as a volunteer in a reception center in Rzeszow, Poland, April 2022.

Photo: Tineke D'haese/Oxfam

Back cover photo:

Toilets for disabled people installed at the Medyka border crossing into Poland, April 2022.

Photo: Tineke D'haese/Oxfam



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