

## ENHANCING SUPPORT SYSTEM: IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING SERVICE GAPS IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN GEORGIA

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**Abstract.** The war in Ukraine changed hundreds of millions of lives. Families have been displaced, communities have been disrupted and the region's social fabric has been significantly altered. The consequences of this conflict extend far beyond geographical boundaries, touching the lives of not only those directly affected by the war but also resonating on a global scale. As we delve into the complexities of this conflict and its aftermath, it becomes clear that understanding its implications requires a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted challenges and transformations that have emerged. This exploration is crucial to shedding light on the experiences of those affected and developing strategies for addressing the far-reaching consequences of the war in Ukraine. More than 180,000 citizens of Ukraine have entered the territory of Georgia since February 24, 2022 (UNHCR, 2023). As of November 2022, around 25,000 remain in Georgia. Around 25% of Ukrainians staying in Georgia are minors. The present study aims to investigate and describe the needs assessment process among refugees with disabilities from Ukraine and gaps in response to this crisis from the volunteering organization in Tbilisi.

**Keywords:** *Civil society organizations (CSOs), humanitarian response, volunteers, people with disabilities, refugees from Ukraine, protection system in Georgia.*

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### 1. Introduction

Since the launch of the military offensive by Russia on 24 February 2022, more than 8 million Ukrainians have been forced to flee to neighboring countries and offered temporary protection by all EU countries, while an additional estimated 5,3 million people have been displaced internally. As of April 2023, around 24,000 refugees from Ukraine are residing in Georgia. Due to Georgia's geographical location and the challenges for some to exit Ukraine from the west, many Ukrainians arrive in Georgia from heavily devastated, non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine via the border with Russia. The Government of Georgia extended the visa-free stay for citizens of Ukraine for up to two years. United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023) reports on the displacement patterns and demographics of Ukrainian refugees in Georgia that consist of around 25% of Ukrainians staying are minors, 9% of those over 60, and 62% of adults are female. Healthcare remains a significant priority for Ukrainian refugees. Up to 34% of respondents reported that they have a household member with a

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severe and chronic illness, 7% reported disability, while pregnant/lactating women comprise 6% of respondent`s households. Of the families that have a member with a disability, in 86% of cases, the individuals have an official documentation/disability card.

The war in Ukraine prompts the emergence of critical roles for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in addressing the pressing needs and services of refugees. As the conflict drives an influx of displaced individuals into neighboring regions, CSOs play a pivotal role in providing humanitarian aid and psychosocial support and facilitating the integration of refugees into host communities (Asian Development Bank, 2008). This challenging context necessitates the adaptive evolution of CSOs to effectively respond to the dynamic and complex needs of the displaced population, reinforcing the indispensable nature of their contributions during times of crisis.

The article aims to explore the support system for Ukrainian refugees with disabilities and identify gaps in response to an example of civil society organizations in Georgia.

## **2. Methodology**

For this research, we used a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights from refugees and key stakeholders. Specifically, we conducted: (1) Sammy structured interviews with members of civil society organizations (N=26) who assist refugees from Ukraine, counting people with disabilities, in Georgia. We also provided an online questionnaire for Ukrainian refugees with disabilities, that fled border and staying in Georgia (N=114). (2) Case study of activities of the single case volunteering organization “Volunteers Tbilisi.” (3) In addition, we studied different information sources about Ukrainian refugees. We gathered secondary data through websites, Telegram chats and Facebook groups of national and international agencies involved in refugee assistance to Ukrainians. This is a preliminary result and the data evaluation is still in process. Our design applies to the following criteria: to be very natural and realistic in interpreting the qualitative data collected during interviews. Our strategies for picking the data are based on these factors and thus, we will provide many citations in this article.

## **3. Desperate vital needs of Ukrainian refugees**

The reports showed that the demographic profile of the refugees (and hence their needs) was evolving. For example, there were differences between the early and later waves of refugees. The more recent groups of refugees arrived after enduring weeks of conflict and challenging conditions in Ukraine and may, therefore, be more vulnerable. According to the Care Caucasus Rapid Needs Assessment Report (CARE Caucasus, 2022), the top priority needs named by respondents are:

1. Affordable accommodation;
2. Food;
3. Healthcare / Medicine;
4. Covering utility costs;
5. Clothing;
6. 36% of respondents felt they did not receive enough information about available assistance and services.

Refugee awareness of available services is limited, mainly affecting people with disabilities. 43% of respondents thought they were not receiving enough information about available assistance and services. Information about health care services was highlighted as unclear and insufficient by 44% of respondents (UNHCR, 2022).

Did you receive from humanitarian organizations information or education about your rights as a human being with a disability?

From 114 Ukrainian refugees who have disabilities or chronic illness to the question	
67 / 58.77%	47 / 41.23%
No, we were not given any information	Yes, information sessions were held with us or reported about people's rights in a different way with disabilities among refugees Frequency Percentage

**Figure 1.** Access people with disabilities among Ukrainian refugees to receive information about their rights

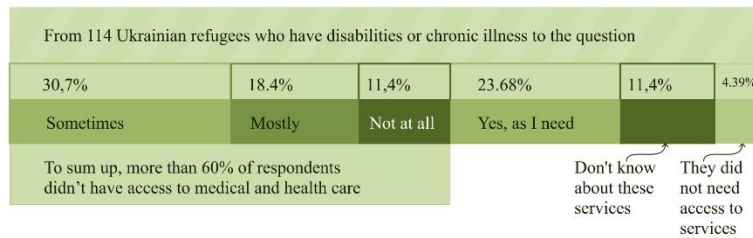
Figure 1 shows the result of a survey of 114 Ukrainian disabled persons among refugees regarding access to health care. The lack of health services worsens the risk of chronic disease treatment disruption. Another concern was the risk of infectious diseases. Also, refugees experience significant psychological distress due to family separation, loss, fear and future worries. There was also the issue of how vulnerable groups with specific needs were catered for, such as those with complex needs or disabilities (WHO, 2023).

I want to emphasize the difference between the humanitarian aid given to people with disabilities and those without. The most essential, of course, are medical services. In Georgia, they are relatively high. The citizens get medical insurance that covers the cost of the medical price. In the case of refugees, it is impossible. The referral program between medical institutions and the Department of Health of Georgia that was kept on stating earlier stages of migration now does not work.

Protection threats included family separation, loss of support networks, mental health trauma, potential discrimination, limited services and resources access and gender-based violence risks.

Data collection also needs enhancement, as information flows from frontline providers must be completed. The monitoring and surveillance of refugee health required standards, too. This makes it challenging to capture refugee needs accurately. As refugee health needs continue to change, further follow-up multisectoral needs assessments will be required. In Figure 2, the data from interviews with refugees can observe access to medical services for people with disabilities. From 114 Ukrainian refugees who have disabilities or chronic illness to the question “In the past six months, how often were you able to access the health care services you needed?”, 30,7% of respondents said “Sometimes”, 18,4% - said “Mostly” and “Not at all” – 11,4% and only 4,4% didn’t need the access to the services. To sum up, more than 60% of respondents did not have access to medical and health care.

In the past six months, how often were you able to access the health care services you needed?



**Figure 2.** Access to medical services and health support among Ukrainian refugees in Georgia

The refugee situation in Georgia is less tense than in 2022, but it will inevitably require long-term solutions. Within this context, there has been growing attention on developing civil society organizations' professional skills to respond to the country's many challenges with refugees.

#### 4. Government and Nongovernment protection of refugees

In Georgia, we notified the main types of stakeholders (government and nongovernment) that provide humanitarian assistance and support.

*Government support* presented several institutions. One of the leading players is The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labor, and Social Affairs of Georgia (IDP agency). The Law on the Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories of Georgia was adopted in 1996. In the same year, the Ministry of IDPs and Resettlement of Georgia comprised the Department of Issues of the Internally Displaced Persons and the Department of Migration Issues, Resettlement and Refugees (Chelidze, 2013). This agency regulates the issues related to obtaining asylum in Georgia. The Law provides international protection for refugees with humanitarian status and status of a person under temporary protection. (State Commission on Migration Issues, 2024).

The most essential analysis for understanding service gaps is the Georgia government's support of Ukrainian refugees. For those, we analyzed Georgia's experience in hosting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). As claimed by Natia Chelidze (2013), since the 1990s, Georgia has been facing one of its most severe problems: the resettlement and socioeconomic integration of internally displaced persons from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region who fled as a result of internal armed conflicts. All essential government responses highlighted in Government Decrees: #1 Government Decree #1254 "On the socio-economic support measures for citizens of Ukraine and persons with the right to permanent residence in Ukraine who entered Georgia due to the hostilities in Ukraine"; #2 Decree #387 "Providing Medical Services for Ukrainian Refugees", extended till August 2023. The government continues to provide financial assistance of 300 GEL (100 EUR) per family and 45 GEL (15 EUR) per person for vulnerable Ukrainians who entered Georgia before 15 July 2022 and were accommodated in hotels. Post 15 July arrivals, this support and cash assistance are limited and restricted. So, that decreases the number of individual refugees and households with access to financial assistance. Another challenge is access to medical services. The Ministry of

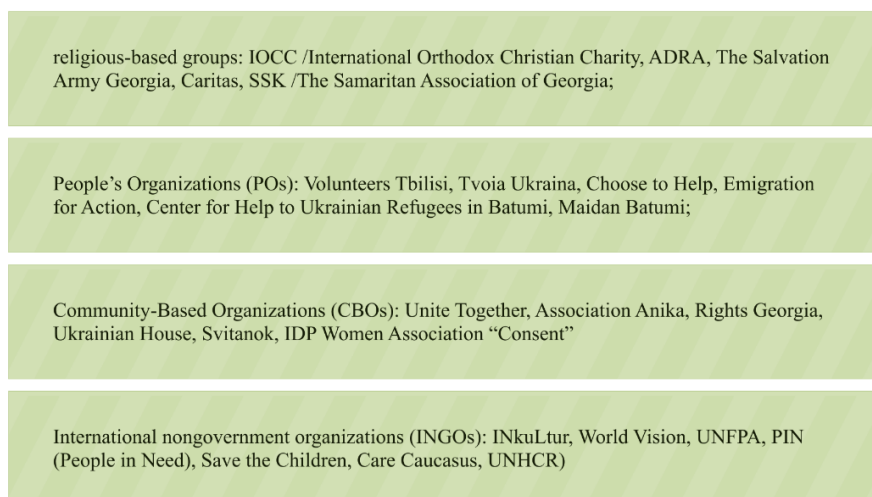
Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labor and Social Affairs of Georgia amended Decree #387. Within the decree, medical services are provided till the end of 2023, within the framework of the state programs, to the citizens of Ukraine who entered Georgia as of 1 February 2022 until May 2023 and who have stayed permanently in Georgia, namely immunization treatment of tuberculosis and HIV infection/AIDS, including the provision of specific medicines; maternal and child healthcare, including antenatal care and new-born screening; mental health; diabetes management; dialysis; treatment of patients with rare diseases and patients requiring permanent replacement therapy; COVID management, including tests, vaccination, outpatient and inpatient care, referral services – emergency medical services, including labor, emergency vaccination. However, according to the Decree, primary healthcare and consultations with family doctors are not covered for those Ukrainians without a humanitarian status. The same standards apply to foreign citizens regarding access to referral programs only for surgeries and other severe or urgent interventions. Overall, we have a different picture comparing this observation of UNHCR (2022) of the government of Georgia's medical response to refugees against responses.

Traditionally, we used the term NGO – *Nongovernment Organization for our study or CSO – Civil Society Organization*. Following the invasion of Ukraine and the arrival of Ukrainians in Georgia, many local refugee-led initiatives were established to provide humanitarian and psycho-social assistance to those in need. Volunteer groups sprang up and offered support despite facing precarious funding during the second year of the war in Ukraine. These organizations persist in assisting hundreds of refugees at their assistance points. Ukrainians also established various community support platforms and civil society organizations. These refugee-led organizations play a significant role in identifying and addressing the practical and psychological needs of Ukrainian refugees in Georgia, developing strategies and networks to help with further inclusion and integration as the situation evolves. International NGOs are also stepping up to strengthen the capacity of these organizations. NGOs and CSOs have increasingly committed to supporting refugees from Ukraine in Georgia.

We agree with explaining main definitions, some scholars argue that “Civil society organizations (CSOs) are non-state actors whose aims are neither to generate profits nor to seek governing power.” (Asia Development Bank, 2008). Nongovernment Organizations (NGOs) have traditionally used the term “NGO” almost synonymously with “CSO” to include all not-for-profit organizations that are independent of the State. Nowadays, the term “NGO” refers more narrowly to professional, intermediary, and nonprofit organizations that provide or advocate the provision of services relating to economic and social development, human rights, public welfare or emergency relief. In our study, we try to classify NGOs that aid Ukrainian refugees as religious-based groups organized around a place of religious worship or congregation, a specialized religious institution or a registered or unregistered institution with a religious character or mission. People's Organizations (POs) are grassroots volunteer organizations that advance their members' economic and social well-being. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) – CBOs are generally organized to address the immediate concerns of their members directly. Among operational CSOs, one can distinguish between international nongovernment organizations (INGOs), usually headquartered in developed countries and national-level NGOs, whose attention is directed toward issues and interests in the countries where they are based. All CSOs aim to develop an inclusive society for

sustainable development with the involvement of local communities and sustainable livelihoods for them (Lobo, 2011).

We studied the following types of CS organizations to analyze their gaps and strengths (see in Figure 3):



**Figure 3.** Types of civil society organizations presented in Georgia

CSOs can make numerous positive contributions to individual projects and development (Civil Society Organization sourcebook, 2008). Such contributions include:

1. Mobilizing resources in ways that the state alone cannot;
2. Educating and motivating people to address social and environmental challenges;
3. Facilitating citizen participation in development initiatives;
4. Promoting compelling, honest, legitimate and responsive government through public scrutiny and advocacy-based activities;
5. Strengthening the government's links with the overall population;
6. Giving voice and assistance to underprivileged and marginalized populations and responding to local needs;
7. Serving as a partner in cases in which countries are suffering from armed conflict or civil strife;
8. Providing frank perspectives on the potential effects of policies and projects, as well as possible measures for improvement;
9. Training leaders, disseminating information and researching public policy challenges.

In addition to those organizations in Figure 3, according to the briefing note World Vision (June, 2023), several organizations are highlighted, showcasing diverse activities aimed at supporting different demographics among the Ukrainian refugee population. For example, the Alliance of the Georgian-Ukrainian Commonwealth provides Ukrainian women language courses and employment support. The Foundation of Economic Education of Georgia operates a kindergarten for Ukrainian children, offering psychological support, art therapy and various activities for children and adults. Other initiatives include the Ukrainian Youth Organization of Georgia's project "Safety and Unity / Kalyta", focusing on integration through music and psychological practices. The

Ukrainian-Georgian HUB operates an internet platform that promotes information exchange, professional services and fundraising opportunities for Ukrainians in Georgia. The Union of Journalists, “Georgian-Ukrainian Press and Book House”, runs projects supporting refugee women and children through education, art therapy and creative tools. The International Agency for Contemporary Development “REVIVAL” focuses on women's adaptation and integration into society through language classes, history, traditions and creative art classes. “Unite Together (UT)” targets elderly refugees in Tbilisi, providing needlework masterclasses, outdoor activities and charity fairs. The organization collaborates with international partners and plans to cooperate with private insurance companies to address healthcare-related issues. The Georgian-Ukrainian Education and Culture Organization “Ednist” runs a project in Batumi that offers rehabilitation and mental support to young Ukrainian refugees through art therapy, handicraft classes, sports activities and free Georgian language classes. The Union of Activists “Maidan Batumi” provides training programs for Ukrainian refugees in Batumi, focusing on first aid and psychological trauma. Through different levels of CSO organizations collaboration that are present in practical discourses following collaboration: ASB and PIN have close partnerships with “Unite Together”, executing a range of initiatives such as cash transfer programs, specialized programs catering to children and the elderly and the distribution of free medication across Georgia. Training on community-based psychosocial support and raising awareness among volunteers about humanitarian principles, international protection mechanisms, rights and services. Volunteer groups received support and capacity development from Action Against Hunger. CARE Caucasus supports and strengthens Ukrainian NGOs and women's initiative groups in Georgia so that Ukrainian citizens can receive humanitarian aid and access to services.

We selected volunteer agencies and created a brief overview of them based on the following criteria: (1) inclusivity, (2) helping refugees from Ukraine and (3) their participation in the survey is voluntary. In this way, we explored non-profit volunteer organizations and then chose one for the case study.

The first agency is the humanitarian aid point “*Choose to Help*”, established on March 2, 2022, initially focused on collecting and sending humanitarian assistance to Ukraine during the early stages of the war. However, in response to the influx of refugees in Tbilisi, the focus shifted to providing essential items such as clothing, food, hygiene products, medicine and toys. The center, relying solely on donations, operates a children's club offering various activities, including English lessons on Saturdays. Providing psycho-social assistance through referrals adds a crucial dimension to their support services.

The second one – “*Emigration for Action*”, specializes in prescribing medicines, including rare and hard-to-find medications not readily available in Georgia. The point has assisted 7,000 individuals with drugs since April 2022 and offers psychological support services. Professional volunteer psychologists conduct online and offline sessions for individuals of all ages, including children, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to health and well-being. After careful consideration and analysis of the humanitarian landscape, the decision was made to focus on the medical aspect of assistance, explicitly providing medication and healthcare. This area was identified as a crucial yet underserved aid aspect for Ukrainians. They do not categorize refugees based on disability status; instead, our beneficiaries include individuals with disabilities and a significant number of elderly refugees with chronic health conditions from Ukraine.

Another volunteer organization, “*Volunteers Tbilisi*”, operates as a humanitarian aid point with a primary focus on providing vital aid, including food, medical care, temporary housing, information and employment opportunities to refugees from Ukraine. The organization, comprising volunteers from Ukrainian, Russian and Georgian nationalities, facilitates temporary housing arrangements and advises on various aspects of life in Tbilisi, such as travel, legal matters and medical care. Their efforts extend beyond urban areas, as they procure, pack and deliver essential items to those residing in remote villages without assistance.

The last one – “*Tvoia Ukraina*”, located on the premises of the Holy Trinity Cathedral, is another initiative providing refugees with clothes, food and hygiene items. This point, staffed by 14 volunteers, most of whom are refugees from Ukraine, actively targets vulnerable groups like pregnant women, people with disabilities and pensioners through the distribution of vouchers. Additionally, the point actively participates in rallies and charity events organized by the Ukrainian community, showcasing a community-oriented approach to support.

Hence, the background of civil society organizations is described as militant and organized groups. In the case of Georgia, they flexibly respond and shift local conditions and overlapping gaps in government protection. Volunteer groups sprang up as collective action to solutions to civil problems, and are still offering support despite facing precarious funding during the second year of the war in Ukraine. Ukrainians also established various community support platforms and continue giving contributions to help refugees and themselves without any visual individual benefits only for the public good (Bazaluk, 2020). They implement language courses, offer psychological support and provide cultural activities like exhibitions, watching Ukrainian movies, spreading Ukrainian cultural traditions and learning Ukrainian literature. They organized summer and Winter camps for children and fundraising opportunities for Ukrainians in Georgia, providing needlework masterclasses, outdoor activities and charity fairs.

## **5. Data Collection: Quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights**

The research questionnaire for members of nongovernment organizations included 33 questions. For now, we focused on the organizational capacity and questions related to the pathways of assessment needs and services most essential for refugees from Ukraine, including people with disabilities. We were interested in what capabilities volunteering organizations need while supporting refugees from Ukraine. The term “*capabilities*” refers to the abilities, skills, resources and capacities that an organization possesses or can develop to achieve its goals and objectives. In a questionnaire, we included questions about the process of need assessment of refugees, ensuring an inclusive environment and counting the needs and rights of refugees during the delivery of humanitarian aid and social services. Our research focuses on the meaning of needs assessment, defined by Zhana Petrochko (2011) as the assessment of needs as a process of collecting, summarizing and analyzing information about the potential development and environmental factors and preparing interventions for the provision of relevant social services. The needs assessment aims to determine the necessary intervention strategies, types of social services and social assistance to ensure the refugee's rights, overcome difficult life circumstances or minimize their consequences.

This statement links with the next part of the article. The first question relates to the statement about using the documentary form for collecting needs assessment refugees.



The response indicates that 38% affirm that their services are meticulously crafted in alignment with a comprehensive needs assessment of refugees. Conversely, the majority, constituting 62%, state that their services are not explicitly tailored based on a needs assessment of refugees.

62%	38%
No	Yes

**Figure 4.** Needs assessment-oriented CSOs in Georgia

In these interviews raised a question regarding the pathways to collect the needs of refugees: *“How does your organization discern the specific needs and services required for individuals with disabilities among refugees from Ukraine?”* Answers define that numerous CSOs do not do a needs assessment; they define critical needs for individuals with disabilities among refugees from Ukraine mainly through general trends and orientate on needs with declarative beneficiaries. Most respondents do not have algorithms or a form of needs assessment and do not identify them because they have standard services delivering humanitarian aid. In this context, provide some examples answers from respondents to enhance the depth and credibility of our research:

- *Personally interview or via Google forms*
- *Regular surveys of people who came for humanitarian aid at the point. We asked questions about rent, sources of income, what you need etc. It gave us a better idea of people's needs.*
- *We do not do needs assessments or make physical diagnoses; we are not doctors.*
- *Refugees fill in a questionnaire, which our specialists then process. Needs are identified, an interview is conducted and the needs are clarified during and through communication with partners. The information obtained is used for a new project.*
- *We identify needs through personal interviews and social media monitoring. We provide standard services but sometimes try to help in specific cases.*
- *Each beneficiary declares them when filling out the application form for participation in our program. Then, the needs are assessed when communicating directly with the coordinator. We have many regular visitors who have even given birth in Georgia and we know all their needs*
- *If you do not even know the number of refugees, how do you know the needs?*
- *We do not carry out needs assessments. We work from the request of our beneficiaries and have retrospective statistics.*

The responses also investigate the usefulness of information about disabilities among refugees from Ukraine for humanitarian response. Some organizations are reporting positive outcomes, with insights from disability data significantly influencing their response strategies, ensuring inclusivity and enhancing the effectiveness of responses. Despite the challenges that face other organizations in integrating disability data fully, they are ongoing to effort for implementing the principle of inclusivity:

*“The lack of comprehensive disabilities data poses challenges in developing a fully inclusive response for refugees from Ukraine” – RNGO#7.*

Regarding the inclusivity of humanitarian points and accessibility for refugees, responders underlined that they work only for Ukrainian refugees of all ages and genders but are limited to those who arrived in Georgia before February 2022. Every day,

humanitarian points work from 12.00 to 19.00. Located near subways and bus stations, mainly in the city's center, have hotlines and deliver humanitarian aid at home. Despite this, main of them do not have ramps and are located in buildings with stairs and without elevators:

*"We try to be inclusive so that the medications can get to those who are physically challenging to get to us. Moreover, in critical cases, we deliver medicines to homes" – RNGO#10.*

The next question was about what challenges they faced on a project for individuals with disabilities. Specifically, we explore the question: *"What challenges have you faced in projects when interacting with people with disabilities?"*

1. As indicated by RNGO#6, one of the primary challenges is a significant financial gap between their resources and the medical needs of refugees. This financial constraint complicates the delivery of adequate medical support for refugees. *"Now, more health services are needed, but we do not have the resources. In addition, refugees need help to integrate into communities, but few humanitarian organizations provide such services (job search, for example and support from resume writing to interviews)"*.

*"The needs are relevant hygiene, food, diapers and sanitary kits. The big gap is that there are children among the refugees, but there is no assistance for them. Products for children are costly"- RNGO#3.*

*"People need a psychologist because they have experienced a lot, but few organizations provide psychological help in the Ukrainian language" – RNGO#5.*

*"Our assistance roughly covers basic nutritional needs, but no more than that. There is a big gap in terms of the provision of health services"- RNGO#1.*

2. The lack of coordination among NGOs, state agencies and international organizations leads to service overlaps for Ukrainian refugees. In some cases, refugees were unaware of available assistance, residing in Tbilisi for over eight months without support due to a lack of information reaching them. Bottom-up and top-down partnerships can help create effective coordination and assistance systems and support to reach refugees better. These challenges underscore the complexity of assisting people with disabilities in humanitarian projects and emphasize the need for strategic solutions and collaborative efforts to overcome these obstacles.

*"There is one big gap. There is a feeling of huge disconnection. It is as if volunteer organizations are doing much more than international organizations" – RNGO#4.*

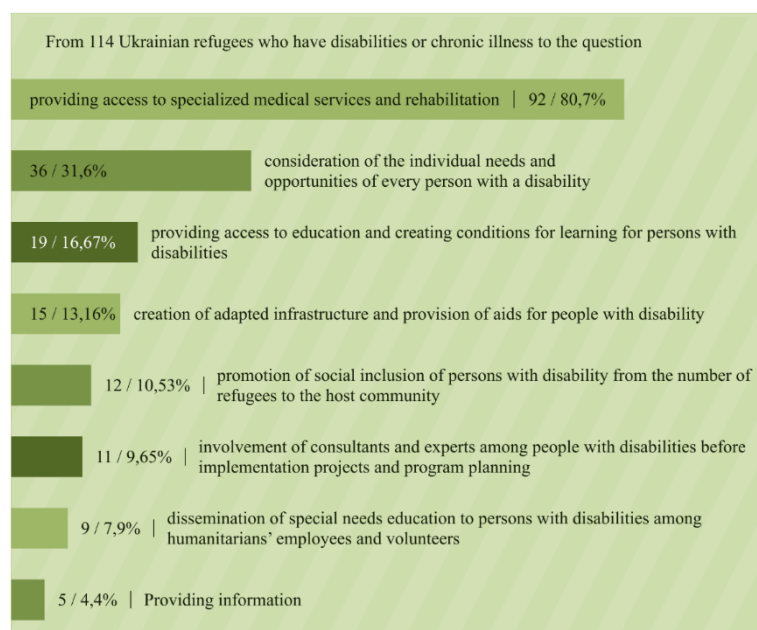
3. Another challenge is the absence of systematic data on people with disabilities among Ukrainian refugees in Georgia. The lack of comprehensive data complicates targeted and effective interventions, highlighting the importance of developing a robust data collection system.

4. Respondents also outlined challenges related to team dynamics, volunteer shortages and the psychological burden faced by specialists accompanying people with disabilities. Continuous changes in team composition contribute to the psychological strain on specialists, impacting their ability to provide consistent support. Additionally, the shortage of volunteers and a lack of knowledge and psychological assistance further compound the challenges faced by refugees in need.

The findings of the analysis question for Ukrainian refugees, *"How do you think humanitarian organizations can better incorporate and prioritize humanitarian principles when addressing the needs of refugees with disabilities?"* underscore a clear consensus among respondents regarding key priorities for enhancing support and inclusivity. The overwhelming emphasis on providing access to specialized medical

services and rehabilitation, recognizing individual needs and ensuring educational opportunities highlights a call for a holistic and person-centered approach to addressing the unique challenges faced by refugees with disabilities. Additionally, the recommendations for adapted infrastructure, aid provision and the active involvement of consultants with disabilities further emphasize the necessity of creating an inclusive environment.

In the past six months, how often were you able to access the health care services you needed?



**Figure 5.** Results of the discussion with disabled refugees about the duty of care by humanitarian organizations

Approximately 31.6% of respondents prioritize individual needs and opportunities, indicating a distinct focus on tailoring support to the specific circumstances of each person with a disability. About 16.67% of respondents emphasize the significance of providing access to education and creating conditions for learning people with disabilities. This highlights a subset of participants as refugees with disabilities placing a substantial emphasis on educational opportunities for integration into society. A notable 13.16% advocate for the creation of adapted infrastructure and the provision of aids, suggesting a recognition of the physical environment's role in accessibility. Approximately 10.53% stress the importance of promoting the social inclusion of persons with disabilities within the refugee and host communities, showcasing a distinct emphasis on fostering community integration. About 9.65% recommend involving consultants and experts among people with disabilities during project implementation, highlighting the significance of inclusive decision-making processes. Around 7.9% suggest disseminating special needs education among humanitarian employees and volunteers, indicating a subset of respondents focused on internal capacity-building within humanitarian organizations.

These variations in priorities signify a nuanced landscape of perspectives, suggesting that diverse approaches may be necessary to address the multifaceted needs of refugees with disabilities effectively.

The analysis of responses from Ukrainian refugees to the question, “*In your opinion, what role can humanitarian organizations play in promoting the rights of refugees with disabilities and ensuring their inclusion in society?*” reveals a collective recognition of the vital role that humanitarian organizations can play in advocating for the rights of refugees with disabilities and facilitating their integration into society. The consensus emphasizes the importance of communication with local authorities, providing inclusive services covering various essential needs and financial support for medical care and employment opportunities. The acknowledgment of humanitarian organizations as playing the most significant role underscores these entities' crucial responsibility in ensuring the holistic well-being and inclusion of refugees with disabilities. Furthermore, this collective insight is a valuable foundation for guiding future initiatives and strategies supporting this vulnerable population. The call for individualized assistance, including the issuance of personalized medical supplies through humanitarian centers, reflects a commitment to recognizing and addressing the diverse challenges faced by refugees with disabilities.

In Georgia, service providers are faced with a lack of the adopted legal government provisions about the rights of children and adults, senior people with disabilities, or with limited physical mobility. These legal tools are made in countries EU (Poland, Lithuania, Estonia) according to and in addition to the Temporary Refugee Protection Directive (Policy Brief Published September, 2023).

These insights provide valuable guidance for humanitarian organizations to refine their strategies and better align their practices with humanitarian principles, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees with disabilities.

## **6. Case study of CSO “Volunteers Tbilisi”**

Relative to our purpose, we demonstrate the practice case of working for the charity organization in Tbilisi, “Volunteers Tbilisi” and describe the general structure and process of needs assessment. The organization was founded in 2022 after the full-scale invasion of Russia in Ukraine and the beginning of active military actions. Seven people completed the team of volunteers at that time. “Volunteers Tbilisi” is a volunteer movement helping refugees from Ukraine get information, food, medicine, medical care and temporary housing in Tbilisi. They started collecting donations and organizing assistance in several key areas. Hotline - Consulting Ukrainians about evacuation from Ukraine and Russia, medical care in Georgia, entry and exit from Georgia, legal issues and all issues related to supporting Ukrainian citizens in Tbilisi. They were providing temporary housing for refugees as a crisis intervention. Opened the humanitarian aid point and started delivering livelihood kits and humanitarian aid for distant villages – delivering food, medicine and hygiene products for those who live and are stuck in remote villages without any support. Moreover, they reported that more than 5,000 people receive humanitarian aid every month, 200 people get housing and 20 people get evacuated and receive medical services. The results of the assistive indicate a significant help for refugees from Ukraine. Qualitative interviews revealed that this organization does not use the needs assessment of people with disabilities as a complex approach. Humanitarian aid was given for two years to all Ukrainian citizens who moved to Georgia

on the first of January, 2022. In that case, we can find much feedback highlighting gaps between the needs of beneficiaries and delivering assistance.

*“Tell me why Ukrainian citizens are divided into those who entered correctly and incorrectly (the women said about refugees who moved to Georgia after and before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022). A disabled child in a wheelchair who needs qualified assistance is constantly refused because he arrived before February 2022”* - Tatyana, a refugee from Donetsk (quote searched from open chat in Telegram channel “Ukrainian in Georgia”).

Eventually, “Volunteers Tbilisi” faced the problem of how to define the primary purpose of needs assistance - decisions about critical issues, such as what kinds of data need to be searched for and what types of vulnerable groups of refugees need more support and for what (Bryman, 2012).

*“We are collecting information about names and surnames, date of birth and date of crossing the border in Georgia. Also, please provide your phone number or profile in Telegram. We understand all duties, so we refused to collect personal data. We do not segregate on other criteria. We do not have specialists educated about needs assessment and humanitarian standards. We want to help more refugees, including people with disabilities, but we have limited fundraising capacities and lack cooperation and government institution support. In the transition to the air table (another data-based system of registration and monitoring of beneficiaries in the organization), we analyzed the frequency of visits to the point by families of different sizes and +- understood the requests and needs. Essentially, the current form of humanitarian aid should not hit refugees. However, at the same time, we expect to be more responsive to needs”* said the coordinator of the humanitarian point of Volunteers Tbilisi.

## 7. Conclusions

The study's findings highlighted some gaps, including lack of expertise and irregular or lack of cross-sectoral collaborations with local and non-local agents as the primary constraints causing the insufficient humanitarian response to Ukrainian refugees translated into a tangible strategy. The ability to relearn and adapt is central to the resilience of support agents and institutions dealing with migration and exile, along with the other factors defining institutional capacity not only to respond to refugees from Ukraine but also to other groups of migrants and internal displacement persons in Georgia. At this point, I would like to highlight the main points and findings:

- In Georgia, we have defined community participation in solving problem refugees primarily through the involvement of volunteer non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). Most focus mainly on facets of integration, such as economic integration (e.g., housing, income, welfare, labor). Instead of cultural integration or spatial integration, which were ignored.
- NGOs pay attention to vulnerable groups of refugees, such as children and parents and periodically organize social integration activities. As for other vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities or the elderly, they can rely at best on volunteer organizations to meet their immediate subsistence needs. This situation makes them invisible and limits their rights to access other services.
- Insufficient collaboration between volunteer organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) has led to a notable lack of coordination in delivering humanitarian aid and services for people with disabilities among refugees. This

fragmentation hampers the effectiveness of assistance programs, resulting in gaps and inadequacies in addressing the specific needs of this vulnerable population. A more cohesive and collaborative approach is imperative to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive humanitarian response that adequately supports refugees with disabilities. In the case of Ukrainian organizations that collaborate with international organizations, they have more sustainability and fundraising money for projects by international donors.

- Government institutions, on their part, have not been successful in this regard. From the perspective of host nations, refugees are considered temporary inhabitants expected to return to their home countries as soon as conditions permit (Aleinikoff, 2015).

- The evident lack of skills and capacities among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for writing project proposals and fundraising highlights a critical area of improvement. Insufficient proficiency in these essential aspects jeopardizes the ability of CSOs to secure the necessary resources for their initiatives, ultimately impeding their potential impact and outreach. Addressing this skill gap through targeted training and capacity-building initiatives is crucial to empower CSOs to articulate their goals, attract funding, and foster the success and sustainability of their valuable projects.

The support system in Georgia (especially civil society grassroots organizations) has a great chance to minimize this gap. They are very quick to adopt and learn, actively using SMM technologies to pay attention to and disseminate information about activities and results of humanitarian aid, and create collaboration with proactive artists, famous bloggers and vloggers for fundraising money. Of course, ongoing conflict provokes exhaustion and fatigue, but we can see in this short overview that CSOs demonstrate a solid motivation to bridge systematic gaps and transition periods. They emerged as mediators in aligning inter- and intra-governmental relationships toward community climate adaptation plans. The significant challenges the CSOs face are weak association and cooperation among international organizations because of minimal financial resources and insufficient capacity of the local organizations (Sharma, 2023).

In conclusion, the combination of social research methods such as content analyses of websites and conversation analysis, and study activities of the non-government organization gave a comprehensive view of people who are helpers' perceptions of the strategy of the humanitarian response to the needs of vulnerable groups include children and adults with disabilities among refugees from Ukraine. The unique aspect of this study is that it has captured opposite points of view of providers of social services and, eventually, those who receive them. Although it only gives a snapshot of the attitudes of both groups to social work with refugees. It provides a vivid picture of the gaps between theory and practice. Ukrainian refugees receive humanitarian aid from different sources; nongovernment organizations, as part of civil society, actively provide services to respond to Ukrainian refugees. Most pay attention to delivering humanitarian aid to vulnerable groups such as mothers with kids, seniors and people with disabilities. However, service providers have a complex balance between resource allocation and societal integration. They are faced with a significant gap in providing medical and psychosocial support because they face a lack of financial resources. Georgia's government is insufficiently providing assistance to local and grassroots NGOs but has collaborated with international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to coordinate assistance on the one hand; on the other – it seems like government services providers are avoiding manage the refugee problems effectively.

Hence, the protracted conflict in Ukraine requires more comprehensive cooperation and partnership with different stakeholders; since the Government of Georgia, international organizations, civil society and the private sector are critical to the achievement of positive solutions to issues of Ukrainian refugees, including people with disabilities.

Further research may analyze the social services system for people with disabilities among Ukrainian refugees and the effective pathways they reach.

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