



# Good Practices in Data Use: Ludotecas in Ștefan Vodă District, Moldova

## Background

In the wake of the refugee crisis, the Ștefan Vodă district in Moldova, nestled along the border with Ukraine, emerged as a central location for refugee families seeking safety. Among them, the most vulnerable were children, facing uncertainties compounded by their displacement. Data analysis, initiated in 2022 and perpetuated through the establishment of a dedicated Data Review Room, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Data for Impact (D4I) project, revealed that as of January 2023, the district housed 370 refugee children, comprising 140 preschool-aged children and 230 of school age. These children required access to education and support for their successful integration into the host communities. The findings underscored the pressing need for focused interventions, particularly in education, to provide refugee children with stability, protection, and opportunities for their growth and development.



Social assistants and education staff working together to finetune the Ludoteca concept; source: DGASPF, Ștefan Vodă

## Addressing the Issues with Multisectoral Stakeholder Engagement

Monthly data review sessions, convened by the Directorate General for Social Assistance and Family Protection (DGASPF) in Ștefan Vodă and facilitated by D4I, were pivotal gatherings where stakeholders from diverse sectors converged to address the pressing challenges facing refugee children. Representatives from the social assistance, education, law enforcement, and healthcare sectors collaborated in these forums, pooling their expertise and insights to fuel discussions and empower stakeholders to propose tangible solutions.

During these discussions, a visionary concept emerged: community *ludotecas*, or recreational centers serving as socio-educational hubs, designed to provide comprehensive support for refugee and at-risk children, including both preschool and school-aged groups. These centers would serve as safe spaces where children could engage in learning, play, and access essential services, fostering their holistic development. The decision-making process that led to this innovative solution involved comprehensive analyses of community needs, resource availability, and the potential for partnerships.

Strategic collaboration with the local nongovernmental organization “Ave Copiii” was instrumental in realizing this vision. Through a memorandum of understanding, the groundwork was laid for the establishment of *ludotecas* equipped with educational materials, recreational facilities, and trained staff. The *ludotecas* were tailored to meet the diverse needs of both refugee and local children, prioritizing inclusivity and ensuring accessibility for all.



## Transforming Lives through the Establishment of *Ludotecas* for Children in Ștefan Vodă

The inauguration of four *ludotecas* marked a transformative milestone for the children of Ștefan Vodă, ushering in a new era filled with hope and opportunities. These vibrant spaces, equipped with educational resources, toys, and interactive games, quickly became more than mere recreational centers, evolving into spaces of both learning and laughter. For 209 children (101 females and 108 males)—comprising both refugees and locals—the *ludotecas* also



Slogan of Ludoteca; source: application of DGASPF Ștefan Vodă to Data Gala contest, Chișinău, December 2023

became places of empowerment and integration. Within the centers, children found not only academic enrichment but also a sense of belonging and community. Through engaging activities such as homework assistance, creative workshops, and sports events, children were able to cultivate vital skills—cognitive, social, and emotional—that would serve them well in their future endeavors. Furthermore, *ludotecas* provided a platform for children from diverse backgrounds to gather together, fostering social cohesion and promoting mutual understanding. The influence of these centers extended beyond individual

children, impacting families and communities as well. Parents and caregivers, observing the positive changes in their children, became more engaged in their education and well-being. Community members, inspired by the inclusive nature of *ludotecas*, rallied around the initiative, offering support and encouragement. In essence, *ludotecas* became catalysts for positive change, empowering children to realize their full potential and fostering a more inclusive and cohesive community in Ștefan Vodă.

## Sustainability and Future Prospects

As Ștefan Vodă's recreational centers for children flourished as vibrant learning hubs, ensuring their long-term sustainability became crucial. Initial funding, sourced through collaborations and partnerships, required innovative approaches for ongoing viability. Community partnerships leveraged local resources and expertise to support their operations. Alignment with businesses, educational institutions, and civil society organizations provided additional funding, resources, and volunteers, strengthening community ties. Volunteer engagement was vital in expanding the centers' reach and fostering community ownership. Governmental support, through advocacy for policy changes and further funding, further bolstered the initiative's success. Looking forward, the *ludoteca* model holds promise for replication in other communities, tailored to suit local needs. Through sustained collaboration and innovation, *ludotecas* have the potential to continue transforming lives.



## Reflections

Ștefan Vodă's *ludotecas* represent more than mere physical spaces; they embody hope, resilience, and possibility. Their remarkable success story offers a blueprint for refugee integration and child welfare that can be emulated across Moldova and beyond. By harnessing their transformative potential, communities nationwide can uplift vulnerable children, fostering inclusivity and resilience in the face of adversity. These spaces not only provide for refugees but also pave the way for a generation of resilient and empowered individuals.

**Material based on the application submitted by DGASPF Ștefan Vodă** to the national contest “Data Gala” organized as part of the Share Fair of Good Practices in Data Use conducted by D4I in partnership with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Chisinau, December 8, 2023 (prize awarded for second place).

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## For more information

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