

Moldova 2023



christian
response
to
eastern
europe



The situation in Ukraine is dangerous and exhausting and we hear of dreadful conditions in Gaza with the conflict between Israel and Palestine. These wars are horrendous and so many people are being killed or injured, not to mention the destruction of houses, people's homes where they have all their life's memories, everything lost.

These hostilities, especially the war in Ukraine, have created worldwide problems, particularly for very poor countries where much of the Ukrainian grain is exported. Moldova was the poorest country in Europe. Now, because of the war debt and the war generally, Ukraine has taken its place at the bottom. In Moldova people have been struggling to survive following the fall of communism in the USSR.

After Moldova declared independence in 1990, internationally recognised in 1991, they suffered a war in Transdnistria - this area in the east of Moldova is still occupied by Russian "peacekeepers"! This in addition to Mafia-style battles, families striving for supremacy in the early years of independence and wide-spread corruption since. For over thirty years "ordinary people" have suffered, resulting in about half the working population leaving for a new life in other countries. Moldova has been abandoned by so many and is a country where today it is difficult to find anyone who wants to stay - they have lost all hope.

As a charity, we wanted to help those in Ukraine whilst not forgetting the suffering and need in Moldova. Our supporters and volunteers have been incredible and for the past two years have enabled us to more than double the aid we give.

In Moldova the early summer was colder than normal, then blisteringly hot and dry, as in the previous year, making the harvest less bountiful for many. Some families harvested less potatoes than they planted! This adds to the many other worries that increasingly haunt Moldovans.

Families in the villages will have worked hard in the fields since the Spring, but it only at harvest time, they discover if their labours have provided enough for the winter



Families gathering potatoes

Electricity is so expensive and gas largely unaffordable. Food prices have rocketed, as has everything else. Even many of those families who previously have had a relatively comfortable life are struggling, and very worried. For those who barely survived previously, it is now proving impossible; there is nothing left to cut back on but there are still mouths to feed. The only thing that hasn't risen in the same way is salaries, people are paid so little. Companies from the West who have opened factories in Moldova pay as little as they can get away, to make even bigger profits. A family living in a village, where things are cheaper than the cities, would still need 8,000 to 10,000 lei per month to survive, about £400 to £500. To earn this would take more days in a month than there are, in fact it would take about fifty working days! It has not been profitable to plant a vegetable garden this year as seeds cost more than the harvest. There is no trust in the authorities, no confidence in the future, they lives are lived in panic and fear.

For many years Moldova has seen an exodus of people, so many have left. With wages so low and prices ever rising even those who were seemingly wealthy have been forced to leave the country. Villages are increasingly being abandoned by the younger generations. This has been going on for years but the trend is escalating at an alarming rate.



When Aculina was 3 years old her mother died. She was brought up by her granny in a tiny house in a village adjoining the Nistru River. This was a very difficult time. Granny Jenea did a fantastic job. Whenever we visited she said how beautiful her granddaughter was, and how proud her mother would have been to see her grow and blossom into a kind and caring young lady. As Aculina grew, the slow transition between the generations took place and, latterly, she was the one working in the fields, chopping the wood and cleaning the house.

Understandably as she grew up she wanted to do more for both her granny and herself. Their home comprised of two small rooms about 8ft by 7ft, each with a tiny window, it was always dark inside. Aculina wanted something more, not extravagant but a little bigger for her granny. Like so many others she decided to look for work abroad and an opportunity to earn more than the meagre salaries paid in Moldova. There are many who have had very bad experiences working abroad where employers take advantage of their situation. This is her story.....

“After the death of my mother, I was left in the care of my grandmother. My father was a drunk and forgot he had a child. My older brother stepped into his shoes, had to leave school and work in construction in Russia, which often did not come with much money. I remember that once my brother sent a letter where he told us that he had been lied to and his documents taken. Marooned in Russia grandmother sent him money to return home. I always asked myself the question, why do I have to go through these difficult moments? For sure my childhood was not one of the most beautiful because I lacked the love of my mother. My grandmother tried her best but in the soul of a child is a yearning for a mother. At school everyone made fun of me because we were very very poor and didn't have clothes like them. Sometimes I didn't even have the essentials, I went with my grandmother to the market and she said 'look we only have money for bread' and she promised me that when she got her pension she would buy something sweet for me.

When I was a little older, about 7, I would go to work on the hill to pick strawberries and cherries in the sun to earn money for school supplies, then you appeared and supported me. We always feared the autumn, frightened not to freeze in the winter because our house was old and we didn't have good conditions and we heated ourselves with wood. Sometimes it was cold because we had no money for wood.

When I grew up I wanted to learn to be a teacher because I love children like crazy but I didn't have the opportunity because I needed large sums of money and rent, which we didn't have. I learned to cook, it was very difficult for me, we studied and worked, we studied until 4 o'clock in the afternoon, then at work until 2 in the morning, I worked at a fast food restaurant, I was so tired sometimes I couldn't even get up to leave, I don't talk anymore because sometimes I didn't even have food.

I didn't have the ability to help my grandmother, I wanted to all my life but did not have the possibility, I wanted to give her a house with a bath, something breaks my heart because I know she deserves it for everything she did for me.

Aculina is now engaged. Granny has been looking after her for many years and I really cannot imagine how she feels now. Very likely delighted Aculina is to be married but, at the same time, immensely sad to see her go. How will granny cope with all the chores and growing all her own food in a village where everyone is struggling to feed themselves and their families?

I decided to go abroad for a better income there, to earn enough money to save for a better home for myself and my granny.

Italy was my first job, and my first failure, I wanted to make money to have a house myself and I found a job on the internet, looking after children, I accepted. I naively took a bank loan to pay for the ticket and the documents to make a Moldovan passport.

When I arrived in Italy something seemed suspicious to me, I had to take care of the children, make food for all the family, clean, arrange the children's clothes as well as theirs. When the date arrived to be paid, they told me that they didn't receive the salary and they will pay me next month, I stayed like that for 2 months, then one day one of their children spoke angrily and I told him that this upset me. He said, I'm paying you, you shut up and work. During this time the husband would also come and shout. I couldn't even eat well because they told me to eat less, then they argued among themselves and said they didn't need me anymore and to leave,

I told them about the money because they didn't pay me, they said they won't give me anything, I didn't receive my salary for 2 months. I emphasize that I had nowhere to go.

With zero in my pockets, they chased me away and said that they would send me to the carabinieri, (the police) as they knew I did not have special documents to stay in Europe. I had to go to the park in late autumn, it was raining and I was sleeping on the chairs.

After a while, a Romanian lady took pity on me and I was staying with her, she found me work to replace a lady for a month to take care of an old woman, then I went home because I had no work,

The house where my grandmother lives does not belong to me. My fiancé is currently abroad, 3 months at work and 3 months at home. He does this because we do not have Romanian documents to work more. Much of his income pays rent and utilities”.

As we know, the war in Ukraine has led to thousands fleeing the conflict and many have now settled in Moldova. Although the refugees are welcomed this has led to an increase in rental prices in many areas.



Vasile, originally from Moldova, recently fled with his family from a village about fifty miles north of Odessa. Vasile's wife Elena is Ukrainian and they have two young children, Ionov who is 7 and Vladimir age 2.

Fleeing the dangers in Ukraine was a big decision. They have left behind all they had, their house and home and nearly all their belongings. They have found a house in a village north of Bălți where they have been welcomed.

Villagers have rallied together to try and help despite having so little themselves. But much that they cannot do. We were happy to provide funds to buy wood to keep them warm in the winter as well as other essential items.

This is just one of the many families we have been able to help with your support.



Our supporters and volunteers have been amazing and we have dispatched more lorries to both Moldova and Ukraine this year than ever before.

As always, our trucks are welcomed and aid distributed to those in



need. It is important to remember and recognize the huge effort put in by our friends and partners in Moldova put in. They too are volunteers and give their time willingly to help their fellow countrymen. Many of these volunteers are poor themselves, nevertheless they expect no reward in return.

Together with the tonnes of medical supplies and humanitarian aid we have taken many new toys which have been generously donated. Over the years we must have taken hundreds of skateboards, roller boots, scooters, bicycles, pools and so much more. All this has given so much happiness for hundreds of children who have never before seen such wonderful toys.

With so many awful things going on at the moment it is lovely to see the children having fun, running, playing, screaming with laughter.

There is so much we can do and thanks to all our brilliant volunteers and generous supporters we have helped, and hopefully will be able to continue to help, many more in Moldova and Ukraine.

Thank you all



The work in our Soup kitchens continues to expand helping more and more children at the centres and an increasing number of elderly at home.



Alexi

The elderly may not look as cute as the children but they still need help - and an occasional cuddle.

The State Pension in Moldova is a maximum of about £45 per month but could be as little as £7.00 per month. Even the maximum pension is not enough for a week let alone a month.



It is very tough for anyone who cannot work for medical reasons there is no real help.

Alexi is not old enough to receive a pension but cannot find work. A few years ago, in the winter, Alexi was working outside but did not have suitable footwear, just a pair of old shoes. The bitter temperatures badly affected his feet. The frostbite led his feet to turn black and the surgeons had little alternative but to amputate the ends of his feet. To add to his problems he is blind in one eye.

Without the support of friends and neighbours he would not have survived but now, with escalating prices, people do not really have any surplus to continue helping others; they struggle to feed their families and have very little left over to give away.

We can help Alexi and other elderly folk by taking food and making certain they have enough wood for the fire. One of the most important things we can do is to visit regularly and show we genuinely care.

With winter approaching families in Moldova will be preparing for the bitterly cold temperatures that may engulf Eastern Europe in just a couple of months' time.

It is difficult to imagine what it must be like knowing you have insufficient wood to heat your home, and maybe insufficient food to last the winter. It must be terrifying with the threat of



nighttime temperatures potentially being colder than your freezer.

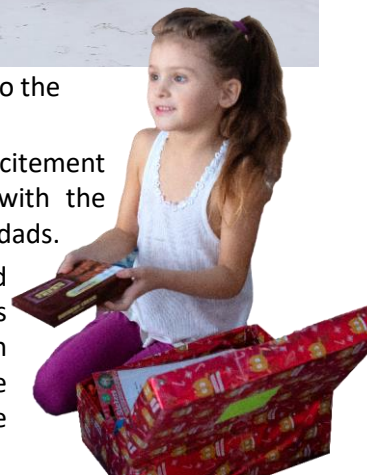
Children will always look forward to playing in the snow but their young years and innocence will blind them from appreciating the real threat, especially to the elderly and infirm.



Our Christmas Shoebox Appeal has always generated great excitement in Moldova, (and now will do so in Ukraine), especially with the children but also a lovely surprise for some grannies and granddads.

Our team of volunteers continue to spend many hours, indeed many days, bagging these ready for loading. Where shoeboxes haven't been filled our volunteers add items to make certain every Christmas box is of the very best quality and filled to the brim. The children deserve the very best we can provide. As we always say, this is not a matter of numbers but is of quality.

Our Christmas truck will be leaving in the first days of December and there is a lot of work for our volunteers..



All being well, and with the support of everyone we will send another lorry to Ukraine towards the end of January or February