

Moldova 2024



christian
response
to
eastern
europe



When in Moldova it is very easy to concentrate on all the doom and gloom and ignore the progress that has been made. Moldova is a very different country than it was when we first went thirty years ago, and huge advances have been made over recent years.

Five to ten years ago many restaurants opened but were largely devoid of customers and subsequently closed. Now these are profitable, with many restaurants, coffee shops buzzing with customers.

Thirty years ago, Moldova was very much a bandit country. We had to find guarded compounds to park our lorry and few people ventured out at night through fear. Few had cars and those who did, they were mainly old Moskvitchs and Ladas



These empty roads now packed with cars

and the occasional 'luxury' Volga. Electricity was only available for part of each day, and a schedule was drawn up so people would know when to expect power. They had to cope. Moldova was a very dark and sinister country. Now the streets throng with people and modern cars, and Moldova's second city now boasts a McDonald's!

At last we can see sustained progress in Moldova. The main roads have been improved to an enviable standard, albeit mainly with funding from the European Community and America. New factories have opened in the cities but finding good paid work in Moldova is still very difficult. So many employers are taking advantage of low wages and pay the minimum they can get away with, resulting in a quarter of the population working abroad. This is 25% of the total population, young and old, so represents a far higher percentage of the

working population. Sadly, many of those who have given up on their country are the ones Moldova really needs to return now, those with 'get up and go'. Moldova needs educated hard working people to return and employers to value their workers and pay them accordingly.

Today, the rich remain rich but there is an increasing number of middle class who now have money to spend in shops and restaurants. Sadly though, the poor are even poorer and desperate.

Prices have rocketed making the difficult lives of the poorest almost impossible, especially in the villages. Many from the West have bought land and introduced huge tractors to take the place of the hundreds who used to work the land.

Despite the workers having been paid very little working in the fields these tractors have taken away their employment, a low wage was much better than no wage.

There is very little work in the villages these days, maybe some fruit picking but little else. Families have to rely on the produce from their gardens but there is not enough land in the garden to support a family. Home grown produce does not pay for electricity or school, let alone buy food, clothes, shoes etc.. Many have borrowed money, but the interest rate is frequently huge, and most have little prospect of being able to repay these loans.

It has been very, very dry so far this year in Moldova and crops have suffered. Everyone was eagerly awaiting rain.

WORKING

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Families are working hard to try to ensure their harvest is successful. This is obviously a very worrying time, and, as they say, rain is more valuable than gold.

Many are complaining of the hot and dry weather, but a considerable number of families are already worried about the coming winter, not only worries about food but importantly wood for the stove. Winters can be long and very cold and the lack of wood can be fatal; for so many this is a terrifying prospect.

When in Moldova recently it was a delight to attend the last day of the school year, a very special day known as 'the Last Bell'.

The end of the academic year, when some children leave to start their lives away from school, is a tribute to their time there. All the children dress beautifully, many of the girls with huge bows in their hair.



The head teacher gives a rather too long speech, and then there is the presentation of certificates, speeches from other teachers, singing by the children and traditional dancing.

The day culminates with those who are leaving leading the young ones, the newcomers, in a procession in front of the rest of the school; one child being held high and ringing the bell.



Tears are frequently shed as friends say goodbye at the realisation their school days are over.

Many families, especially in the villages where there is no real opportunity for work, really struggle and try to survive in impossible circumstances.

Few have sufficiently large gardens to provide enough food for the family. Paid work is almost unattainable outside major towns or cities. The only opportunities arise when fruit needs picking. Even in the towns, sensibly paid employment is hard to find.



Picking fruit may pay 300 lei for a ten-hour day but things are expensive in Moldova. The Office for National Statistics says the average salary in Devon is £30,800. Taking the income for those lucky enough to find employment in Moldova and compare this to Devon incomes a chicken in Moldova would cost the equivalent of £35.54 a kilo! If a chicken weighs say 2 kilos then one chicken would cost the equivalent of £71 for a person on an average Devon income. How could a family feed itself at such prices?

Anghelina has four children, her husband abandoned them several years ago.

We learned of this family recently and when we visited we took a box filled with food. The children were so happy to see this and excitedly looked through everything. The eldest, Alisa aged 9 started to cry as she was so hungry and we were just talking.



When we said she could open a tin of beans you would have thought we had given her the crown jewels. She hurriedly opened the tin and poured the contents onto a plate for all to share.



When the plate had been licked clean, she returned to the tin to see if there were any remnants left.

Mihai is a lovely chap but suffers from a debilitating condition meaning he is unable to walk without crutches.

When we called, he was working very hard in the hot sun, on his knees cutting wood in preparation for winter. A huge pile of wood, all cut to lengths to fit into the stove.

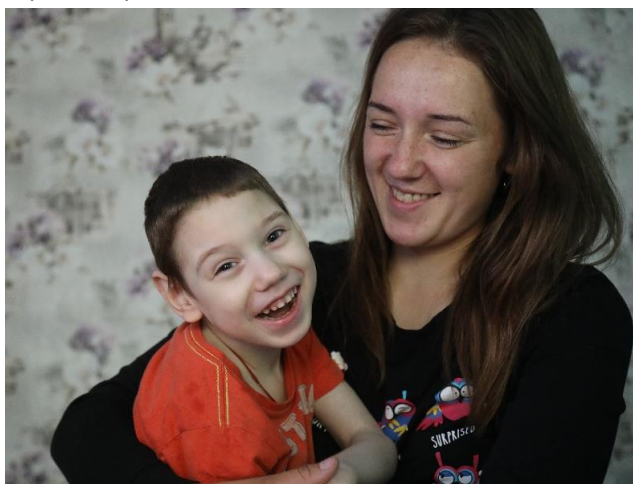
His crutches had broken but he found some straight branches and fixed them to the plastic handles of his broken crutches.

Mihai has done a great job on mending these crutches



and although we could arrange replacements it seems such a shame as he put so much effort into repairing his and they work well. The only thing he really needs is a supply of the rubber ferrules for the ends as he wears them out regularly.

Irina is a 27 year-old mother with two severely disabled sons. She is the sort of loving mother that brings tears to your eyes. No words can adequately express my admiration for her.



Her husband is a drunk and violent man. He became so aggressive he attacked her and her mother with a knife. He is now in prison serving a ten-year sentence.

Her two lovely boys are David who is 10 and Victor 6. They seem to be suffering from similar disabilities.

The boys are both incontinent and need nappies but the house is very tidy and clean. There is no running water, just water she has to fetch from the well

Mum does not work as she has to care for her two severely disabled sons. Irina is an inspirational mother and loves her boys very much.

Her brother lives in the same village and helps financially when he can and cares for the children when Irina is ill.

Irina has a bike as she sometimes needs to go to the shop and cannot take the boys. She has to be as quick as possible, and the bike is a great asset as the shop is some distance away.

Victor is very responsive and has a gorgeous smile. His favourite toy is a large squeaky hammer. He loves this very much, if only there were more things to stimulate him.



David is less responsive but would definitely benefit from having some suitable toys to play with.

These are just three examples of good families who have a huge struggle just to survive. They work hard every day, but life gets more difficult with increasing prices and little rain. Sadly, these are just examples of thousands of families in a similar situation





Thanks to fantastic support we have been able to send many children to Summer Camp this year.

Many children in Moldova have pretty grim lives with little by the way of fun. School has finished for three months and some children will spend much of the time working, looking after cows or sheep every day or working in the fields.

The money earned is put into the family pot for basic essentials, but more frequently, to buy all the things needed for school in September.



The excited screams and shouts from the children who can go demonstrates the importance of these camps. Many of these children have so little opportunity to escape the normality of their harsh and dull lives and these camps allow them to be children again, to run around playing and just having fun. Some are scared when leaving home but soon make new friends and enjoy great food and fun activities, even if only for a week.



Some of us are fortunate enough to start life's journey walking through meadows of grass stumbling sometimes at the occasional brook that traverses our path. Our level passage allows time to sit and ponder our situation and take a rest before continuing.

However, others are born into a life of climbing rugged hills, stumbling over jagged rocks, suffering cuts and bruises and, under the heavy burden of their everyday life, occasionally slipping and falling further down the hill. Every time this happens there is no option but to stand up and start again, clambering over the same difficulties, struggling with problems others may not even notice, but these same problems have catastrophic effects when carrying such heavy loads.

For so many in Moldova and in Ukraine the dark shadows of hopelessness cast silhouettes of despair. We know the support we are able to give shines a light of hope amongst these shadows making them lighter. When those in Ukraine and Moldova feel sad and alone, many think of cr2ee and the hundreds of people working hard to support them. This is a huge comfort to them and helps give them the determination to continue.