

We want to see vibrant communities of Jesus followers among the least reached

## Loving our neighbours

*special focus edition:*

**Ukraine Disaster Response**  
refugee ministries in Moldova



When war broke out for our neighbours, everything needed to shift to help them. Never have I experienced my country, the Moldovan people, coming together so beautifully at a time such as this. We worked together with churches, organisations and the government to help Ukrainian refugees in need. It almost instantly became like an assembly line to make it possible to receive, guide, transport, host and support refugees. It has been difficult and stressful at times, but we have seen God at work and how He has turned ashes into beauty. We had great opportunities to share the love of Jesus with people and be His hands and feet.

One of the saddest sights I saw was children having to say goodbye to their fathers at the border, not knowing when or if they would see them again; whereas a glimpse of hope was seeing a family reunited at the border after not having seen each other for three months, since the war had begun. This is our heart and prayer for all these displaced families: joyous reunions and restoration.

God is the one who brings people to a place of refuge, as many of these refugees flee from their homes not knowing where to go – there are just no words. But time and time again, we have seen how God led people to safe places, providing what they need and taking care of them, as you can see in the stories shared here.

The power of prayer has guided our team and given hope to people, as we have seen the Lord answer prayers and do miracles. Through your prayer, support and practical help, it has been possible to continue this direct ministry with the refugees, as well as provide resources and support for churches across Moldova and into Ukraine. Thank you for coming alongside us, as the body of Christ has come together from the nations!



Eugen Ciumac

Field Leader, Moldova



Especially during the first period of the war, the tent we set up at the border was extremely busy.

## Loving our neighbours

When war broke out in Ukraine - which borders Moldova on the north, east and south - we redirected a lot of our ministry towards helping those affected by this new crisis, who started streaming into our country by tens of thousands.

Moldova is the country that - relative to its population - has taken in most refugees from Ukraine, with the number of refugees remaining to live in Moldova staying continuously high at about one refugee to every 20-30 locals, more than half of these being children. Additionally, many times more than these have crossed the Ukrainian border into Moldova and received some initial support here, before moving on to other European countries.

It was amazing to see the generosity and hospitality shown by the people of Moldova, including our partnering churches, who responded way beyond what could have been expected from this nation, that is among the poorest in Europe, and besides has lived with the fear of being dragged into this war itself - especially when there were attempts to also stir unrest in Transnistria (Moldova's own separatist region under strong Russian influence). The fact that a big part of the refugee aid in Moldova happens through local evangelical churches and Christian organisations has been a great witness for Jesus within this nation.

We have also been hugely encouraged by witnessing so much solidarity from around the world for the Ukrainian refugees, and we would like to sincerely thank you for your faithful and generous support for our refugee ministries in Moldova - in prayer and finances, encouragement and practical help.

Through your support we have been able to:

- maintain a permanent presence at the border, offering food and other aid, information, fellowship and prayer
- house refugees at our OM buildings, offering them practical assistance, accommodation and food, as well as fellowship, activities, counselling sessions and spiritual input
- help to coordinate the nationwide Christian response to the refugee crisis and provide aid for churches that have taken in refugees
- organise and drive aid deliveries to Ukraine, for further distribution there by the Ukrainian OM team and their nationwide network

Besides meeting immediate physical needs, all these projects also served to bring hope and consolation to the refugees and our prayer is that every single one of them was able to get a glimpse of God.

"We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

mobilising & supporting  
Moldovan churches for ministry

## Unity in the body of Christ

One of the beautiful things that became evident throughout this crisis was the amazing collaboration of believers all over the country, united in the desire to help and be God's hands and feet in this world, making Him visible in word and deed to those who are suffering.

"How can I just go home and sleep, while there is so much need?" These were Petru's words, when asked whether he was not exhausted, as he was making yet another long drive across the country in service of OM's refugee ministries, at the same time being constantly on the phone with church members and local authorities from his home village, as he was also coordinating the housing and feeding of refugees there. Petru is a Moldovan OM team member and the leader of a local church, and his attitude was mirrored by many believers throughout the country, who served with dedication but little rest, whether in direct interaction with the refugees, or behind the scenes in cooking, cleaning, driving, buying supplies or making phone calls to coordinate help.

We praise God for our long-standing partnerships with churches across the country, as well as other Christian organisations, which in this crisis allowed us to react quickly and work together effectively. Thus, we were able to help coordinate the country-wide Christian response, as well as support individual churches in their specific response to the new needs created by refugees arriving in their own communities.

### Supporting churches as they serve

Many churches across Moldova took in refugees themselves or helped to care for refugees in their local communities. Most offers for shelter had been set up as an emergency short-term response: a spontaneous reaction to an unexpected need, at a time when most refugees were only passing through or else expecting to return to their homes within a short time - but as the war kept going on for months, the continuous provision for so many refugees became more and more challenging. We set up support for these churches, e.g. by helping some to cover their increased expenses for electricity or gas, or by providing food parcels which they could offer to refugees who were living in their communities. Similar aid packages were also sent to Ukraine, for further distribution there by the local OM teams and their network of partners. We expect that this will be an ongoing need and a longer-running project.

### Blessings received

At the same time, we experienced the blessing of being supported ourselves through these various partnerships. When international organisations warned against an increased activity of human traffickers in the context of the refugee crisis, we could profit from the experience of a partner organisation whose ministry is specifically focused on combatting human trafficking and who helped us to be alert and able to give good advice to the refugees. Local churches, too, were involved in our refugee ministry at the border from the very first day: One church cooked every day, so we could offer warm meals at our tent; others sent volunteers to help us there. By the end of May, we could increasingly staff our tent with such volunteers and hand over responsibilities to them, so it was no longer necessary to permanently have team members alongside them at the border.

How beautiful to see God's children in Moldova living out His love and shining His light into the darkness!



Our team prepares aid packages for refugees, containing food but also other essentials, that are distributed by churches and organisations throughout Moldova and Ukraine.



One local church prepared hot meals, which were then taken to the border and handed out in our tent to those waiting to cross the border from Ukraine.



*It did not take long for the whole line to shift to go right through our tent.*

## Being God's hands and feet at the border

*From the very first days of the war, we were present at the most frequented border crossing from the Ukraine. At the place where refugees wait to cross into Moldova we could set up a tent, offering warm meals, drinks, blankets, hygiene products etc., as well as information or the chance for conversation and prayer.*

### A quick response

The voice of a friend breaking with a mixture of emotion and exhaustion as he tells you about his first visit to the border; refugees staring with empty eyes, too traumatised to speak; the sight of a young woman waiting in line, her face pale as death - paler than you've ever seen a living person look; the last embrace as a father says goodbye to his wife and children, before sending them across the border, while having to turn back himself... - the first personal impressions of war in our neighbouring country are hard to describe and hard to forget!

During the first days of war, thousands of refugees were pouring into Moldova, many having children with them. They waited for hours, some even days, to be able to cross the border. Tens of thousands were still on the way or waiting on the Ukrainian side. There was a severe lack of food, blankets, baby food, diapers, hygiene articles or medicine. The need was huge - but so was the response of the Moldovan people, who welcomed refugees at their borders, offered transport, provided food or helped to find temporary housing. "I've never been so proud to be a Moldovan as I am today," our OM leader Eugen shared at that time, after witnessing people from all over the country jumping to help those fleeing Ukraine.

In collaboration with local churches, we visited the border several times during these first days, bringing food, blankets, diapers or other sanitary products, as well as warm meals, which a nearby church prepared. After a few days, we could set up a tent on the Ukrainian side of the border, turning our visits into a continuous presence at the border. We were offered a good spot, right next to the line of people waiting to get across on foot - and it did not take long for the whole line to shift to go right through our tent. As temperatures were low and there had been slight snowfall, people were especially thankful to spend part of their wait in a warm and sheltered place, besides being offered warm food, tea, blankets or sanitary products, as well as information and directions.

### Empowerment

Serving at the tent was often heart-breaking, especially watching men say goodbye to their families, but we also saw a lot of gratitude and had some encouraging encounters. One day a Ukrainian teenage boy was among those standing in line. Instead of taking a blanket and simply awaiting his turn to cross the border, he put on a volunteer's vest and joined us in handing out food and other aid, serving with us for the whole night, at minus 8°C. Later, when he had safely arrived in Bucharest (Romania), he sent us a message to let us know how he was and to thank us for having given him the opportunity to serve his own people in their need. While for many of those arriving at the border, our ministry was mainly one of giving immediate relief to exhaustion, hunger, cold and fear; we also saw how important it could be for someone to not feel a helpless victim but be able to do something about the situation around him.

### Growing desperation

After the first few weeks, the number of refugees at the border grew less - but those who came then were more desperate and more traumatised. While the first wave had included many who had the means to depart more easily or who had connections in other European countries, there soon seemed to be very few left who drove their own cars or who fled 'only' from the threat of war drawing near. Most of the newer arrivals were evacuated in buses and dropped off at the border. They had truly experienced war. They had seen their homes destroyed. They had helplessly watched as food and resources ran out. They had fled in fear and haste. They had passed destruction and dead bodies on their way. They arrived at the border with no money, no idea where they were heading and no place to return to.

"It's heart-breaking to see those who arrive at the border and break down in tears," one of our team members said at that time - tears because of the terror they had experienced,

*"Her wrinkled hand trembled as she held her tea and I poured sugar to stir. She was too nervous to eat. It was just her and her granddaughter, trying to cross the border together - full of fear that her granddaughter wouldn't be able to cross, due to her documents just being copies, not originals."*



*"God tells us to love Him with our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Now, literally, our neighbours are in really big need, and they need help - so that's why I'm here."*

*(Oxana, Moldovan OM team member)*

tears because they finally felt safe, tears because of dear ones they had lost or didn't know if they'd see them again. They didn't know where they would go or even where they could spend the next night; they only knew what they had left behind - and that in the future they might not have anything to return to. Relieved that they had made it so far, yet grieved and afraid for all they had left. Burdened more by pain, bewilderment and dread than by the few possessions they could carry with them.

At that period, our tent was less busy than at the start, but it was even more important to not only meet immediate physical needs, but to also be able to offer a listening ear and prayer.

### The solace of prayer

OM worker Amanda remembers an old lady she met one day at the border: "Her wrinkled hand trembled as she held her tea and I poured sugar to stir. She was too nervous to eat. It was just her and her granddaughter, trying to cross the border together - full of fear that her granddaughter wouldn't be able to cross, due to her documents just being copies, not originals."

Added to the trauma of what they were fleeing from, many were anxious about whether they would be allowed over the border. That same day, Amanda also met a brother and sister arriving together: They had been told the brother would not be allowed to leave Ukraine, being older than 18, whereas if he stayed, his sister might not pass due to being under 16 without a guardian.

"With each of these families we listened and showed care," Amanda said, "and when we asked if we could pray for them, their eyes opened up with great appreciation and a glimmer of hope. We prayed that God would comfort them, lead them, protect them, open up the borders to them and help them find a place of refuge. Praise the Lord that in the end God did open the border to all these families!"

There are no words that can either describe or alleviate what all these people have gone through, but we trust that our response of prayer and practical love did help to bring some solace.



*"What language do you use to communicate with these people?" our Brazilian friend was asked, while she was volunteering at our tent at the Moldovan-Ukrainian border. "The language of God's love!" was her reply.*

## A home far from home

As there was a big need for accommodation all over the country, we also took in refugees at our OM buildings in Chişinău. At the beginning these were mostly refugees who needed a place to sleep for a night or two, as well as help in organising their further travels or getting necessary documents sorted before driving on to other countries. Soon we increasingly received more who needed to stay longer, having nowhere else to go. Besides taking care of accommodation and food, we offered fellowship, activities, spiritual input and professional counselling sessions for the adults (mainly women); we also set up a children's play area and organised occasional activities for the children and teenagers. It proved a great blessing that good communication is generally possible between Moldovans and Ukrainians, and as the majority of our OM team in Moldova are Moldovan nationals, there were many opportunities for deeper conversations with the refugees, as well as having spiritual messages included in many activities.



The first special event we organised for the refugees was 8 March - International women's day - which is an important celebration in former Soviet countries, but this year the Ukrainian ladies had to spend it far from home and separated from their husbands. To make this day a bit more cheerful, we arranged a special programme for the refugee women and their children, who could take part in different activities; while we shared songs, small gifts and the message of the God who loves them infinitely. The women and children were beyond thankful and showed their appreciation with tears and hugs. It also led to several good conversations with team members.



Many of our activities were aimed at helping the refugees to deal with their experiences of the previous weeks and get started on a healing process, while also sharing our hope in God. We are thankful for the readiness and gratitude with which they participated and responded to what we shared.



At Easter, we had a special Easter celebration with the group of refugees from Ukraine who were staying with us at that time. Going through different stations we had set up, they could interactively experience some of the events of the last week of the life of Jesus - up to His crucifixion and through to His resurrection - and hear about what this all means for us, today.



Some of our team members offered English lessons to refugees who were staying with us. Those participating may have considered it a useful preparation for moving on to other European countries, or maybe simply sought to be distracted from their memories and worries for a short time. Whatever their reason to attend - it was beautiful to see them smile!



One family who crossed the border had no idea where they could go and what they would do for the night. When they saw ten vehicles driving in a line, they decided to follow them. This convoy was a group of 55 deaf and mute people, who were on their way to OM. The family drove behind them all the way from the border to OM - approximately a two-hour drive - and were amazed to see that they could be hosted that night as well with a bed, a warm shower and a hot meal.

One of the Ukrainian ladies staying with us was an English teacher. Although she had left her home and her country, and her pupils were also spread across multiple countries, where they had fled with their families, this lady continued teaching them online, striving to bring some structure and normality to these children's lives. She was also giving lessons to other refugee children staying at our OM buildings at that time. Her resilience and determination inspired us, and even though our contribution may not have been more than providing a desk and internet access, it was a reminder that even small things can enable someone else to be a blessing.



One lady shared about a dream she had had around the turn of the year. In that dream she had found herself in a big house that she had never seen before, not knowing where she was. A few weeks later the war started; she fled to Moldova, found accommodation at OM - and recognised our training centre, where she had now found refuge, as the building she had seen in her dream.



A lot of work was going on behind the scenes to be able to offer such hospitality. It was a whole new way of doing things, not being able to make a plan, never knowing how many people would come and at what time of day or night. Maria, who coordinates our kitchen, shared what one of the first days was like for her: She was preparing to cook for the five refugees she had been told were coming, when she heard she had to include six additional people for the meal and adapted plans accordingly - only to then receive another phone call telling her that a group of 55 more people was on the way! Surprises and challenges were frequent, but by the grace of God - and the sacrificial efforts of many - it all worked out.

## Gratitude

Ina and her son fled from Cherson; they passed our tent at Palanca and there were directed to our OM centre for accommodation. Some weeks later, when they had found a place to live in Great Britain, Ina wrote this message to the team member who had talked to her at the border:

"When we were living in occupied Cherson, it seemed that nobody needed us. It was frightening to leave with a child and just two backpacks; we did not know where to go, nobody was waiting for us anywhere. Google maps directed us to the nearest border. We are very glad we entered your tent and then went to the address you gave us.

Thank you for directing us to this place for accommodation. We were received very well; they offered us to stay not just for one night, but also longer if we needed it. We spent three nights there and could rest and recover a bit. During this time, we planned our further journey. We are grateful that on our way there were so many people who were ready to help us.

Thank you again!"



REACH participants on rural outreach, snowboard outreach and mobilising others to pray for the world

## God prepares places and people

Our REACH training (formerly MDTe<sup>3</sup>) had already been running for a month when the war in Ukraine started. As their first transition to Romania was due at exactly the same time, we decided not to cancel the programme, but to run the whole remaining course in Romania. On top of the normal curriculum, the participants also got the chance to be involved in some refugee ministry there. One of them shared about a church near the Ukrainian border that had welcomed refugees in their building:

The church had only eight members, including the missionary, Anna, and her husband. Anna told us how in the past there had been a lot of opposition from the local Orthodox priest, and because of this, the people of the town didn't interact with the church. Even after seven years the believers saw no acceptance for them or their message of hope. The beautiful church building was surprisingly big for eight members. Anna told us it was actually a very old building and had been in big need of renovation, with the roof leaking everywhere. For years they had tried to save up money, and last year finally had a budget to start repairs in the smaller rooms. To their surprise, as they continued working, God provided more and more, so they could finish the renovation of the whole building. The day they finished the building was the day before the war started in Ukraine. Now they could use this renovated building to host the Ukrainian refugees! Anna testified how God not only prepared this place for the crisis, but also used the crisis to build a bridge between the church and the people of the town. Local people saw how the church helped the refugees and started to offer help themselves. Some cooked and some did laundry. Even the Orthodox priest supported them with a box full of toys for the refugee children. Wonderful how God prepares a place and the people to help those in need and at the same time uses the crisis to build bridges!

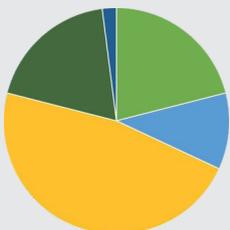
## Thank you

for your overwhelming response to the needs created by the war in Ukraine, enabling us to reach out to so many people who were displaced and suffering!

Please continue to pray for the situation in Ukraine and for the ministries in those places where people have fled to in big numbers. Pray especially for our teams in Ukraine and Russia - two countries where ministry is exceptionally difficult right now!

### refugee ministries in Moldova - financial overview

funds received as of 31 May (net): EUR 549.550,- | funds used by 31 May: EUR 358.210,-



#### categories of funds used by 31 May, by percentage:

- housing refugees at OM: 21%
- tent/ministry at the border: 11%
- aid packages throughout Moldova and aid transports to Ukraine: 47%
- support of local churches and organisations: 19%
- transport: 2%

A significant number of aid-/food-packages for Moldova and Ukraine are still in the process of being put together and distributed, using funds that had not yet been spent by 31 May. We expect that this will be an ongoing need and a longer-running project.

### Get involved:

- PRAY** for our ministries  
or  
**GIVE** towards a project  
or  
**GO** - join a programme:  
Love Moldova (2 weeks)  
REACH (5 months)

We are also constantly looking for people to join us mid- & long-term.

Please contact us for more information about current needs and opportunities!

### info & publications:

Check out our [website](http://www.om.org/md) for more updates and information: [www.om.org/md](http://www.om.org/md)

You can **subscribe**/unsubscribe to:

- "Moldova News" (3x/year)
- [Prayer Updates](#) (2x/month)

Contact us or use the form on our website.

We're also on **facebook**: @OMinMoldova

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