

## Caritas Australia shares stories of Ukrainian families supported in Moldova

The Caritas Australia Ukraine Appeal supports partners such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) as they help millions of Ukrainian people in need.

To date [6.5](#) million people have been displaced, 3.7 million still reside within Ukraine, with the rest having fled overseas. Over [116,000](#) Ukrainians are sheltering in Moldova, a country that is subject to its own political insecurity with frequent changes in government, as well as severe economic pressures. This leaves Ukrainian refugees in the country increasingly dependent on international humanitarian support.

Caritas Australia is sharing the stories of some of the families supported by generous donations to the Ukraine Crisis Appeal.

**Lyudmila Zhumailo and Yuri Popov** had been anticipating a quiet retirement in Odessa before war broke out in February 2022. For over a year they sheltered, often under pillows on the floor, while air raid sirens blared. Once heavy artillery fire began on their hometown in July 2023, they fled to Moldova for what they hoped would be a temporary stay. Unable to find an affordable place to stay, Lyudmila and Yuri began living at a refugee centre.

“My husband has a disability,” Lyudmila says. “He just needs relative quietude. And that place was very noisy.”

Lyudmila and Yuri participated in the CRS shelter program and were able to find an apartment faster than they expected. While Lyudmila and Yuri say they are now living quietly and peacefully in their apartment, it’s difficult for them to think about the future. Their children and grandchildren are still in Ukraine. They say they just have one wish.

“To see an end to this war, to go back home and of course, to see everyone,” Lyudmila said. “We wish everyone was on their land, where they belong, and we wish for peace on earth. It’s the greatest of our wishes. There is nothing else.”

**Yana**, her husband, and several other family members also initially stayed in Ukraine but fled when missiles began flying around them. Her parents stayed behind.

They were greeted by Vera Pleşca, who welcomed them into her home. “I said my home was small and not so rich, but I could host their wives and children,” Vera says.

“People were incredibly generous, often hosting families for free,” Svetlana Cires, a Catholic Relief Services project manager in Moldova says. “But that’s not a long-term solution, because it obviously can be expensive to have several extra people in your home.”

CRS, along with partner Caritas Moldova, provides support for refugees and host families such as Vera’s. The program offers cash assistance, rent and utility subsidies, and small repairs.

Yana’s family has now been living with Vera for two years. They eat together, celebrate birthdays and holidays together, and take care of each other. “We’re like a family now,” Vera says. “Everybody knows their duties. If I need help and she’s home, she’ll go and cook for my child.”

Yana says they were moved to tears by the generosity of people when they arrived in Moldova. “It almost feels like home, but our hearts are still back there,” Yana says of Ukraine. “Words cannot express how much we want to go home.”

**Nina and her husband Adrian** knew exactly what to do when war broke out. “What’s there to decide?” Nina asks. “We decided to help people. Help them, because where we would they go?”

On the evening of February 24, 2022, Nina's family and friends drove to the border town of Palanca, Moldova. "I think there were already a thousand cars there," Nina says.

Nina hosted several people over a period of months and supported them as they figured out where to go next. Nina received cash assistance as part of the CRS program and used it to make repairs to her bathroom.

"You should have seen it," Nina says. "It was simply a disaster. We didn't have the money to start this sort of renovation, but we did with your support."

In the fall of 2022, Vera and her grandson Ruslan came to live with Nina. When they first arrived in Moldova, they stayed in a refugee centre but soon found Nina who welcomed them, as she had done with so many others. "I'm not home, but it feels like home," Vera says. "It was so nice of them to receive me here."

"It's really okay to open your doors to a stranger," Adrian says. "That's what people call us, right? A small nation with a big heart."

To support Caritas Australia's Ukraine Appeal, visit [www.caritas.org.au/ukraine/](http://www.caritas.org.au/ukraine/) or call 1800 024 413 toll free.

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