Apart but still together
Just like here, across eastern Europe Jewish Community Centres remain closed, social gatherings banned, unemployment levels rocketing, service delivery compromised and access to medical care limited. As if living in poverty weren’t enough, Covid-19 has compounded vulnerable older people’s despair. Their resilience and stoicism is remarkable. They don’t complain and ask for help. And their gratitude for our crucial support is immense.

Last year we delivered critical services to over 14,000 older Jews. That is 14,000 individuals who are dependent upon us to alleviate their daily struggle to access food, medical support, homecare, dementia care or comfort. Amazingly, because of your generosity, we remain on target to maintain the scale and depth of our support this year. This client group remains my primary worry and we are doing all we can to ease their plight.

We are only as impactful as our local partner organisations enable us to be. As many of you know, World Jewish Relief has built an incredible network of 66 partners in 16 countries, giving us unique scale and reach. Each of these partners must pass detailed scrutiny of their integrity, governance and finances. Their real strength, though, is that they are rooted in their own communities and are well placed to find local solutions to local problems.

As Belarus remains in the midst of political turmoil, we have increased our engagement with our local partner in Minsk to ensure that older Jewish community members can continue to access services safely. You will read about our Belarussian programme in this edition, as well as being updated on the horrific aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster 35 years on.

We were deeply saddened at the passing of Rabbi Lord Sacks z”l in November. The wisdom, advice, guidance and passion he showed for World Jewish Relief over many years helped us navigate the challenges that the world presented. His celebration of our work assisting those both within and beyond our own community filled me with confidence that these pillars of our work remain firmly rooted in our mission.

To that end, I am proud to record that World Jewish Relief is today, remarkably, the largest provider of employment support to resettled refugees in the UK. As global displacement reaches unprecedented levels, our expertise and commitment in this area is so relevant. You can read more in this edition about the incredible STEP programme which is only five years old, but is built upon 87 years of helping refugees. It is of course at times of disaster that World Jewish Relief’s expertise really shines.

Let’s hope that 2021 is a better year for everyone, and I can return to worrying about normal things. Thank you for your support for all that we do. It is deeply appreciated.

paul@worldjewishrelief.org
By Sebastian Rudol, Deputy Director JCC Krakow

JCC Krakow was founded by HRH Prince of Wales and World Jewish Relief in 2008, and since our opening, World Jewish Relief has provided the Centre with guidance and support to help us carry out services necessary for our community.

JCC Krakow focuses on rebuilding Jewish life in a place which for so many years has been associated with a tragic past. Our mission is to provide members of the local Jewish community of all ages and backgrounds with a safe space, where they can freely express their Jewish identities and meet other community members. We provide services to Holocaust survivors, for whom the JCC is a second home, and at the same time educate Jewish children in our recently opened preschool. Being able to meet and work with this community every day is an incredibly rewarding experience.

JCC Krakow was forced to close its buildings following Polish government regulations on March 13th, 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have committed the past months to focusing our efforts on providing services to the community remotely. A key part of our current remote programming is taking care of over 200 senior members (among them 50 Holocaust survivors), who are incredibly vulnerable. To ensure their needs are met, JCC Krakow is providing them with weekly food and medicine deliveries, and phone counselling 2 or 3 times a week as part of our Covid-19 Relief Programme. We also continue to provide online programming to the rest of our community, with over 200 events organized since March.

During the summer, while the number of cases in Poland was falling, JCC Krakow brought back onsite programming including Shabbat dinners and meetings of the Senior Club – all of these meetings took place in the JCC Krakow garden with proper measures introduced to ensure a safe environment for our vulnerable members. Since the second wave hit Poland hard in October, JCC Krakow moved back to remote programming and introduced a new service through which we deliver special Shabbat-dinner-in-a-box sets to seniors on Fridays twice a month. We are also now providing additional transportation services for older members who need to receive medical services outside of their homes and also provide home repairs to vulnerable community members. We are proud to report that all members of our Senior Club remain healthy.

So many of our community members grew up not knowing they were Jewish and have often discovered their heritage at a later stage in their lives. Seeing them rediscover this lost identity is to me a symbol of the resilience of the Jewish spirit and gives me a lot of hope for the future.

I’m not Jewish myself, but I come from a town in Poland which was 75% Jewish before the war. I grew up learning about the history of my birthplace, thinking that the Jewish history of Poland ended in 1939. Learning that there is still Jewish life in Poland, and that people are rediscovering their Jewish roots is important to me as a Pole. Jews have lived in Poland for a thousand years, contributing to its history and culture, and I believe that the Polish community should understand and support the Jewish revival.
As the aftermath of the US elections rumbles on, it is easy to forget about the protests still ongoing months after Belarus’ contested presidential elections at the start of August. But waning international interest has not deterred the protesters, who still demand that President Alexander Lukashenko resign and that fresh, fair elections be held.

Every Sunday, tens of thousands of people crowd together and at the most recent protests, over a thousand civilians were arrested and held in cramped cells. This, alongside the onset of winter, has naturally contributed to a surge in Covid-19 infections. President Lukashenko has consistently downplayed the pandemic, calling it a “psychosis” and refusing to instate any lockdown measures. Belarus is currently seeing over a thousand new recorded infections a day which, in a country of just 9.5 million people, is astronomical. Real figures may be much higher.

We are deeply concerned about the strain that the pandemic continues to place on health and social care systems that are already chronically overstretched and underfunded, as Maria’s story illustrates.

“We don’t get any help from doctors – not even a consultation,” says Maria, “but I have to think about my own health, and the health of other loved ones, the ones who are not ill.”

Maria is part of Belarus’ Jewish community, and spent years caring for a relative who had dementia when she felt the state services had failed her. Her story is typical of people across Eastern Europe, where the infrastructure available to support people as they age is deeply underdeveloped: dementia is severely underdiagnosed, state homecare provision is limited to delivering basic goods to people’s front doors, and private care is beyond the reach of most, given that pensions average £50-80 a month.

The Covid-19 pandemic has drawn global attention to the difficulties faced by people who care for a loved one at home. In the UK, the closure of day centres and the reduction of at-home support has left carers burnt out, contributing to a rise in mental health concerns. Many carers are struggling with the isolation that comes from not being able to leave their homes and the lack of respite services for their loved one.

But for people living in Eastern Europe, these difficulties are not new. Many of the older Jewish people we support in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova...
and Georgia have been living in de-facto lockdown for years. Residential care options for people with conditions such as dementia are scarce and often consist of admission to a large neuro-psychiatric institution. Instead, they remain at home while their loved ones do their best to support them. As the younger generation emigrates to countries like Russia, Poland and Romania to seek employment, much of this unpaid care work is taken on by spouses, who are likely to be living with multiple health conditions of their own. It is common for people to live in cramped and poorly-maintained flats, meaning that carers often live in a single room with the person they care for. These flats are often in Soviet-era blocks without a lift, making getting outside challenging even at the best of times.

As well as providing homecare to those who need it most acutely, World Jewish Relief also offers training, resources and respite to individuals who are caring for a loved one with dementia. When the pandemic hit, it threw into sharp relief the importance of this support, and we needed to redouble our efforts to ensure that family carers had access to this same level of support despite the circumstances.

Throughout the pandemic, I have been immensely proud of the work that World Jewish Relief's local partners have been doing to support those who are caring for a loved one with dementia, and I have been blown away by what they have managed to achieve. Our partner organisation in Minsk, Hesed Rakhamim, has set up a schedule of weekly Zoom meetings for community members who are caring for a loved one with dementia, where participants support each other and share ideas for how to cope in challenging circumstances. Meanwhile, Hesed Yehuda in Chisinau, Moldova, has been sending out activity packs to clients with dementia to help them stay engaged and active during their period of isolation.

World Jewish Relief's partners have proven that in adversity there is opportunity. The needs of carers and of the people they look after are in the limelight globally, now more than ever before. We must use this moment as an opportunity to bring the needs of older people with care needs and their caregivers to the fore. This momentum may be exactly what we need to radically improve the lives of the most vulnerable older people.

With your support, we are able to change the lives of people living with dementia and their loved ones every day. As vulnerable people age, our expertise in dementia care is more crucial than ever, and we would love to be able to reach more and more people with our programming.
April 26, 1986. The day of the Chernobyl Nuclear Disaster, 35 years ago. The nuclear reactor was unstable due to a faulty test, but no one knew. When the test drew to a close, the shutdown of the core created an uncontrolled chain of nuclear reactions. Superheated water caused a series of explosions, and the resultant fire burned for 9 days, throwing radiation into the atmosphere.

Thousands of people’s lives changed that day. Many were forced to leave their homes, and give up everything they had to escape the radiation. Others sacrificed their own safety to travel into the exclusion zone to help with the relief efforts. One of these people was Lyudmila.

‘I was born on January 28, 1954, in a large, friendly Jewish family. In my life everything went well, after school I got married and had a daughter. I started working as a teacher.’

‘The black pages in my life started on April 26, 1986. This is the day of the Chernobyl disaster. A week after the explosion, I was invited to the Komsomol and told that it was necessary to rescue children from inside the exclusion zone.’

‘As a mother and a teacher, I understood that I must help. I made 12 trips to Chernobyl, and took children to makeshift camps in Odessa.’

‘I saw dying children. I heard how children received news of the death of their parents. This has never left me.’

Even though 35 years have passed since the Chernobyl disaster, there are still thousands who live with the consequences. Lyudmila still feels the effects of her time spent inside the exclusion zone. Not only is she haunted by the memory of the harrowing things she saw, but she felt the physical effects of being exposed to that much radiation. She spent weeks in hospital with blood disorders, and doctors could do little for her. She recovered slowly, but Lyudmila still felt the long-term effects of the radiation. She had to work two jobs to have enough money to pay for all of her medication. As
her health deteriorated, the costs of her medication spiralled, and her income could not keep up. She was trapped in a loop of increasing health problems and increasing costs.

Like Lyudmila, Alexander has felt the long-term effects of the disaster. As part of the Soviet army, he was forced to go and work in the exclusion zone for nearly 3 months. He was so close to the reactor he could see glowing patches of earth, just 30 metres from the epicentre.

‘If you fell down, no one was allowed to help you up. There is a lot of truth in the films that you see.’

The effects of the radiation have permeated his whole life.

‘All people who worked in Chernobyl had so much radiation. Nobody knew how bad it was as they couldn’t see it, but they ended up with all this radiation inside them.’

Alexander, like Lyudmila, had issues with his blood vessels for years that ultimately led to clots in his leg. The doctors gave him two choices - live without your leg, or die. He chose life, and had his leg amputated. He blames Chernobyl. His life changed overnight, and he was no longer able to get around. ‘It makes you very depressed. I live alone. My life is the TV, the internet... sometimes I go outside alone, but that is it. It’s all I have.’

Luckily, World Jewish Relief was able to step in and help Lyudmila and Alexander. We pay for Lyudmila’s medication, and provide her with medical advice and consultations, to help her keep on top of her conditions.

For Alexander, we provide access to his local Jewish Community Centre, a homecare worker to check in on him and keep him company, and we help pay for his heating bills over the winter. Without help, he would have to go without food, his connection to the outside world, and would not be able to stay warm.

Thanks to your support, we can make sure Lyudmila and Alexander are happy, comfortable and safe as they grow older. Lyudmila is grateful for the help that she gets - she says ‘The help I get has greatly improved my health situation. I am so thankful for the help I get. It is so important to me.’

Alexander said ‘The Jewish community is always helping others and that is why I feel so close to the community. They wouldn’t let me fall and fail alone.’

There are so many older people in Ukraine still suffering the consequences of the explosion 35 years ago - indirect, long lasting effects that have slowly taken over their lives. We ensure that older Jewish people who need our help do not go unnoticed, and are given assistance to make sure they don’t have to go hungry, feel lonely or suffer illnesses.

With your support, we can help many more people like Lyudmila and Alexander live better lives.
In 2018 World Jewish Relief’s Humanitarian Team embarked on a new initiative, developing the way in which we respond to disasters. Our traditional approach was reactive: when a disaster hit, we launched a fundraising appeal, and then we set out to identify a local partner organisation through which to deliver our response. We had to work at speed to find and assess a local partner capable of delivering on our humanitarian agenda who would meet our due diligence standards. Whilst this approach is still necessary, especially in responding to large scale emergencies where we do not have a pre-existing partner, we saw an opportunity for improvement.

To be better prepared for disasters, more able to respond to smaller disasters that don’t hit media headlines, and transition to a more proactive way of working, the Humanitarian Team designed the Disaster Preparedness Initiative (DPI). The initiative sought to broaden our network of local partner organisations, and to further develop relationships with our pre-existing partners in disaster-prone regions.

The objectives of the DPI include:

- Be proactive in our approach to humanitarian partnerships, enabling us to respond better to more emergencies.
- Grow our network of local partners and support them in developing their expertise.
- Develop a World Jewish Relief presence in new locations.
- Use our Disaster Funds and access new opportunities with our local partners.

Building the Disaster Preparedness Initiative

We began by working to identify the most suitable contexts for the DPI to operate in. We analysed need using three different risk indexes, to identify risk-prone countries where disasters were highly likely to occur. We also considered our organisational capacity to work within different countries, accounting for accessibility, conflict, and political context.

Based on our analysis we selected eight countries, three of which we already operated in. In these three countries we trialled the DPI with our existing partners, and in new countries reached...
out to suitable local organisations to build a partnership.

We formed a simple agreement between us and the partner. This involved us supporting the partner to become more effective in disaster management, and better able to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and reduce the risk of disasters. The partner committed to building channels and networks to share early warnings of disasters, and to a sustained affiliation with World Jewish Relief. Furthermore, we committed to working to deepen partners’ understanding of the humanitarian sector, humanitarian standards and early disaster needs assessment.

The DPI has been operating for three years, and we now have a pool of 13 partner organisations across nine countries. Despite Covid-19 temporarily affecting our plans, we are looking forward to welcoming two new partners to the initiative – one in Colombia, and one in Ethiopia.

In 2019-20, thanks to the DPI we were able to access a total income of £676,495 from the START Network, an organisation that funds humanitarian responses to lower profile emergencies. This meant that in one year, we were able to respond to four emergencies: floods in Southern Haiti, the Maluku-Indonesia earthquake, Sofala-Mozambique floods and mass displacement in Myanmar. None of these disasters grabbed the headlines, but hit incredibly vulnerable communities, and we were able to provide vital assistance.

Through our DPI partnerships we have also been able to respond to Covid-19 effectively in six countries: Haiti, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ukraine, and Greece.

**Our initiative in Myanmar**

Myanmar was hit particularly hard in the 2019 monsoon season, with severe spells of heavy rains and strong winds wreaking havoc throughout July and August 2019. At its peak at the end of August, torrential rains caused riverbanks to overflow, landslides, and extensive flooding. The worst landslide in Paung Township killed more than 70 people. The states of Mon, Bago and Kayin were the worst hit, with more than 80,000 people displaced.

As Myanmar was one of the countries where we had established a new DPI partnership, we were able to quickly access funding and respond immediately.

We successfully applied to the START Fund for almost £100,000 to target 29 villages in the three worst hit states. Our short-term project alleviated the immediate needs of those displaced and affected by flooding, including a month’s worth of food packages for those who had been displaced. The project was implemented by our DPI partner, Metta Development Foundation, one of the leading humanitarian agencies in Myanmar. Had we not created this partnership through the DPI we would have been unable to respond, as the scale of the crisis did not warrant an emergency fundraising appeal, nor would we have been eligible for immediate START funding without an existing local partner.

Thanks to our partnership with Metta Development Foundation, we reached 18,127 people in three states with essential food supplies they would not otherwise have received. Distribution commenced 6 days after funding was approved, a speed unthinkable without the DPI.

**You can donate to our Disaster Fund today to help us grow the DPI. Your support will ensure that when an emergency hits anywhere in the world, World Jewish Relief can respond as quickly as possible, bringing urgent supplies and support to those in need.**
When Youssef, a tailor from Syria who is now a refugee in Yorkshire, learned about Covid-19 he knew his sewing skills could be of use. He arrived in the UK three years ago from Aleppo, where, before he had been forced to leave, he had specialised in making wedding dresses and sports kit. He is currently on World Jewish Relief’s Specialist Training and Employment Programme (STEP) and approached his Employment Manager from the programme, Katie, who is based at the Refugee Council in Sheffield, with an idea. He wanted to create a refugee sewing group to manufacture PPE for people in need. The idea took hold and Zaher (above), another Syrian tailor from Homs on the STEP programme, was brought in to help run online workshops teaching a group of 15 participants around the country how to sew high-quality protective face masks.

Youssef does not have a sewing machine so has been hand stitching the face coverings. It takes him around 20 minutes to complete a mask. It’s a far cry from the wedding dresses he was renowned for producing in Syria but he is just glad to be doing something that contributes back to the country he is living in. He says:

“This is my profession, I have the know-how, I just wanted to be of use and to help others”.

Zaher, who is fortunate to have access to a sewing machine, is equally committed saying

“It is in my nature to help people. When Covid-19 hit, when I knew I could do something to help using my skills I didn’t hesitate. I try to help people. Even when I have problems I like to help others as it raises my spirit. I am not doing this for reward, I am doing this to help those in need. This community embraced us, gave us accommodation, school for our children, benefits for us. This is the least I can do”.

Over time Youssef and Zaher have used their expertise to improve the design of their masks and determine the best fabrics to use. Now several weeks in, the group have produced over 50 high quality face-masks for a care home in Sheffield and sets of scrubs for care workers. From making the masks and hosting the workshops, they have slowly improved what they can do – they’ve learnt fabrics are best to use and how to make masks in different sizes. Their dream is have access to more sewing machines so that they can increase production.

World Jewish Relief’s STEP programme is facilitating the zoom workshops and providing the materials for making the masks.

As well as this voluntary sewing project, both men are continuing with the online English classes provided by STEP and are working closely with their Employment Managers on their journey to find work. Zaher hopes to get a position in security, while Youssef dreams of having a clothes shop again.
Janette is afraid.

She’s afraid of what will happen to her this winter.

She’s afraid of the cold.

It creeps into her tiny house, through the hard concrete floors and the gaps in the thin walls. Her breath freezes in the air. Water freezes in the pipes, so she cannot wash.

There are thousands of older Jewish people like Janette who need your help. Temperatures in Ukraine can fall as low as -20. While older people in the UK get the Winter Fuel Allowance to help with the cost of heating, in Ukraine there is no such safety net. Pensions average just £55 a month, and as temperatures drop, older Jewish people face difficult choices. Their bills skyrocket, and they are forced to choose whether to pay for food or heating. They live in fear of debt, illness and the cold.

You can make sure vulnerable older Jewish people don’t have to live in fear this winter. We provide comprehensive winter support to older people in eastern Europe, from bank cards to pay for food and heating, to fuel, hot meals and winter clothing. With your help, we can reach many more people like Janette this winter.
DONATE TO CELEBRATE

Mark a special occasion by supporting World Jewish Relief

Whether you’re looking to give a meaningful gift or celebrating a wedding, anniversary or birthday yourself, mark a special occasion by giving some of the world’s most vulnerable Jewish people something to celebrate too.

For more information about Donate to Celebrate contact Adina Birnbaum 020 8736 1250 | adina@worldjewishrelief.org

DON’T FORGET ME

And don’t forget to leave a gift to World Jewish Relief in your Will

You can help end Jewish poverty

For more information about leaving a gift in your Will, or about our Free Will service, please contact: Richard Budden richardb@worldjewishrelief.org 020 8736 1250

World Jewish Relief would like to thank the following supporters and their families for generous gifts left in their Will:

Julius Badyan
Isidore & Deborah Levy
Deborah Oscar
Lena Sackin
Steve Glicksman

WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES

For every £1 spent, 81p goes towards our life-changing projects supporting older Jewish people and those escaping poverty around the world. We invest the other 19p to manage our income and to help raise the next pound.

To make a donation please visit worldjewishrelief.org