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SPOTLIGHT

HelpAge International in Ukraine

HelpAge

International

A monthly digest from HelpAge International, bringing the faces behind our work into the spotlight - those whose lives are being transformed and those who make it all possible.

DEC Ukraine Emergency Response

Supported by Age International and Disasters Emergency Committee



REACHING THE MOST VULNERABLE

The escalation of hostilities in eastern Ukraine has worsened the already fragile situation of many older people, cutting them off from basic services like food, hygiene products, and medical care. To help those most at risk, HelpAge International has been on the ground in the frontline settlements of Kharkiv, delivering three months' worth of diapers and essential hygiene supplies to older residents still living in precarious conditions. Although the area is no longer occupied, the proximity to ongoing conflict makes life dangerous and access to resources scarce.

"Living in these conditions, we are very happy to receive such help. We often cannot afford even the most basic care products," says 85-year-old Raisa.

Olha, 74: "We felt cut off from normal life, being here alone, and thanks to you, we see that we are not left to fend for ourselves."

HelpAge has been supporting over 1,100 older people through our programme in these areas. HelpAge's social workers are helping them connect with evacuation services and vital food and water supplies.

In the face of such adversity, psychosocial support is proving equally important. While the Community Safe Space in Myrnohrad remains closed, HelpAge psychologist Svitlana continues to offer sessions in the local park, providing emotional support to those who have chosen to stay.



"In such a difficult time, even a simple talk can make a miracle. After such meetings, I feel much lighter," says 72-year-old Taisiia. Valentyna, 68, adds: "I was afraid we would be left alone, without support. But you didn't abandon us! Knowing that there are people who care gives me strength to hold on."

These stories underscore the power of human connection and community support. As Svitlana, 65, reflects, "These meetings not only help me cope with stress and reduce fear, but also remind me that I am not alone. I am part of a community that cares about me."

ESSENTIALS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LOST EVERYTHING

For 76-year-old Viktor and his wife, Yevheniia, life changed forever in 2014 when war first reached their hometown of Bakhmut. The conflict returned with even more devastation in 2022, forcing the couple to flee their now uninhabitable town. Taken by volunteers to a small shelter near Dnipro, they left behind everything, including the home they once cherished. "I don't even know if my house is still intact," Viktor says quietly.

The war has not only taken their home but also worsened Viktor's health. Struggling with mobility issues and the lingering effects of an untreated stroke, he finds himself in constant pain, often losing his balance. "If there was an opportunity, I would like to undergo a medical examination. I feel a lot of pain every day, and I fall all the time. Doctors don't come here, and I can't go to them," Viktor explains.

With a small pension of 4,000 UAH (76 GBP) and IDP payments of 2,000 UAH (38 GBP), Viktor and Yevheniia have barely enough to cover basic needs, let alone medical expenses. Through a project providing essential support, they received a hygiene kit, along with financial assistance of 6,660 UAH (123 GBP).

Additionally, they received food packages, bed linen, a blanket, and pillows through the project's referral system. "These are the most necessary things that you don't appreciate until you lose everything," Viktor reflects. "They allow us to bring a little comfort to our lives—the lives of those who have lost their homes."



Multisectoral humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups of people affected by the Ukraine war, in Ukraine and surrounding countries

Supported by German Federal Foreign Office, Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany

"I'VE FOUND THE STRENGTH TO KEEP CREATING"

As she approaches her 75th birthday this autumn, Halyna reflects on the unimaginable journey that brought her from her home in Kharkiv to her temporary refuge in Lviv. "The bombings were relentless," she recalls. "The conditions were practically impossible to live in."



Forced to flee in 2022, Halyna left behind not just her home, but her life as an artist and designer – a life filled with creativity and joy.

"I've always been a creative person. I designed houses, painted, wrote poetry and prose," she says. "But the war and displacement took all of that away. There were no pencils, no canvases, no paints. But most of all, we had to focus on surviving."

At her lowest point, Halyna found support through HelpAge International's psychosocial care. This help allowed her to rediscover her passion. "I found the strength to keep creating – that's how my graphic works were born. Painting helps me cope with the new reality. My life began to improve a little bit," she explains. Her resilience culminated in a personal exhibition in Poland to mark the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

However, just as things were looking up, a road traffic accident left Halyna seriously injured. Hospitalised and in pain, she once again faced tremendous hardship. But this time, she wasn't alone. Her social worker, Anzhelika, stepped in with unwavering support. "Anzhelika came to visit me in the hospital, bringing me a blood pressure monitor, hygiene products, and food," Halyna shares. "I was touched by such warmth and kindness. Like me, she's also displaced, so she knows how hard it is to live far from home at this age."

SAFETY COMES FIRST

As the conflict in eastern Ukraine intensifies, the threat to civilian lives grows, particularly for older people who are often left isolated in dangerous areas. In response, HelpAge International, in partnership with Handicap International - Humanity & Inclusion, organised a series of vital



mine safety trainings for both its staff and older residents from Kryvyi Rih, Liubotyn, and Pavlohrad.

The participants gained crucial knowledge on how to recognise and respond to dangerous objects, learning about different types of mines and unexploded ordnance, and the essential steps to protect themselves and others. This lifesaving training provided practical skills that could make the difference between safety and tragedy.

These efforts are part of HelpAge's broader mission to safeguard older people in conflict zones. "This training helps reduce risks to civilians and is an integral part of our security efforts," explains a HelpAge representative. By continuing to educate both staff and older Ukrainians on mine safety, HelpAge is ensuring that those most vulnerable are equipped to face the challenges of war with greater awareness and confidence.

Humanitarian response to deliver lifesaving assistance and early recovery support to older people affected by the conflict in Ukraine

Supported by Canada-Ukraine Foundation and HelpAge Canada



A LIGHT OF HOPE AMIDST HARDSHIP

For 60-year-old Olena, the dream of a peaceful older age was shattered when war came to her home in the Donetsk region. Forced to flee for safety, she began her life anew in the village of Gubynikha, Dnipropetrovsk region. But starting over was far from easy – finding a place to live, integrating into a new community, and the absence of everything she was familiar with left her feeling isolated and overwhelmed.

In the midst of this upheaval, an even greater tragedy struck. Olena's eldest daughter passed away from illness, leaving her with the unexpected responsibility of raising her two grandchildren, Kira and Hnat. With only her modest pension and IDP allowance to rely on, Olena found herself struggling to make ends meet. "It's simply not enough," she confided. "Raising my grandchildren and surviving through all these challenges has been incredibly difficult."

But in her darkest hour, hope arrived in the form of a community-led project offering essential support. "Participa-

tion in the project has become a lifeline for me," Olena says. "The hygiene kit I received had everything I needed, and the financial assistance was incredibly helpful. It's so important that you reached out during the most difficult period of my life. Thanks to this help, I feel more confident and secure."

For Olena, this support has been more than just a helping hand – it has provided her with the strength to continue, to care for her grandchildren, and to face each new day with renewed hope.

"NOW I CAN ENJOY MY FAVOURITE HOBBY AGAIN"

Ella, 77, from Kramatorsk, once lived a peaceful life, cherishing her role as a wife, mother, and teacher at a local academy. In 2012, she found a new passion—creating dolls using the sculptural textile technique. Her collection grew, and her intricate work was showcased in exhibitions. But in 2014, her life took a drastic turn when conflict forced her to leave her home. Displaced for a second time in 2022, she now lives in Kamianske, Dnipro region.



With each upheaval, Ella left behind not just her home but also her beloved art. On top of this, her health deteriorated, with chronic illnesses and severe spinal pain making even daily tasks difficult. In this challenging period, a glimmer of hope came through the support of NGO Event Space, a partner of HelpAge International. Thanks to a mini-grant, Ella was able to purchase a posture correction corset, as recommended by her doctor.

"Now I can walk more, and most importantly, I can do my favourite thing – create. I have so many ideas!" Ella shares with joy.

Supporting older people in Ukraine

Supported by HelpAge USA

"WE SUPPORT EACH OTHER BY WORKING TOGETHER"

For many older people displaced by the war, losing their homes has been an overwhelming experience. Yet, in the midst of resettlement challenges, they are finding strength and resilience by creating new lives. In one of Drohobych's



dormitories, a group of displaced older people has come together to organise a small garden, bringing a sense of home and purpose to their new surroundings.

Tatiana, 71, who fled Ukrainsk in the Donetsk region at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, finds comfort in growing flowers. "It reminds me of my home, where my whole yard was in bloom," she reflects. For Valentyna, 65, from Kharkiv, growing vegetables is not just about nutrition. "It helps me recover spiritually. Working on the land gives me strength and energy," she says.

Similarly, Tetiana, 63, displaced from Sievierodonetsk, has found both moral and physical health benefits in gardening. "It brings fresh food to the table, which helps, as my pension doesn't cover all my needs," she explains. Antonina, 69, also from Sievierodonetsk, used to tend a vineyard at her home and couldn't imagine life without working the land. "Gardening calms me and reminds me of home. This is how we support each other – by working together."

REDISCOVERING LIFE'S JOY

At 68, Kseniia never imagined she would be forced to flee her home. But in the early hours of 24 February 2022, as shells flew past her windows in the Kherson region, she and her husband packed their belongings in just 20 minutes and escaped. "We lived near Crimea, and at 5 a.m., the bombing began. We evacuated our children and grandchildren, then set off in search of safety with nothing but the clothes on our backs," Kseniia recalls.



After a brief time abroad, Kseniia and her husband returned to Ukraine, settling in Lviv, where they've lived for the past three years in a friend's flat. Their home remains under occupation, now inhabited by strangers, and with a combined pension of just 4,000 UAH (96 USD), they face

daily challenges. "It's impossible to survive on this money in the city," Kseniia explains. "In the countryside, you can at least grow your own food. Here, we don't know how we'd manage if my husband didn't work." On top of this, her chronic health conditions demand constant medication, further straining their limited resources.

Yet despite the hardships, Kseniia found hope through the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Lviv. "These activities saved me from despair," she says. "I met other older people like me, who had lost everything. I took part in art therapy, learned digital skills, and even joined age-appropriate sports. No matter what, life still has value, and being part of a community makes it easier to endure difficult times."

A LIFELINE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

In the western regions of Ukraine, the six-month project in partnership with Help and Hope NGO has had a profound impact on the lives of older people affected by the ongoing war. Through the Survivor and Community-led Response (SCLR) approach, eight local initiatives were supported with small grants and capacity-building, benefiting over 1,000 older people, including those with disabilities.



One such initiative, "Community of Caring People" in Chervonhrad, Lviv region, helped older people stay connected through mobile communication. This project, implemented by the Caritas Kramatorsk Charitable Foundation, distributed mobile phones to over 160 older people. Along with the devices, they received support to set up and learn how to use the phones, along with a brochure containing essential emergency contacts.

For 75-year-old Oleksii, this initiative was nothing short of life-changing. After the loss of his wife six years ago, he has lived alone, with his children and grandchildren far away, some even abroad.

With a pension of 3,600 UAH (about 87 USD), Oleksii has struggled to make ends meet. Yet, thanks to this project, he now has a vital link to the outside world.

"On my birthday, they brought balloons and sang to me. I didn't expect such kindness. They handed me a phone and taught me how to use it. Now I can call my doctor and neighbours. It's a real window to the world for me," Oleksii said.

This initiative goes beyond just providing technology; it offers older people like Oleksii a way to reconnect with their community, access vital services, and alleviate their sense of isolation. It represents a significant achievement in ensuring that older people, often the most vulnerable in times of crisis, are not left behind.

Through partnerships and empowering local groups, HelpAge International is showing that even in the darkest times, community-based solutions can create lasting change. As the war in Ukraine continues, initiatives like these bring hope and tangible support, helping older people reclaim a sense of dignity and connection to the world around them.



A SAFE HAVEN FOR OLDER UKRAINIANS

In Chernivtsi, project small grant recipient NGO *Vertical* for people with disabilities has created a sanctuary for those who have lost everything, providing a lifeline to older people left homeless by war, family circumstances, or deceit. Originally planned as an overnight shelter, it has grown into a 24-hour refuge, offering not just a place to sleep but food, warmth, and a much-needed sense of se-

curity.

Svitlana Skliarenko, the shelter’s director, explains: “Our goal is to reduce the number of people forced to spend the night on the streets. Many older people find themselves homeless through no fault of their own – whether due to family disputes, scams, or returning from prison to find their home no longer theirs. Every story is different, but everyone deserves help.”

The shelter is a haven of dignity, with beds, a kitchen, and accessible showers. There’s even a ramp for those with mobility issues, and the staff help with grooming and basic care. For many, this place is more than just a shelter – it’s a second chance at life.

Valentyna, 85, has faced more than her fair share of hardship. After losing her husband and being displaced by the war, she fled Mariupol in 2022 and found solace in Chernivtsi. With her daughter living abroad, she was alone and struggling with heart disease, mobility issues, and the daily management of her health. Her small pension and state allowance, totalling less than 5,000 UAH (120 USD), were nowhere near enough to meet her needs.

“A doctor visits us here and monitors my condition. I now have a roof over my head and psychological support,” Valentyna shares. “Since I cannot chew, the food grinder they provide helps me a lot. I would love to return home, but it’s destroyed. So, I’d be grateful if I could live out my life here.”

Beyond offering immediate support, the project titled *Voices of the Community*, through which the shelter was funded, has built a network of organisations prepared to respond to future crises. This sustainable network ensures that older people like Valentyna are not left behind, even in the face of unimaginable challenges.

NOTE:

All photos and stories featured have been obtained with the consent of the individuals involved and are approved for public sharing. Full-quality images can be found [here](#)

Supporting older people in Ukraine:



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