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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*



### FINDING STRENGTH IN CRISIS

After enduring 11 months of occupation, 71-year-old Liudmyla was evacuated from Makiivka, Luhansk region, to Kharkiv. Her life, family, work has now been changed forever. Her home was destroyed, and her two sons, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild were forced to seek safety abroad.

Liudmyla struggled greatly with the loss of her home. The overwhelming stress led to a stroke. She spent nearly a year in rehabilitation in Kharkiv, but as daily challenges in the frontline city became harder to cope with, she decided to move to western Ukraine.

Now, she lives in a shelter in the city of Kolomyia. After suffering a stroke and a hip fracture, she could barely move on her own. That's why the crutches she received through

the project became a way to regain some of her mobility - now she can move around the shelter independently. In addition, Liudmyla received a hygiene kit, financial assistance, adult diapers, and a winter items.

"My small pension and big health problems made me dependent on other people and circumstances. This support allowed me to save money, and the crutches have given me the ability to move without assistance. I now realise that even in the most challenging conditions, you can find hope, support, and strength," she shares.



### SUPPORT THAT TRANSFORMS LIVES

To help older people not only physically but also psychologically adapt to new living conditions, the HelpAge Community Safe Spaces operating within the project provide comprehensive psychosocial support. One of its key elements is regular meetings with a psychologist, that help older people cope with anxiety, overcome challenges, and find inner resources for recovery.

For instance, in January, older people in Dnipro learned to create a "vision board" - a powerful tool that helps them recognise their aspirations, regain a sense of control over their lives, and maintain a positive outlook. In city of Samar, Dnipropetrovsk region, participants in both group and individual sessions with a psychologist had the opportunity to share their experiences, manage anxiety, and build resilience.

Similarly, in HelpAge Community Safe Space in Mukachevo, in western Ukraine, our psychologists conduct training sessions for displaced older people, supporting them in adapting to change and finding a sense of belonging in their new communities. In a safe and welcoming atmosphere, they learn to better understand their emotions, regain balance, and rebuild self-confidence.

All these activities create a supportive environment where older people affected by war can feel valued and emotionally supported. We continue providing psychosocial assistance because we believe that care and attention are essential for everyone, regardless of age.

**Provision of age-inclusive humanitarian and resilience-building support to conflict-affected older people in Ukraine**

*Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany*

**"I FELT LIKE I WAS LOSING NOT ONLY MY HOME BUT MYSELF AS WELL."**

72-year-old Enver was born and raised in Baku. A graduate of the Azerbaijan State Conservatory, he dedicated his entire life to music and his family. At the age of 24, together with his wife Nataliia, they moved to Kherson, where their life was filled with joy, love, and music. But the war in 2022 forced them to leave their home and separated them from their children. Now, Enver and his wife live in a collective centre in Drohobych, western Ukraine.

The loss of their home and the uncertainty of displacement seriously affected Enver's health. Memory problems, which arose from an injury nearly ten years ago when he spent 17 days in a coma and was left with a disability, worsened due to the stress he experienced. "Because of the war, I felt like I was losing not only my home but myself as well," he confides.

Unfortunately, the consequences of the trauma and the stress of the war continue to worsen his condition - speech



problems have emerged, making communication difficult for Enver. Yet it is in music that he has once again found solace. As a participant of the HelpAge Community Safe Space, he gained access to a piano used for singing lessons.

"Playing piano is my salvation. Daily practice helps me overcome depression, stabilise my emotional state, and maintain my professional skills," Enver shares.

He also eagerly attends Nordic walking classes, learns IT skills, and uses hairdressing services, which boost his confidence and strength. Thanks to the workshops, excursions, and cultural activities, he feels socially integrated and valued. "Here, I not only received the necessary support but also felt that my talent and experience matter," says Enver.

**FOR THE STRENGTH OF BODY AND SPIRIT**

Nordic walking has become an important part of the activities for older people in all four HelpAge Community Safe Spaces in the Lviv region, having an incredibly positive impact on their physical and emotional well-being. These sessions not only improve the physical condition of older displaced persons but also reduce stress levels, giving them new emotional energy and boosting their mood. They once again experience the joy of movement, improving their endurance, while also having the opportunity to be part of a supportive community.

Each session is conducted under the supervision of an instructor who carefully adjusts it to meet the individual needs of the participants. Special poles help reduce joint strain, improve coordination, and provide balance, which is critically important for older adults. This not only helps maintain physical health but also gives a sense of safety and confidence.

At the HelpAge spaces, Nordic walking is not just physical activity - it's a true social event. Group sessions allow participants to communicate, make new friends, and support



one another. This is especially important for older people, as a community where mutual support and care prevail can reduce feelings of loneliness, which often accompany older individuals, especially in times of war. The program not only strengthens their health but also fills their lives with new emotions and gives them the chance to feel valued and important to others.

**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*

**“HELPAge HAS BECOME MY SECOND FAMILY”**



At 98 years old, Anastasiia, a resident of the town of Liubotyn in Kharkiv region, has been through many trials. As a little girl, she had to endure the horrors of the Holodomor, and World War II coincided with her school years. After surviving a difficult childhood and adolescence, Anastasiia decided to become a doctor to help others.

She devoted her entire life to treating children, retiring only at the age of 76. Until she was 80, Anastasiia was a blood donor. Even after retiring, she didn't sit idle – she became the head of the local veterans' organisation, where she still works, providing support to older people.

After helping others her whole life, today Anastasiia herself faces the need for support. Widowed at an early age and raising two sons on her own, she saw the birth of two grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and now she is once again confronted with war, the second one in her life.

To face these challenges, she found support at the HelpAge Community Safe Space, which has become her place of strength. Anastasiia actively participates in events, shares her experience, receives the necessary psychosocial support, and learns to enjoy life despite living in a frontline area.

“HelpAge has become my second family,” Anastasiia confesses. “This place has brought me joy. With you, I do not lose hope that when peace comes, older people will have more opportunities for an active life and social support. The faith in people and the kindness I have found here helps me keep moving forward.”

**SUPPORT AND CARE KNOW NO DISTANCE**

In supporting older people, HelpAge not only provides home care for people with limited mobility or social activities in 8 Community Safe Spaces within the project in the east and west of the country.

HelpAge also continues supporting older people who, due to distance, cannot participate in activities at our Community Safe Spaces. The HelpAge team from Stryi visited displaced older people in the town of Morshyn. The meeting included a session with a psychologist, a masterclass on making decorative candles, and board games. Additionally, the older participants learned neck exercises - a simple and effective technique that helps relieve muscle tension and prevent headaches. Now, they can practise these exercises independently.

Meanwhile, the HelpAge team from Kolomyia travelled to Ivano-Frankivsk to hold a creative gathering for displaced older people at the “I am Mariupol” hub. In a cosy atmosphere, participants decorated gingerbread houses with vibrant icing. For many, this symbolises the home they were forced to leave. Each such mobile visit is another step towards ensuring that older people, even far from home, feel cared for and supported. Each such mobile visit is another step towards making elderly people feel cared for and supported even when they are far from their homes.



Also an important meeting was held at the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Sheptytsky between representatives of public and charitable organisations, social services, and local authorities. The fruitful discussion focused on improving social services for older people, who are one

of the most vulnerable groups. The participants discussed the organisation of informational and psychological trainings, consultations, expanding access to social services and ways to implement new initiatives that would support older IDPs.

**Improving the wellbeing of the most at risk older people through the provision of community and homebased support in Ukraine**

*Supported by WHO/WHO Ukraine in partnership with Age International and with the financial support of FCDO*

**"I HAD EVERYTHING, AND NOW I AM LEFT WITH NOTHING"**

72-year-old Olha, a doctor and entrepreneur, lived in her own house on the bank of the Kakhovka Reservoir in Kerson region, surrounded by a garden with apples, pears, cherries, and grapes. "But when 2022 came, the fairy tale ended. Grief came to our land. The cannons thundered, explosions rang out, the earth moaned," she recalls the start of the war.

Fleeing her home in fear, Olha reached Kryvyi Rih, where she has been living in a rented apartment for almost three years. "I had everything, and now I am left with nothing," she adds sorrowfully.

"I am grateful for this support at a point in my life when I was almost drowning in despair. I received a set of household and hygiene products. Everything was of high quality and very useful to me. Social worker Svitlana, always kind and sensitive, also helped me with kind words; she helped me improve my mental state. Thanks to this support, I,

in turn, try to stay positive, do physical exercises, take care of flowers, and knit for myself," says Olha, expressing her desire to remain strong and optimistic despite all the challenges.

**MAKING WINTERS WARMER AND LIFE - MORE COMFORTABLE**

In January, two thousand older people in the Dnipropetrovsk and Zakarpattia regions received kits containing essential personal hygiene and household cleaning products, designed to last for three months. Thanks to this support, older people receiving home care now have the necessary supplies to help them feel both financially and personally more secure.

Additionally, the distribution of personal hygiene items for over a thousand older people has been completed. This assistance, which included adult diapers and urological pads, was crucial for those requiring special care.

Furthermore, older people are now equipped with essential items for a comfortable life during the cold season. As part of the project, two thousand older Ukrainians received winter kits, which included warm blankets, pillows, bedding sets, thermoses, flashlights, and power banks.



**TO FEEL HUMAN –  
A FILM TRIBUTE TO OLDER UKRAINIANS**

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, now in its third year, has tested the strength of Ukraine's people. But resilience isn't just about surviving, it's about holding on to purpose.

*To Feel Human* is the third film in HelpAge's trilogy on older Ukrainians - each one a tribute to the different ways they adapt, endure and keep going. Each one a Ukrainian story told by a Ukrainian voice in a film made by Ukrainians.

This film follows Anhelina, one of HelpAge's social workers, who isn't just getting through the war, she's stepping up, to care for her peers, while also facing the same hardships herself.

Ultimately, it's a story about strength and solidarity and the will to keep going. It's a powerful reminder that even in crisis, older people are not just waiting for help - they are the ones giving it.

Because to help is to feel human.



**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:**

