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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*



OVERCOMING CHALLENGES, FINDING PURPOSE

Olha, a 74-year-old from Novomoskovsk (Samar), dedicated most of her life to working at a sewing factory. Today, she is excited to expand her skills by learning modern knitting and embroidery techniques at the local HelpAge Community Safe Space.

"I've found a new family here," Olha says. "This is a place where I feel needed, active, and inspired. Singing lessons, creative workshops, and especially psychological support have been a real lifesaver for me. Working with the psychologist has taught me to channel my thoughts positively and find inner peace."

Similarly, 75-year-old Lidiia, who spent her life nurturing children in a kindergarten, now faces the dual challenges of war and loneliness. When the Community Safe Space

opened in Novomoskovsk, she discovered a passion for crafts. "Here, I've learned to knit clothes, which makes me less dependent on store-bought items and brings me a sense of calm," she shares.

Despite these challenges, Lidiia has found a new way of living. This place has helped her make new friends and rediscover joy in everyday life. "Every day here is a gift," she says with a smile.



FOSTERING HOPE AND COMFORT

In eastern Ukraine, the newly established Community Safe Space in Dnipro has become a beacon of hope for around 70 older people who regularly attend art therapy, sports groups, psychological support sessions, and even hairdressing services. Designed as part of an expanded humanitarian response, these spaces provide much more than leisure – they are vital for fostering social integration and rebuilding lives. For displaced older people, the Safe Spaces offer a chance to form friendships, share experiences, and find solace amidst the war.

As winter approaches, HelpAge remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting vulnerable older Ukrainians. Over 2,500 people across seven regions, including Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Lviv, received winter kits containing essentials such as blankets, bed linen, power banks, and

flashlights. These items provide much-needed comfort and warmth during the harsh season.

For those facing mobility challenges, HelpAge has also distributed mobility aids and rehabilitation equipment to ensure their safety and well-being. By creating supportive spaces and addressing urgent needs, HelpAge continues to bring hope and resilience to older people navigating the challenges of war and displacement.

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 AM STRONGER NOW"

Halyna, 64, from the Kharkiv region, has been living for two years in an old house in western Ukraine, Lviv region, provided by kind-hearted people. "My home became uninhabitable after a strike. I'm grateful that there were those who let me stay," she shares.

Despite having accommodation, Halyna faces significant challenges. Her pension of 3,000 UAH (68 EUR), earned over 32 years of work, is insufficient to cover medical expenses. Each month, she spends a large portion of her budget on treatments for chronic ailments, including hypertension and joint pain. "Just today, I spent 700 UAH (16 EUR) on medication, and that's not even for the whole month," she sighs.

Halyna's children and grandchildren live separately, leaving her to care for herself. The HelpAge Community Safe Space in Sambir helps her cope with the loneliness. Although getting there is challenging – a journey of nearly an hour and a daily travel cost of 100 UAH (2 EUR) – Halyna admits she can't imagine life without these meetings.

"I can't do without this community anymore. Here, I can chat and paint. I'm also learning how to use a mobile phone – I didn't even know what messengers were or how to search for information before. Now, I feel much more confident and stronger."

HelpAge Community Safe Spaces in Lviv, Sambir, Novoyavorivsk, and Drohobych provide older people with opportunities for both connection and growth. As digital skills become increasingly important, digital literacy classes teach enable older people to stay in touch with family, access information, and remain part of the modern world.



BRIDGING GAPS FOR DISPLACED OLDER PEOPLE

HelpAge is dedicated to bringing essential legal assistance closer to older people affected by war, addressing barriers such as mobility issues and lack of information. At the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Novoyavorivsk, legal consultations were organised in collaboration with the NGO Right to Protection. Specialists provided personalised support to help older people resolve critical legal matters, including restoring documents and accessing social benefits.

HelpAge also partnered with the Rokada Lviv Charity Foundation to arrange a unique foil art therapy session. Guided by a psychologist, displaced older participants used foil to process emotions, transforming negativity into positivity, while reflecting on childhood memories and dreaming of peace.

For those unable to attend activities, the HelpAge team visited displaced older people at Novoyavorivsk Vocational School. Despite facing multiple displacements, the residents shared their resilience and optimism. The visit featured creative activities such as painting-by-numbers, diamond mosaics, and dancing, fostering joy and a sense of community.

Through these initiatives, HelpAge ensures older people feel valued, connected, and supported, even amidst the most challenging circumstances.



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

THE POWER OF MUTUAL SUPPORT

Peer-to-peer meetings among older people are a vital initiative aimed at supporting those who struggle with mobility, offering them comfort and understanding from those who have experienced similar challenges.

In Kolomyia, participants from the Community Safe Space visited older people with mobility challenges in the village of Stara Zhadova, Chernivtsi region. A heartfelt conversation, a small gift, and simple attention significantly helped these older people feel less isolated and more socially included.

Similarly, in Stryi, Lviv region, members of the Community Safe Space visited immobile older people receiving home care services. These visits, filled with warmth and attention, brought not just symbolic gifts but also the invaluable gift of human connection. "It's so important to feel that, even in displacement far from home, there are kindred souls who care," says 97-year-old Valentyna from Popasna.



Halyna, 72, displaced from Kherson region, adds: "By supporting others, I feel like I'm doing something truly meaningful. We've all been through hard times, but together, we can overcome them."

These meetings offer opportunities to share stories, experiences, and information, providing support and inspiration to everyone involved. Some find solace, while others discover a renewed sense of purpose in helping others.

SIMPLE THINGS, PROFOUND IMPACT

Lidiia, 86, is from Volnovakha in the Donetsk region, where fierce fighting broke out in the first days of the full-scale invasion. In March 2022, she was forced to leave her home and arrived in Lviv on an evacuation train. Initially, she lived in a modular town and later in a shelter at a monastery.



Her declining health, exacerbated by the stress of war and displacement, made daily challenges even more difficult. Lidiia is mobility-impaired and suffers from several chronic conditions. Recently, her daughter returned from abroad to take care of her. Now they live in rented housing, which significantly strains the family's already limited budget.

Through the project, Lidiia received hygiene kits, a blood pressure monitor, financial assistance, crutches, incontinence pads, winter clothing, a blanket, and a pillow. "These may seem like ordinary, everyday items, but for displaced people like us, they are worth their weight in gold," says Lidiia.

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

RESTORING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

In November, another Community Safe Space was opened as part of the project, in the town of Vynohradiv in the Zakarpattia region in the west of Ukraine. Since 15 November, it has become a meeting place for older people affected by the war, offering them the opportunity to find support and connection. The first events included tea gatherings and singing sessions, fostering a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Currently, about 30 displaced older people are actively participating in these activities. From December, singing lessons, psychological support sessions, digital literacy workshops, crafts masterclasses, and hairdressing services will be offered. Additionally, visitors will have the chance to watch films. Soon, a "Peer-to-Peer" group will be created, promoting mutual aid and knowledge exchange among older people.



"Our space aims to create conditions for the social integration of older people, helping them overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness, and restore lost connections," says project manager Inna Serdiukova. "We strive to provide older people who have suffered from the war with a platform for psychological well-being and personal development."

This initiative is part of a broader project that supports older people across various regions of Ukraine. A month earlier, the first Community Safe Space was opened in Vasylykivka village, Dnipropetrovsk region in eastern Ukraine, offering older people activities such as art therapy, Nordic walking, digital literacy, singing lessons, and psychological consultations.

Together, these spaces are making a significant impact, creating an environment where older people can restore social connections, learn new skills, and regain a sense of belonging.



STANDING TALL THROUGH LIFE'S TRIALS

80-year-old Kateryna knows all about hardships and trials. Having spent her entire life in Kherson region, where she worked tirelessly on a farm for 40 years, she dreamed of a peaceful and safe older age. But in 2022, her home village came under heavy shelling, forcing Kateryna to leave her home and venture into the unknown in search of safety. She eventually settled in Kryvyi Rih, where she now rents an apartment with her husband.

Displacement was a heavy blow for Kateryna, as it brought not only physical challenges but also immense emotional strain, severely aggravating her battle with cancer – a fight she has been waging for many years. "Over the past four years, I have undergone four surgeries. They removed my breasts, gallbladder, and hernias. On top of that, I was granted a disability status due to vision loss, which resulted from chemotherapy," Kateryna shares.

Her ongoing need for medical supplies to maintain her health, and regular monthly check-ups consume nearly all her pension of 4,500 UAH (85 GBP), supplemented by 3,000 UAH (56 GBP) in state assistance for internally displaced persons.

"I constantly wonder how to survive – without a home, without money, without health. My blood pressure often skyrockets because of the relentless stress," she confides.

However, Kateryna has not been left to face these challenges alone. Psychosocial support from our social worker Yuliia has helped her regain optimism, while humanitarian aid in the form of essential items, including a hygiene kit, allowed her to save on basic needs, bringing back a sense of security. She will also soon be provided with a winter kit, which includes items such as a flashlight, thermos, power bank, blanket, pillow, and bedding. "This support is invaluable during such a difficult time for people like us."

Older people's wellbeing and dignity support program

Supported by HelpAge USA



"NOW I CAN STAND FIRMLY ON MY FEET"

HelpAge partner, Charitable Foundation "Caritas Kramatorsk", now operating in Sheptytskyi in western Ukraine, offers a Home Care program for more than 80 older people. This program provides social and legal assistance, food and hygiene kits, mobility aids, and personal care items.

As part of the project, mobility aids were distributed to people with limited mobility. Among the recipients is 76-year-old Nina from Nikopol, who lost her home due to the war and now lives in a small room of a shelter in the town of Sosnivka. Nina, who has a disability, has suffered both a stroke and a heart attack. Currently, she is experiencing rapid vision loss and struggles with Parkinson's disease.

Thanks to the walking cane she received through the project, Nina has newfound independence. "I could barely stand or walk, but now I can stand firmly on my feet," she shares, even joking, "Now I'm even ready to be courted!"

Additionally, she received a commode chair, which has significantly eased her daily challenges.

Despite the hardships, Nina continues to hope for a better future. This support has become more than just practical assistance – it's a symbol that her struggles do not go unnoticed.

RESTORING HEALTH AND PURPOSE

Yurii, a 76-year-old pensioner from Zakarpattia, has been living in Ivano-Frankivsk since 2022. Renting an apartment on a limited pension, Yurii struggles to afford daily medication for cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure. His children and grandchildren help, but financial pressures remain, compounded by the stress of his grandson serving in the army and the constant worry for his safety.

Relief came through the Healthy Mind, Healthy Body project, implemented by a HelpAge partner, the Caritas Ascension Charitable Foundation initiative group. With Yurii's help, a sports and cultural space for older people was established in Ivano-Frankivsk. The space provides free gym access, allowing Yurii to follow his doctor's long-standing advice to exercise for joint and musculoskeletal health – something he previously couldn't afford.

"A sports space for maintaining health is so necessary for older people," Yurii says. "Paid gyms were beyond my reach, but now regular training sessions have improved



my well-being, restored my energy, and given me a sense of purpose."

In addition to fitness, Yurii participates in mental health workshops and activities, including psychologist consultations, media literacy lessons, and nutrition advice. "These sessions have helped me care for both my body and mind. I've even made new friends who share my interests," he adds.

Yurii plans to continue exercising to maintain his health and is committed to supporting others who now benefit from the free sports facility.

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:

