



January 2025

# 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*

for emotional connection, cultural expression, and shared hope during challenging times.

Recognising the importance of such initiatives, Serhii Reznik, Mayor of Samar in the Dnipropetrovsk region, visited a local Community Safe Space ahead of the holidays. During his visit, the mayor extended warm Christmas and New Year greetings to the older participants, emphasising the critical role these activities play in strengthening community ties and supporting older residents in rebuilding their lives.



### WELCOMING THE NEW YEAR WITH NEW HOPES

In December, the network of Community Safe Spaces in eastern and western Ukraine became hubs of festive activity as older people organised Christmas and New Year carnivals. At HelpAge's new Community Safe Space in Dnipro, participants embraced the holiday spirit by creating hand-made decorations, setting up a beautifully adorned Christmas tree, singing traditional folk songs, reciting heartfelt poems, and holding lively riddle and proverb contests. The celebrations even included fortune-telling, adding a touch of tradition and fun to the festivities.

These gatherings are much more than seasonal celebrations; they serve as an essential means of restoring a sense of community and belonging for older people who have experienced the profound losses and hardships caused by the ongoing war. They provide a vital space

### EMPOWERING HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE SUPPORT

To enhance the capacity of humanitarian organisations in Ukraine, in December HelpAge conducted a five-day Training of Trainers (ToT) in Dnipro for international and Ukrainian civil society organisations as part of the Collective Initiative project implemented in consortium with ActionAid and Action Against Hunger.

During the event, participants explored and analysed the Survivor and Community-Led Response (SCLR) model, reviewed Humanitarian Inclusion Standards (HIS), gained essential knowledge on mental health, acquired skills in providing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), and practiced effective communication and amplifying the voices of civil society organisations.



The training, implemented under the “SPRAVA” initiative, became a significant step in strengthening the capacity of the humanitarian sector by preparing trainers who will further disseminate the necessary knowledge among civil society organisations in Ukraine. Through joint efforts, we aim to ensure an inclusive humanitarian response and effective support for the most vulnerable groups, both during crises and in recovery.

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

*Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany*

**STRENGTH IN CREATIVITY**

“I always dreamt of a peaceful life in my home with my older mother and my daughter, who has a disability. But the war took that away from me. The relentless shelling hastened my mother’s passing. After her funeral, my daughter and I were forced to flee – I knew I had to find a safe place for her,” shares 61-year-old Halyna, who left her native Sloviansk in April 2022.

Halyna spent her first year as a displaced person in Stebnyk, western Ukraine, in a centre for people with special needs. Today, she lives in a collective centre in the town of Drohobych. The relocation was challenging. Halyna suffered a knee injury, which now limits her mobility. Her income – a pension, allowance for internally displaced persons, and social benefits for her daughter – does not allow her to afford comprehensive medical treatment. “Sometimes, I have to buy cheaper alternatives to medicines, but they don’t always work. The consequences of the war have taken a toll on both my body and soul,” Halyna explains.

Becoming a participant in our project, Halyna found a place for creativity and connection at our Community Safe Space in Drohobych, eventually becoming a member of the initiative group. Initially, she attended activities to im-

prove her psycho-emotional state. Over time, she discovered her artistic talent. Halyna mastered the Japanese art of making paintings with colourful pieces of silk, creates unique lamps from disposable cups, paints stones and plates, and decorates jars. Most importantly, she shares her skills with other older displaced people by conducting workshops.

“Creativity helps me forget the bad things and feel needed,” she says. “Returning home remains my dream, but for now, far from my native place, I am learning to live on and enjoy the little things. And, most importantly, to share my experience with others. Even in the hardest times, it’s vital to stay united,” Halyna concludes.

**LEARN, LIVE, CELEBRATE**

In Ukraine, there are four Community Safe Spaces within the project – in the cities of Lviv, Sambir, Novoyavorivsk, and Drohobych in the Lviv region. Older people have the opportunity to learn digital technologies, engage in sports, and attend psychological consultations. All centres also offer art therapy sessions – painting, mosaics, ribbon embroidery, bead weaving, etc. Additionally, older people can play board games, chess, and more.



The Lviv Community Safe Space recently hosted an exhibition of works by displaced older people. Furthermore, last month, an excursion to the castles of Transcarpathia was organised for displaced persons from all centres, where they learned about the traditions of this region.

In December, many activities focused on Christmas and New Year’s themes. For example, in Drohobych, displaced older people wove Christmas wreaths, created unique decorations that are part of Ukraine’s cultural heritage. For older people, such activities help find new meanings in new realities, bring joy, and a sense of belonging to the magic of the winter holidays.

Meanwhile, in Novoyavorivsk, Christmas gatherings for older people were held at the Community Safe Space and in collective centres. Gatherings with sweet treats, memories of family traditions, and carol singing helped displaced older Ukrainians feel less lonely and homesick on holidays.

Moreover, a series of meetings aimed at improving displaced people’s access to information took place in the same location. In collaboration with the “Right to Protection” Charitable Foundation, a new type of aid for



IDPs – subsidies for rent payment – was presented. Participants learned how to apply for state compensation, which is crucial for older people and people with disabilities who have lost their homes and are forced to rent.

Psychological training also took place in cooperation with Charity Foundations "People in Need" and "Rokada" to improve participants' emotional well-being and restore their psychological balance.

The network of these four spaces is creating a stable community where older people find support, attention, and the opportunity to collectively overcome the challenges of the war by participating in joint activities that strengthen their emotional resilience, provide learning and development opportunities, and restore a sense of belonging.

### **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*



### **"KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS CAN PROTECT YOU"**

Older people are among the most vulnerable groups when it comes to domestic violence. Many accept mistreatment as normal, and social isolation often leaves the issue hidden.

This topic was addressed at an event organised by the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Kolomyia, which joined the nationwide "16 Days Against Violence" campaign in December. Over 30 older people learned how to recognise domestic violence and where to seek help. "This is very relevant to us. We don't always know our rights or where to go when they're violated. Now I understand that knowing your rights is a way to protect yourself." says 84-year-old Ivan from Kolomyia. We continue to support older people by raising their awareness of their rights. Everyone deserves to live with dignity, safety, and respect, regardless of age.

### **FOSTERING CONNECTION AND CARE**

HelpAge International continues its mission to ensure that older people affected by conflict are not overlooked, par-

ticularly during the holiday season. For many displaced older people, the holidays brought feelings of loneliness and anxiety. To address this, the "Peer-to-Peer" initiative facilitated gatherings where older people could provide mutual support. As part of this effort, a group of older people from Kolomyia visited less mobile and immobile individuals in the village of Stara Zhadova, Chernivtsi region, delivering small gifts and heartfelt holiday wishes. These visits offered not only material assistance but also emotional comfort, fostering a sense of connection and belonging.



In addition to these efforts, training programmes aimed at improving support for older people took priority. In December, 25 specialists from five regions of Ukraine participated in a three-day training designed to enhance their practical skills. The sessions covered topics such as effective communication with older people and those with disabilities, preventing professional burnout, and selecting and using assistive devices for home care. Participants also explored strategies to strengthen peer support groups, enabling a more collaborative approach to care. The training provided an opportunity to share experiences and implement innovative methods to better address the needs of vulnerable older populations, ensuring they receive the dignified and compassionate care they deserve amidst challenging circumstances.

### **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*

### **EMPOWERMENT AND STRENGTH**

Community Safe Spaces operating in the village of Vasylykivka, Dnipropetrovsk region (eastern Ukraine), and the city of Vynohradiv in Zakarpattia region (western Ukraine) have become meeting places for older people affected by the war, offering them opportunities to find support and connection. Activities include singing sessions, digital literacy training, arts and crafts workshops, Nordic walking and fitness classes.

In these spaces, HelpAge places special emphasis on supporting the psychological well-being of older people. That



is why psychological training is a vital part of our work, helping older people cope with negative emotions and find harmony. For example, the Vasylkivka space hosted a psychological training session for older people, where they reflected on the past year, shared their achievements and dreams, and set new goals to inspire them to lead an active and fulfilling life in the year ahead.

By helping older people master digital technologies, strengthens their confidence in themselves and their abilities. Online shopping, booking medical appointments, and staying connected with loved ones no longer seem daunt-



ing. Modern technology enables older people to remain independent, feel up-to-date, and access vital information.

Both Community Safe Spaces make a significant impact, creating environments where older people can rebuild social connections, learn new skills, and regain a lost sense of belonging.

### ACTS OF KINDNESS

The war that has ravaged Ukraine for the past three years has become the greatest challenge for 67-year-old Liubov. Forced to leave her beloved village in the Kherson region due to relentless shelling, she had to say goodbye to the place where she went to school, got married, raised her children, and worked for over 30 years as a livestock technician. Today, her new home is a rental apartment in Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk region.

The loss of the house she and her husband built with their own hands and the separation from her children, who now live separately, have left a deep mark on her soul. "Poor health, financial hardship, and living in a strange home in a strange place – this has become my reality," Liubov shares.

Amid such challenges, Liubov joined a HelpAge project, which she says saved her from despair and loneliness. The psychosocial support and conversations with social worker

Khrystyna have been particularly meaningful to her. "I am so grateful there are people willing to help during these tough times," says Liubov.

She also felt cared for through receiving essential supplies, including a winter kit and hygiene items. "For some, this may just be humanitarian aid, but for me, it restores faith in myself and the kindness of the world," she explains.

Living with a disability, Liubov struggles to move due to severe knee pain and dreams of having a walking stick "to greet peace while standing strong."



### Older people's wellbeing and dignity support program

*Supported by HelpAge USA*

### "WE FEEL HEARD"

In March 2022, just days after the full-scale invasion began, 66-year-old Liubov left Kramatorsk and found herself in western Ukraine, in the town of Mukachevo in Zakarpattia, where she has lived in a dormitory ever since. "The hardest part for me is that I can't return home. My heart is still in Kramatorsk," shares Liubov. Her relatives live in another region of Ukraine, so she is far from her loved ones.

Liubov receives a small pension and state aid for internally displaced persons, but it's not enough for a comfortable life. "Like many people my age, I have health issues. Fortunately, the state provides free medications under the reimbursement program, and I can consult with my family doctor," she says. The war has impacted not only her physical health but also her emotional well-being.

Thanks to a sub-grant received through HelpAge partner, the NGO "Help and Hope", the initiative group of the Mukachevo Vocational Education Centre dormitory significantly improved the living conditions for the most vulnerable residents. "We were given the opportunity to express our needs, and the main thing is, we feel heard. Now we have



furnished kitchen, new furniture, a TV, a sofa, tables and chairs where we can engage in handicrafts. We also received folding chairs for relaxing in the yard – this was so needed because there were no benches here,” Liubov shares.

This support has allowed Liubov to feel almost at home, even far from her native city. “Thanks to this support, we can not only resolve daily issues but also engage in our favourite activities,” she says.

### SMALL STEPS TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

71-year-old Tamara, displaced from Melitopol, faces daily mobility difficulties due to leg problems. After fleeing the war, she settled in Western Ukraine, in the town of Sosnivka, where she shares a small room with her grandson.



“It’s hard to take care of myself and my grandson when I can’t move freely,” says Tamara, not hiding her worries about her health and her grandson’s future. Thanks to the work of our partner, the Charitable Foundation “Caritas Kramatorsk,” now operating in the city of Sheptytsky, Tamara received a walker, which has somewhat improved her quality of life. “It helps me move around on my own, which has given me some independence in daily life,” she shares. She also received a commode chair.

Despite the challenging circumstances, Tamara doesn’t lose hope and continues to look for ways to improve her health. The dream of getting an MRI scan is unattainable due to budget constraints, but the support she has received helps her keep going.

### 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:

