

November 2024

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*



"I SPEND ALL MY INCOME ON MEDICINES"

Oleksandr, 74, from Bakhmut, has endured immense hardship due to the war. For months, refused to leave his home, hoping the fighting would subside. But as the situation grew dire, he finally boarded an evacuation bus, leaving everything behind for an uncertain future.

In a shelter in Novomoskovsk, Oleksandr faced further challenges. He suffered a leg injury that led to the amputation of his toes. Despite this, bureaucratic hurdles prevented him from obtaining disability status. "I have so many health problems," he explains. "My eyesight is very poor. I also have diabetes and need to inject insulin."

Access to medical care remains a major challenge for Oleksandr, as doctors do not visit the shelter. His years

of savings have been entirely spent on medicines, leaving him reliant on a modest pension and allowance for internally displaced persons. While the shelter provides essentials like food, bedding, and clothing, Oleksandr's entire income is spent his medical needs.

The support he received through the project has offered some relief. A hygiene kit helped him save money for other necessities, while financial assistance allowed him to address immediate needs. However, he requires consistent medical care, including consultations with an ophthalmologist and endocrinologist, access to insulin, and legal support to receive disability status.



CHANGING LIVES THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

In the east of Ukraine, the Inhulets District Veterans' Organisation in Kryvyi Rih, a partner in the HelpAge-supported project, is making a meaningful impact. Through a small grant, the organisation supports approximately 80 older people, including those with disabilities, by providing essential household goods to improve their quality of life.

Svitalana, 84, has lived with rheumatoid arthritis for over 20 years and relies on a walker to move around her apartment. Living alone, she faces significant challenges with self-care. Despite 40 years of work experience, her small pension barely covers her expenses, with most of it spent on medication. "Medicines are very expensive, almost all my pension goes to the pharmacy," she explains. "I've long dreamed of a slow cooker, as it's difficult for me to

stand at the stove. Now my dream has come true – thanks to the humanitarian aid, I have a smart assistant that will make my life easier.”

For 92-year-old Oleksandra from Kryvyi Rih, life has become a constant battle against isolation. Poor eyesight and mobility issues confine her to her apartment, where she spends each day alone, surrounded by the fear of air raids and uncertainty about the future.

Her one wish was for a small TV to provide comfort and help ease her loneliness. With support from the grant programme, Oleksandra’s dream became a reality. She now has a TV, which she says has transformed her days.

“It feels like a living person has moved into the room, helping me overcome my fear and giving me peace of mind,” Oleksandra shares. “Now I can follow the news and know more about the world outside my apartment.”

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

CELEBRATING LIFE

October was an especially vibrant month across all the HelpAge Community Safe Spaces, both in the east and west. These hubs of support and connection were alive with activities designed to help displaced older people adapt to their new surroundings.

Field trips offered participants a chance to learn about the traditions and culture of the regions they now call home. These outings not only provided a sense of community but also helped create a connection with their temporary environment.

To reach those unable to travel to the CSS, the HelpAge team conducted mobile visits. In Luzhany, the team met with older people who had found shelter in Chernivtsi after fleeing their homes. These visits created an opportunity for participants to share their heartfelt stories, discuss their interests, and receive small yet meaningful gifts. Similarly, teams from Chervonohrad and Stryi visited neuropsychiatric care homes, ensuring that older residents in these facilities felt included and supported.



The spirit of autumn carried through the Community Safe Spaces as visitors organised performances, costume parties, and exhibitions. These events showcased the creativity and energy of older people, proving that age is no obstacle to living an active and fulfilling life.

Through these efforts, HelpAge continues to foster resilience and joy among older people, reminding them that even in the most challenging circumstances, life can still be celebrated.



RESTORING FAITH IN HUMANITY

Hanna, 84, has lived a life shaped by relentless trials. Her earliest memories are of the hardships of the Second World War, where hunger and cold were her constant companions. “We slept on a dirt floor on straw. We were always hungry. My grandmother died of starvation, and I was swollen. We ate grass, roots, frozen potatoes, rotten apples – anything just to survive,” she recalls, tears filling her eyes.

Orphaned young and subjected to violence from her stepmother, Hanna’s own family life brought little reprieve. Determined to escape spousal abuse, she left her husband and raised her son alone. Yet now, she faces life completely alone. “All my relatives are gone, and I don’t even know where my son is now,” she says.

In 2022, war once again upended Hanna’s life. In the Kharkiv region, she endured months of shelling, hiding in basements without food or water. The violence inflicted on her left lasting physical and emotional scars – her back and legs bear the marks of injury, and she has lost sight in one eye.

Today, Hanna resides in a dormitory in Kryvyi Rih, sharing a room with two other older displaced persons. Humanitarian organisations have provided her with clothes, bedding, and food. Through the HelpAge project, she has received cash assistance, a hygiene kit, urological pads, warm winter clothing, and crutches to help her navigate the icy conditions.

Despite the support, Hanna’s health continues to decline. Chronic pain, leg swelling, heart issues, asthma, and diabetes require constant medication. Yet amid the suffering, she has found a glimmer of hope. “All my life, I have not seen affection or love,” Hanna shares. “Now, I am surrounded by good people, and I am starting to believe that I can leave my painful memories behind.”

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

Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany

THE POWER OF SUPPORT

Alla, 73, a resident of a centre for displaced people in Drohobych, recalls every day the peaceful life she had in Kharkiv. She was forced to leave it in August 2022, a few months after the full-scale war began. The war not only changed her place of residence but also divided her family – her daughter and grandson went abroad in search of safety, and her son-in-law is serving in the army. “I want to hug my family, I want to see my hometown again, but for now I have to hold on,” she says.

While in displacement, Alla continues to fight her cancer. Constant tests, examinations and treatment deplete Alla’s already small income – her disability pension. She buys some medicines herself and receives some from humanitarian organisations.

Despite her health problems, Alla is actively involved in public life. She is a regular participant in almost all the activities of the HelpAge Community Safe Space and is even a member of its initiative group. For example, she not only walks the routes with Nordic sticks as part of health classes but also takes part in creating and presenting dance performances for other residents of the dormitory. And by



attending digital literacy classes, she not only improves her own skills, but also passes on this knowledge to other older displaced people in the dormitory.

“This place is my support. It has become my life. I feel like I replenish my internal resources here to keep my head up,” she says.

FINDING STRENGTH AND BELONGING

Amidst the turmoil of war, HelpAge International’s Community Safe Spaces in Lviv, Sambir, Novoyavorivsk, and Drohobych in western Ukraine are beacons of hope for older people. They offer older people space to rediscover joy, community, and self-expression through a variety of activities tailored to their needs.

Digital literacy classes are a key part of the programme, equipping older people with essential skills to connect with loved ones, navigate information, and regain a sense of independence in an increasingly digital world.

Art therapy is another integral activity, offering solace and a way to process the trauma of displacement and conflict. Through drawing and painting, participants find peace and emotional release. Halyna, 71, a displaced resident from Kramatorsk now living in Drohobych, shares, “Painting helps me forget my pain and sorrow. It has brought me calmness and tears come less often now.”

Fitness classes, including Nordic walking, further enhance both physical health and mental well-being. For many, these sessions have become cherished rituals, offering a boost to their mood and confidence.

Culture plays a pivotal role in fostering belonging and pride. Older people in Novoyavorivsk recently attended The Art of Embroidery, an event celebrating Ukraine’s rich tradition of Vyshyvankas. This cultural garment, steeped in history and symbolism, represents health, fortune, and familial memory. Participants donned embroidered shirts, learned about regional patterns and colours, and explored how Vyshyvankas have become symbols of national identity.

Helping displaced older people integrate into their host communities is crucial. Participants in Drohobych visited a mountain village in the Carpathians, where they immersed



themselves in local traditions, such as bread baking using ancient methods and crafting linen fabric. Alongside cultural immersion, the trip included psychological support sessions and health workshops conducted by coaches from Ivan Franko Drohobych State Pedagogical University.

These activities not only provide practical skills and emotional support but also help older people rebuild their sense of belonging. Displaced individuals often face isolation and loss of social connections. Events like these foster mutual understanding, strengthen community ties, and remind participants that they are not alone in their journey. One participant remarked, “These moments inspire me and give me strength during these difficult times.”

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

"SUPPORT THAT CHANGED MY LIFE"

Yevheniia, 64, once lived a calm and steady life, working in finance in her village in the Dnipro region. But when war reached her home, everything changed. Forced to flee, she describes the experience as heartbreaking. "Leaving my home was unbearable, but I had no choice. The fear for my family became unbearable," she says.

Seeking safety, she found temporary shelter in the village of Pokrovske, only to face the harsh reality that it was soon just a few kilometres from the front line. The war and displacement have taken a heavy toll on Yevheniia, bringing joint pain, heart problems, depression, and anxiety.

Support came through a project that provided Yevheniia with hygiene kits and financial assistance. The funds allowed her to access critical treatment she otherwise could not afford. "It was a real lifesaver," she shares.



Yevheniia also found solace in the visits from Valentyna, a social worker who has become her confidante. "I look forward to each of her visits," she says. "When Valentyna comes, it feels like my troubles become a little easier. She informs me about events in the community, gives me advice, helps me, and just listens. It's hard to describe in words, but her presence is so important for people like me."

Though fear and worry for her children and grandchildren remain constant, Yevheniia finds strength in the support she has received. "My life has changed for the better. I have found understanding and care," she says. "I am deeply grateful to all the good people who help older people like me in these difficult times."

STRENGTH IN INDEPENDENCE

Liubov, a 72-year-old displaced woman from Avdiivka, spent her life in her hometown, dedicating over 40 years to working at a coking plant. However, the outbreak of the



full-scale war in Ukraine forced her to leave everything behind and start anew in the town of Kamianske.

She recalls those harrowing days with a heavy heart, describing how she hid from relentless shelling and spent long hours in the basement. During one attack, Liubov injured her leg and caught a severe cold, leaving her with ongoing mobility challenges.

Support came through a project implemented by the NGO Event Space, one of HelpAge's partners. Liubov received a cane, which significantly improved her ability to move around, as well as vouchers to purchase essential hygiene products.

"It means a lot that there are people who care about us and support us," she says. "The cane is comfortable, and now it's easier for me to move around. I can go to the store and the clinic on my own."

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

PREVENTING SOCIAL ISOLATION

To support older people in the Dnipropetrovsk region, a new Community Safe Space has been established in the village of Vasylkivka, the first of its kind in the area. This space is dedicated to fostering social integration and promoting the psychological well-being of older individuals affected by the war.

In its first month, the space has already welcomed about 70 older people, offering activities such as art therapy, Nordic walking, digital literacy, and singing classes. Visitors also have access to services from a psychologist and a hairdresser. These initiatives aim to restore a sense of purpose and connection for older people who have experienced displacement or other hardships due to the war.

"The space will eventually support around 200 older people affected by the conflict," explains project manager Inna Serdiukova. "All activities are designed to help dis-



placed older people adapt socially and integrate into their new communities. They provide a space for communication, personal development, and psychosocial support, addressing challenges like loneliness and social isolation.”

This initiative is part of a larger project that includes a second Community Safe Space in the Vynohradiv community in the Zakarpattia region of western Ukraine. Together, these spaces are making a meaningful impact by creating environments where older people can reconnect, rebuild their lives, and rediscover their sense of belonging.

“I’M MADE OF IRON!”

Nataliia, 56, has lived through a decade of displacement. Her journey began in 2014 when the conflict in eastern Ukraine forced her to flee her home in Donetsk. After finding temporary shelter in Kramatorsk, she had to move again, eventually settling in a rented apartment in Vynohradiv, Zakarpattia region.

The war has not only uprooted her life but also separated her from her family. Nataliia lost her husband several years ago. Her two sons and daughters-in-law remain in the war zone, while her granddaughter has found safety abroad. Now living alone, Nataliia faces daily challenges, including limited mobility.

“I move very slowly and only with a cane,” she explains. “I need a joint replacement, but surgery is out of the question because I simply can’t afford it. My pension is only 2,300 hryvnias (52 EUR), and the IDP payments I receive – 3,000 hryvnias (68 EUR) – aren’t enough to cover my constant medical needs. I often have to choose between buying necessary medicines or addressing other needs. And I fear I’ll soon need external care,” she shares.

Physical limitations add to her struggles. “Even simple things, like going to the store or taking a walk, are major challenges,” she says. “Many places aren’t accessible for people with disabilities, and this loss of independence makes me feel isolated.”

The weight of these trials affects her emotional well-being too. “I often feel a lump in my throat, and my emotions can be unpredictable,” she admits. However, the support of the project’s community worker, her namesake Nataliia, has been a lifeline. “She gives me a space to talk openly about my feelings and provides the support I need. These



moments give me the strength to keep going. The hygiene kit I received, designed to last three months, has also greatly improved my well-being.”

Through the project, Nataliia will also receive rehabilitation aids, bringing her closer to her dream of a joint replacement surgery that could relieve her pain and restore her mobility.

“My life has been transformed since the war began,” Nataliia reflects. “The war has brought pain, loss, fear, and countless unanswered questions, but it has also revealed my resilience. Today, I say I’m made of iron! And I refuse to give up.”

Older people’s wellbeing and dignity support program

Supported by HelpAge USA

FINDING INDEPENDENCE AND CONFIDENCE

Serhii, 74, from Pisky in the Donetsk region, has faced years of hardship in the face of war. Since the conflict in eastern Ukraine began in 2014, he spent eight years enduring near-constant shelling, holding onto hope despite the chaos. However, the full-scale invasion in 2022 forced him to flee, leaving behind everything he held dear.

Now living in a modular town in Lviv with his wife, also 74, Serhii adjusts to a small, shared room they affectionately call a “compartment” due to its limited space. Their daughter has been living abroad for a decade, while their son remains in the Donetsk region, both far from their daily lives.



Serhii struggles with a leg condition that frequently causes numbness, making movement challenging and dangerous. "I can fall at any time when my leg loses sensation," he shares.

Through a project implemented by the Modular Village initiative group in Lviv, supported by a subgrant from HelpAge partner NGO Help and Hope, a rehabilitation space was created to assist older individuals recovering from illness. As part of this effort, Serhii received a cane, enabling him to move more independently and with greater confidence.

"I've been undergoing treatment and feeling a little better. But winter is coming, and I've been afraid of snow and ice," he explains. "With this cane, I feel confident. I can feel it holding me up!"

REBUILDING HOPE

For 67-year-old Olha from Okhtyrka, Sumy region, the war brought unimaginable loss and upheaval. When her hometown was struck by relentless shelling, Olha, her daughter, and her grandson were forced to flee, leaving behind their lives and possessions. "On 10 March 2022, we left everything we had to save ourselves," Olha recalls. Their home, destroyed by the hostilities, was a stark reminder of the war's devastating reach.

The family sought refuge in Mukachevo, Zakarpattia, where they began the arduous task of rebuilding their lives. Yet, like many internally displaced people, Olha faces



daily struggles. Her modest pension, despite 40 years of service, is barely enough to cover essential needs. While state aid for IDPs provides some relief, making ends meet remains a constant challenge. "The burden of war is both physical and emotional," she shares. "But I hold onto hope for a better future."

Support arrived through a subgrant awarded to the initiative group of the Mukachevo Vocational Education Centre's dormitory. This funding allowed for essential improvements to the living conditions of the dormitory's most vulnerable residents. "We got what we really needed: new furniture for the kitchen and lounge, a TV, chairs, a sofa, irons, ironing boards, and dryers," says Olha.

The impact of these upgrades has been profound. "Our everyday life has become much more comfortable and calmer," Olha explains. "It's an incredible feeling to be heard and to have the most pressing problems solved."

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:

