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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*



### COMFORT IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Across Ukraine, HelpAge Community Safe Spaces are offering something essential: psychosocial support for older people living with the lasting impact of war and displacement.

In Samar, Dnipro, Novopidkriazh, Prosyana, and Mukachevo, group sessions with psychologists help ease loneliness, reduce anxiety, and create space for older people to share stories and support one another.

Equally important are the individual sessions offered at these spaces. They provide time and care for more in-depth emotional work – addressing specific challenges related to trauma, loss, or behavioural change. This personalised approach makes a profound difference for those struggling to process what they've lived through.

"Caring for mental health is not a luxury," a HelpAge team member shared. "For older people, especially in times of conflict and forced displacement, emotional support is a basic necessity."

The pain of losing loved ones, homes, and entire ways of life often remains invisible. Yet its impact is deep. With consistent psychological support, older people are not only surviving the crisis – they are finding ways to restore a sense of purpose, reconnect with others, and rebuild their confidence.



### SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LOST EVERYTHING

For 89-year-old Vira, the war in Ukraine has meant losing everything familiar – her home, her community, and the comforting presence of her family. A resident of Sviatopokrovsk in Donetsk region, Vira had endured years of conflict. But in 2022, the situation became unbearable.

"We held on for a long time," she recalls. "But the day came when we had to leave everything behind and escape. Only one of my daughters was able to leave with me; the other stayed at home... I miss her so much."

Vira and her daughter were evacuated by bus to Samar, in Dnipropetrovsk region. There, they now rent an apartment, but life remains far from stable. Financial hardship quickly set in – especially after purchasing a wheelchair,

essential after Vira suffered a stroke that affected her mobility. "After this purchase, we barely had any money left to live on," she says.

HelpAge stepped in with critical support – providing food packages, hygiene items, household cleaning products, and psychosocial support. "It helped us survive," Vira confides.

While the assistance has eased some burdens, the family continues to face daily struggles to afford basic necessities. Yet despite everything, Vira holds onto hope. "I dream that the war will end soon, and I can return to my home, embrace my other daughter, whom I miss so much... I truly believe that day will come soon."

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

*Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany*

**"NEITHER INJURY NOR WAR HAS BROKEN ME"**

At 61, Nadiia has faced more than her share of hardship. A life spent working in manufacturing in the Donetsk region left her with a serious injury after a workplace fall. "I worked as a ventilation systems operator – we supplied air to the mines. One day, while descending, I just tumbled head over heels from a height," she recounts. What followed were years of treatment and recovery.

But in 2022, war compounded her struggles. Forced to flee her home, Nadiia and her husband resettled in Sambir, western Ukraine. They've recently been joined by their daughter and grandson, who also fled the conflict. "My pension is only 3,000 UAH (54 EUR)," Nadiia says. "With housing alone costing 15,000 UAH (270 EUR) a month, there's barely anything left for food or medicine."

Her chronic injuries require regular rehabilitation – care she currently cannot access. "I no longer have the strength to fight the bureaucracy," she admits, reflecting the exhaustion many older people feel when trying to claim the support they are entitled to.

Despite it all, Nadiia has found hope and healing at the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Sambir. "Here I can do something for the soul – beading, diamond painting. But most of all, it's the psychologist's support that's made a difference. I'm learning to see the world differently and to let go of the pain I carry inside."

Nadiia's resilience shines through. "Neither injury nor war has broken me. But what really helps is feeling that I'm not alone – that someone truly cares. And that gives me the strength to keep going."

**STRONGER TOGETHER**

In displacement, older people often lose more than homes – they lose networks, routines, and the sense of belonging built over a lifetime. But at HelpAge – supported Community Safe Spaces, something powerful is happening: older people are coming together not just to cope, but to lead.

Across Ukraine, HelpAge has delivered training for "initiative groups" – older people united by shared needs and a desire to support one another. These groups are more than social circles. They are springboards for education and action.

"Being part of this group reminded me I still have something to give," said one participant. "I used to think, at my age, no one would listen. Now I know my voice counts."

During the sessions, members learned to assess needs in their communities, communicate with local authorities, and plan initiatives that address access to health and social services. These skills don't just reduce isolation – they build confidence and purpose.

Supporting these groups is more than a project activity – it's a statement of belief in older people's capacity to shape their futures. "When we understand our rights, we feel less invisible," another participant shared. "Now we're not just waiting for help. We are helping ourselves – and each other."





## 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*



### **"PAIN ISN'T THE WORST PART. LONELINESS IS."**

Mykola, 69, a displaced man from the Luhansk region, lives with the daily pain of osteoarthritis in his knee. The chronic discomfort keeps him awake at night, and even a short walk to the shop is a serious challenge. But what weighs on him most is not the pain – it's the loneliness.

The war has severed contact with his family, who remain in an occupied area. His only nearby relative is his 74-year-old brother, who also needs support. "The pain in my knee isn't the worst part. Loneliness is," Mykola shares. That's why the psychosocial support he receives from his social worker, Denys, means so much.

In addition to emotional support, Mykola received a hygiene kit, financial assistance, warm clothing, a blanket, pillow, torch, and a walking stick – small essentials that make a real difference for someone with limited mobility.

Recently, representatives from the German Embassy in Ukraine visited the municipal hostel in Dnipro where Mykola lives. Accompanied by the HelpAge team, they met with older residents, listened to their experiences, and gained valuable insight into their needs. The visit reflected the long-standing support of the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO), a committed partner in HelpAge's work with older Ukrainians.

Mykola is one of over 600 older displaced people in Dnipro receiving home-based care through the GFFO-supported HelpAge project. This support includes psychosocial assistance, information, and essential aid, delivered by trained social workers who have been trained by HelpAge to ensure high-quality, tailored assistance.

### **ACTIVE, CONNECTED, AND VALUED**

The HelpAge Community Safe Spaces continue to serve as vital hubs for older people affected by war and displacement. These centres are more than just places for support – they help older people stay active, learn new things, and maintain meaningful social connections.



In each location, a warm, welcoming atmosphere encourages participation in activities that enrich daily life and improve emotional well-being. In Stryi, for example, a self-organised family club brings older couples together to share board games, take part in creative workshops, and simply enjoy each other's company. These gatherings not only foster creativity but also strengthen emotional bonds within families.

March brought a range of special events, including workshops for International Women's Day. In Lyubotyn (Kharkiv region), older people celebrated with songs, contests, and hand-made paper flowers. The event gave older women a chance to feel appreciated and joyful, while older men found renewed purpose and connection.

In Sheptytskyi, physical activity was the focus. Despite unpredictable spring weather, participants took to the "Health Trail" for Nordic walking, and joined in adapted fitness and yoga sessions. Each activity was carefully designed to accommodate varying physical abilities – ensuring that everyone could take part and benefit.

These diverse activities are not just recreational – they are a testament to the importance of active ageing. In every Community Safe Space, older people can engage in physical movement, express themselves creatively, celebrate special occasions, and receive emotional support.

### **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*

### **STRENGTH AND RENEWAL**

For Valentyna, a 60-year-old displaced woman from the Kharkiv region, life has been shaped by hardship. Though she devoted herself to her family, her home was marked by domestic violence and constant humiliation. When the full-scale war broke out, the abuse only worsened.

"I felt like I couldn't live like this anymore," she recalls. "So, I gathered the last of my strength and decided to move to a safer area on my own."

In 2023, Valentyna left behind the trauma of her past and resettled in the village of Shyrokye, Zakarpattia region. There, she now lives alone, facing loneliness, financial difficulties, and the emotional toll of her past. Due to musculoskeletal diseases, Valentyna is immobile. She does not receive a pension, and her IDP payments have been suspended – restoring them requires navigating complex bureaucracy that her health does not allow.

She describes joining the HelpAge project as "a ray of light in the darkness." With support from the team, she received a hygiene kit, a winter set, and psychosocial assistance. But for Valentyna, the most impactful support came in the form of connection.

"During the visits, social worker Natalia brings not only the necessary help but also a piece of humanity and warmth," she says. This care is helping Valentyna overcome anxiety, depression, and feelings of helplessness. Her will to fight for herself – and her future – is beginning to return.



Legal support is also being arranged to help restore her access to pension and social benefits. "Older people especially need love and respect," Valentyna reflects. "For us, it is important to know that our feelings matter, that someone is there who listens to us and supports us. With you, I have felt that."

### **"WHAT I VALUE MOST IS BEING HEARD"**

For 55-year-old Valentyna from Osokorivka, Kherson region, life changed forever on the day she fled her home. "We lived simply, but happily," she recalls. "Until that terrible day when the war began. I will forever remember the date – 25 April 2022 – that's when I left my home, which trembled every minute from explosions."

Faced with rising danger, Valentyna, her elderly mother, and their neighbours embarked on a difficult journey to safety. "My hands were trembling, and my heart was gripped with fear. We travelled along long and dangerous roads until we reached Kryvyi Rih," she says.



Now living in a small rented flat with her mother, Valentyna faces daily health challenges. "I constantly suffer from tachycardia, and since the war began, I've rapidly gained weight. My knees hurt. Even just moving around the flat is hard for me."

Beyond physical hardship, she struggles with emotional wounds – anxiety, uncertainty, and profound grief over losing her home. "I often feel guilt, fear, and struggle to adapt to new living conditions," she shares.

Her only income is a modest allowance for internally displaced people – 2,200 UAH (around 40 GBP), which is far from enough. "I can't even afford my blood pressure medication, let alone anything else," she says.

Through the HelpAge project, which she learned about from acquaintances, Valentyna received a hygiene kit and a winter set including a blanket, pillow, power bank, and flashlight. More importantly, she received psychosocial support.

"Thanks to the social worker, I'm finding emotional balance, self-confidence, and the strength to move forward," Valentyna says. "What I value most is the ability to be heard without judgment."

For Valentyna, this support is more than practical help – it's a symbol of care that eases the pain of displacement and rekindles faith in kindness and humanity.

### **Provision of assistive products to older people with disabilities in Chernivtsi region**

*Supported by HelpAge Canada*

### **"IT'S A CHANCE TO FEEL HUMAN AGAIN"**

When 53-year-old Serhii left his hometown of Bakhmut three years ago, he couldn't have imagined the challenges that lay ahead. A stroke left him with partial paralysis on his left side, and chronic conditions including joint disease, hypertension, and lung issues now shape his daily life.

Serhii lives with a disability and limited mobility in supported accommodation in the Chernivtsi region. A neigh-



bour helps him manage basic needs such as meals and hygiene, offering much-needed support in an otherwise difficult situation.



People like Serhii are among those reached through a project that provides essential assistive items to older internally displaced people. These include bathing chairs and urine collection devices for incontinence – an issue that is rarely spoken about due to stigma, but one that deeply affects comfort and psychological well-being.

For Serhii, this support has been life-changing. “The urine bag isn’t just an item – it’s a chance to feel human again,” he says. “Now I depend less on others and even have a bit more comfort.”

Beyond the physical supplies, Serhii says the project gave him something just as important: dignity and care. “These are things I had deeply needed,” he reflects.

### CARE THAT RESTORES CONFIDENCE

At 85, Vasyl has lived a life shaped by hard work and independence. But war changed everything. Three years ago,

he was forced to evacuate his home in Sievierodonetsk, and the stress of displacement worsened his already fragile health.

Vasyl now lives in Chernivtsi with his daughter and has settled into supported housing. But daily life remains a struggle. He is living with cancer, recovering from recent surgery, and faces difficulties with movement, memory, and communication. Basic tasks such as dressing or bathing have become major challenges.

That’s why a simple item – a bathing chair – has brought such meaningful change. “Not long ago, I couldn’t even take a shower on my own – I depended entirely on others,” Vasyl shares. “With this chair, I can now manage my hygiene safely and comfortably. And your attention and care give me strength and confidence.”

Through this project, older people with disabilities like Vasyl are not only receiving practical tools to support daily living, but also something less visible and just as vital: psychological comfort. A sense of safety, dignity, and care that can transform lives.



### 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:



**Aktion  
Deutschland Hilft**  
Germany's Relief Coalition



In partnership with  
**Canada**

