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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*



**"WHEN THEY BROUGHT ME A GLUCOMETR, I
CRIED WITH HAPPINESS"**

68-year-old Yevheniia was born in Russia but lived all her life in Ukraine, in Bakhmut, together with her husband Viktor. They dreamed of a peaceful old age – they bought a small summer house with a little garden where Yevheniia grew flowers. "We loved spending summers in that house and every evening sitting in the gazebo drinking tea with jam," recalls Yevheniia. But the full-scale war changed everything. The couple found themselves in the epicentre of heavy fighting and were forced to evacuate.

They still remember how soldiers and volunteers evacuated them, giving them warm blankets and water. "We were taken to a transit centre, where beds were made from pallets stacked three tiers high – was terrified I wouldn't be able to climb up. But people around tried to help in any way they could – they gave us blankets, food, and offered more comfortable beds." After six months of wandering, the couple finally found shelter in a cottage near Dnipro, provided by a local resident to more than ten older displaced people.

Life in the new place remained difficult: financial hardship, chronic illnesses, lack of medical devices and limited access to healthcare. The situation changed thanks to the HelpAge project. "A social worker, Tetiana, started visiting us – she talked to us, taught us breathing exercises, read books. She is such a warm and bright person." Later, another social worker, Inna, began supporting the family. During this time, the women not only delivered humanitarian aid, incontinence pads, winter bedding and clothes, and cash assistance, but also helped the couple restore their IDP benefits.

"And when they brought me a blood pressure monitor and a glucometer, I cried with happiness. I have diabetes, but my glucometer broke a long time ago, and buying a new one was impossible for us because of lack of money. Now I can monitor my health again. For us, these are not just devices – they mean confidence in tomorrow. Thanks to HelpAge, we feel not forgotten but cared for," shares Yevheniia.

The project not only meets critical needs but also restores dignity and hope for people like Yevheniia and her husband – among thousands of older Ukrainians affected by the war.

"THANKS TO THIS SUPPORT – I SURVIVE"

His greatest wish is to return home and be with his family again. But his house in Zaporizhzhia region is far too close to the front line. 74-year-old Dmytro had to evacuate in March 2022. His home is half-destroyed, and he now lives in a dormitory in Lviv, sharing a room with another displaced person. His only connection with family is through phone calls.

Due to health problems, daily life is becoming increasingly difficult. That is why the assistance received under the project has been crucial for maintaining his dignity and well-being: a hygiene kit, a winter set (pillow, blanket, bed linen, power bank), a glucometer, as well as financial support.



During her recent visit to Ukraine, Alison Marshall, CEO of Age International, met with Dmytro. His words were short but profound: "Thanks to this support – I survive."

"I urge international donors to continue prioritising the needs of older people in Ukraine – both now, while the war continues, and afterwards, so that the country can rebuild with the rights and needs of older people in mind," said Ms Marshall, noting that this support remains critically important.

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

Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany

"WHEN ILLNESS TAKES YOUR STRENGTH AND WAR TAKES EVERYTHING ELSE, YOU FEEL DEFENCELESS"

62-year-old Alla from Lysychansk never thought that one day she would have to flee from war. Yet, on the very first day of the full-scale invasion, 24 February

2022, she, her husband, daughter and son-in-law, and two small grandchildren – the youngest only eight months old – had to leave their home in a hurry. "The beds were made, things were in their places... We only took what we could grab," recalls Alla.

But the journey to safety turned out to be even more terrifying: they ended up in the epicentre of the fighting. "Tanks were coming towards us. We hid in a basement – without light, heat, or food, with small children who were simply freezing... Every day felt like the last one."

Eventually, the family managed to evacuate to Drohobych, Lviv region, where they still live in a dormitory. Alla is coping not only with the loss of her home and stability but also with battling cancer. "I have been ill since 2019. I went through chemotherapy and radiation. Now, every few months, I travel to Kharkiv for experimental treatment."



The side effects of chemotherapy – damaged nerve endings, numbness in her legs, poor vision – make even everyday tasks difficult.

"I constantly need to buy medicines to maintain my condition, do tests. All this requires considerable funds. Often, I have to give up some medicines because the treatment is so expensive. My pension is not enough to cover it," she says.

The family's financial situation is extremely difficult. They survive on pensions and IDP assistance, which barely covers basic needs. "When illness takes your strength and war takes everything else, you feel defenceless," shares Alla.

That is why the support from HelpAge at the local Community Safe Space has become so important for her. "When you're vulnerable, you really want someone to listen and understand you. Our meetings here have become an island of hope and warmth for me. We've all become friends, and you always know who to turn to for support. I especially love IT classes – my grandchildren are growing up, and I don't want to fall behind and be ignorant in the digital world," she smiles.

This project gives older people an important sense of care and safety. For those who have suffered from the war, this means a great deal. "I dream only of peace, so that my grandchildren never know what fear is. Until then – we fight on. And your support gives us the strength to keep living," says Alla.

ACTIVE OLDER PEOPLE = STRONGER COMMUNITIES

To amplify the voices of older people and increase their participation in community life, the HelpAge team trains, supports, and unites them to initiate and implement change.

What is civic engagement and why is it so important for older people? How can you influence change around you – not waiting but acting? These were the topics discussed during the training "Active Community: Tools for Influence and Engagement", held in Drohobych as part of the project for initiative groups of older IDPs who visit HelpAge Community Safe Spaces.

Participants learned how to turn ideas into real change: from taking part in public hearings, submitting electronic petitions, and using participatory budgets – to conducting street surveys and community meetings. They discussed where to find resources for initiatives – from local budgets to partner grants, and most importantly, how to make the voices of older people strong and influential.



"We are not just aid recipients or an invisible part of the population – we are those who shape change. The community is not someone 'out there', it's us. And now we know how to do it," shares 71-year-old Tetiana.

And these are not just words. The initiative group from Novoiavorivsk is working on the idea of installing public drinking water access points; in Sambir, they dream of a safe playground; in Lviv, they are looking for a venue for older people's leisure activities; and in Drohobych, they plan to improve the area near dormitories for older people and persons with disabilities.

Initiative groups are a real opportunity to be heard, to unite and to act for changes that make communities stronger for everyone. And HelpAge is there to support this journey, to train, empower and connect older people so their voices are heard, and their rights protected.

The activity and participation of older people help build resilient communities where everyone has a dignified place and the opportunity to influence change.

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

FOR THOSE WHO LOST EVERYTHING

Three years ago, 66-year-old Antonina, who had lived all her life in Sievierodonetsk in the Luhansk region, was forced to leave her home, fleeing the war. Behind her remained her apartment and everything the family had accumulated over the years. At first, she and her husband and children found shelter in a dormitory, later managing to rent a small apartment in Dnipro.

Antonina has a disability and faced a severe ordeal: during displacement, she sustained a fractured femoral neck and later underwent a complex surgery to replace the implant. Her husband also requires ongoing treatment after throat surgery. The family survives on pensions and IDP payments, but this is critically insufficient even for basic needs – food, medicine, hygiene items.



A friend told Antonina about the HelpAge project. The assistance she received was life-saving: hygiene kits, warm clothes, a blanket, a walking stick for mobility, and financial support that helped partially cover post-surgery expenses.

"What may seem like small, everyday things to someone else became a lifeline for people like us – those who left everything behind. We lost everything, but thanks to your help, we've started rebuilding our lives," Antonina shares.

In addition to material aid, psychological support from a HelpAge social worker proved invaluable, helping Antonina overcome feelings of despair and anxiety. This project not only addressed urgent needs but also provided a sense of care and security – something critically important for older people affected by the war.

A NETWORK OF SAFETY, ACTIVITY, AND SUPPORT

June at HelpAge Community Safe Spaces was marked by care, mutual support, and activity. Art therapy sessions helped relieve stress and anxiety, while Nordic walking and wellness exercises supported physical well-being.

However, life for older displaced people in Ukraine is still full of daily challenges: loneliness, new surroundings, loss of stability. That's why excursions organized for Community Safe Space visitors became true medicine for the soul. "I was filming the waterfalls - they calm me down. I'll send the videos to my grandkids," says 71-year-old Kateryna, displaced from Kharkiv. "A place where your body and soul can rest, where your own soul speaks to you in whispers," is how 65-year-old Olena, evacuated from Mykolaiv, describes the landscapes of Bakota Bay. Even small trips become a big step toward adaptation and regaining confidence in the future.



This month, older people also took part in important events. "We call on the world to allow people to live in peace and safety. We are against people suffering because of war and being forced to leave their homes. We support every displaced person: wishing them courage, faith, and strength to rebuild their lives," said 74-year-old Orysia during World Refugee Day in Ivano-Frankivsk - her words became the voice of many.

"We strive to draw attention to the challenges older displaced people face. Solidarity, empathy, and better understanding from local communities are crucial today," adds Nina, HelpAge specialist. "We aim to create an environment of mutual understanding and support for displaced older people."

In June, older people also joined the International World Elder Abuse Awareness Day - Kolomyia hosted a "Nordic Marathon" with more than 60 participants. "This is the second time we've held this marathon. It's a reminder to society: a dignified life in older age is not a privilege but a right. A right to safety, health, and dignity," notes project officer Nina.

Unfortunately, thousands of older people in Ukraine who have endured shelling, loss of homes, and loved ones remain at risk from explosive hazards - even in displacement, far from the frontline. To protect them and provide essential knowledge, a training was held at the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Stryi, Lviv region, in partnership with the Ukrainian Red Cross Society. During the session, older people learned about types of explosive hazards, what to do if they find one - and what not to do - as well as a safe action algorithm in dangerous situations. For older people who have already faced disproportionately heavy challenges, these skills are lifesaving.

HelpAge Community Safe Spaces remain places of safety, growth, and connection. Here, older people not only receive support but also feel they are not alone. We believe: care, respect, and activity are the keys to a dignified life - even in the most challenging times.

Multisectoral humanitarian assistance to most vulnerable older people affected by the conflict in Eastern Ukraine

Supported by Government of Canada and HelpAge Canada

"THE SCARIEST THING IS THE FEELING OF HELPLESSNESS"

84-year-old Nina has lived her entire life in Sloviansk, Eastern Ukraine. She had always been active and independent, but after suffering a stroke, her life changed dramatically. Partial paralysis limits her mobility, and every step takes tremendous effort. "The scariest thing is the feeling of helplessness when you feel like a prisoner even in your own home," she shares.



It is hard for Nina to take care of herself, and constant pain makes the situation even worse. Because of these problems, Nina found herself in a state of social isolation, which negatively affected her emotional well-being.

Although her son comes every day to help with the basics, it is not enough to overcome the feeling of loneliness. On top of that, her small pension does not even cover basic needs, let alone special care products.

That is why the support she received under the project changed Nina's life. She received a hygiene kit that helps her with everyday life, as well as psychosocial support that reassures her she is not left alone with her problems. However, Nina is still in urgent need of assistive items (a walking stick and incontinence pads).

"When you feel that someone remembers you and cares, it gives you the strength to go on," says Nina.

For older people who are struggling with illness, loneliness and the consequences of war, this means so much. In June, the project carried out a distribution of hygiene kits, and more than 2,000 older people in the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Kharkiv regions received simple but essential items to help maintain their quality of life and dignity.

THE PATH TO RESTORING DIGNITY

The project is implemented by HelpAge in partnership with the Charitable Foundation "Right to Protection" and the Volunteer-68 Humanitarian Aid Centre, reaching 5,000 older people and their caregivers to provide them with personalised support.

61-year-old Oleksandr, originally from Donetsk region, became an internally displaced person in the spring of 2024 due to the war. After evacuation, he settled in temporary housing in Zaporizhzhia. The most pressing issue for Oleksandr was the lack of documents confirming his ownership of his house - a critical aspect that prevented him from feeling safe and confident about the future.

Thanks to HelpAge's cooperation with lawyers from the Charitable Foundation "Right to Protection", Oleksandr received the necessary legal assistance to restore his property rights and was supported

through the documentation process. Oleksandr received the necessary legal assistance to restore his property rights and was supported through the documentation process. Soon after, he received an extract confirming the registration of his ownership rights to the house.



This assistance was invaluable for Oleksandr. He emphasises: "Without the support of the lawyer, I wouldn't have managed on my own. It's a very complicated procedure, especially for those who find themselves in a new city without any documents." Restoring his property rights gave him not only legal confirmation of ownership, but also renewed self-confidence, security and hope for the future.

The HelpAge project, aimed at supporting older internally displaced persons, provides not only humanitarian assistance but also comprehensive support, including legal aid. It helps overcome bureaucratic barriers that often become insurmountable for older people in difficult life circumstances.

NOTE:

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Supporting older people in Ukraine:

