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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*



### "WE DON'T EVEN HAVE DRINKING WATER"

83-year-old Hanna spent her whole life in Donetsk region, where she worked until retirement. But in 2014, war came to her land, and in 2022, Hanna was forced to move to the village of Havrylivka in Dnipropetrovsk region to live with her younger daughter and son-in-law.

"I haven't seen my other daughter for ten years, she stayed in Donetsk. I miss her terribly...", shares Hanna.

In recent years, her health has significantly worsened: she has almost completely lost her sight, can barely hear, and no longer walks. Her daughter takes care of her, despite living with a disability herself.

"I can only move from the bed to the table. But what hurts most is my soul – because of the war. I can somehow cope

with everything else. But when children are dying, when everything people worked hard to build is destroyed – I just can't accept that. That's why I hardly sleep. My head is full of anxious thoughts," she says.

Hanna's pension is 4,000 UAH (£72), and she receives an additional 2,000 UAH (£36) in state support for internally displaced persons. "But have you seen the prices of medicine?! Everything is so expensive! And it keeps going up!" Hanna says with a bitter smile.

HelpAge's support came at just the right time. She received a hygiene kit, cash assistance, a winter kit, a flashlight, a walking stick, a walker, and drinking water.

"This support is incredibly helpful. Power is often cut off due to shelling, and we're left in the dark. The flashlight is essential. When I filled out the form, I mentioned that we don't have drinking water. The water in our well is technical – completely undrinkable. My daughter had to walk to the shop to buy bottled water. I didn't expect your organisation would hear us and help with that."

Equally important for Hanna were the visits from the social worker. "I'm old, very old. But sometimes I just want to talk to someone, and I can't even go outside. That's why I always wait for social worker Nina. When she comes, I feel happy – there's warmth in my heart. It's so nice that people care about the old and the frail like me."

"Your support helps me feel calmer, safer. Because I know there are people who truly care about my fate. I'm deeply grateful that you are here for us in such difficult times."

### TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER

The DEC-CI "SPRAVA" project continues to be implemented in consortium with ActionAid and Action Against Hunger. Within its framework, our partner, the charitable foundation "Pomahaem," is sharing its experience with five other civil society organisations in Dnipropetrovsk region, which have become subgrantees. This project has united the efforts of local humanitarian initiatives to provide inclusive, effective, and accessible support to older people.

"It is an incredibly interesting and challenging project. It's one thing to do the work yourself, and quite another to teach others, support them, and guide them along the way," says Anna Barabash, project manager at Pomahaem. "We've gained deeper insight into the challenges of the civic sector, the work of colleagues in communities. We feel united and ready to change society with renewed strength."

One of the project participants is the NGO "Event Prostir," which launched a "Wellness and Psychological Relief Space" at the Central City Library in Kamianske. This is a place where older people can read, watch films, use exercise equipment, play board games, monitor their blood pressure, and receive consultations from a rehabilitation doctor. Most importantly, it's a safe and welcoming place for communication.

66-year-old Liudmyla lived with her husband in Donetsk for many years. They built a family and a career, and raised a son. But in 2014, the "Russian world" arrived. "We lived near the airport - those events are etched in our memory forever. The memories are heavy, piercing, painful..." says Liudmyla.



The couple relocated to Kamianske, leaving everything behind. Their new life was full of challenges and loneliness. "One day, I was invited to the library, where a cosy corner for older people had opened. It was interesting, peaceful, and joyful. I felt: I'm not alone!" she shares.

"I've made new friends, my life regained meaning. I returned to books and even discovered a new hobby - beading. This kind of peer communication is so needed - it supports us in these difficult times."

In May, the roundtable "Results of the DEC-CI 'SPRAVA' Project: Lessons Learned, Achievements, Challenges, and Gaps" was held. Over two days, national and international organisations discussed how to make support for older people more effective, analysed success stories and challenges, planned further integration of older people's needs into local policies, and reflected on what is needed to make such support sustainable,

accessible, and responsive to the real needs of older people.

This project is more than just a set of activities. It is a clear example of how local solutions, partnerships, and mutual support can change lives. Together we are stronger!

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

*Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany*

#### **"LIVE. DON'T WAIT!"**

76-year-old Valentyna from Sievierodonetsk lost her home in April 2022. Her building was completely destroyed during the fighting. "We arrived with just one bag in one hand and a cat in the other. We thought it would only be for a few weeks, just until the shelling stopped," she recalls.

But more than three years later, Valentyna is still renting a flat in the city of Sambir in western Ukraine together with an older woman she met during the evacuation. "She was alone, with nowhere to go. When the evacuation began, we just took her with us - and now it's the two of us."



Her daughter, granddaughter, great-grandson and the granddaughter's husband are also displaced. Their recently renovated home was completely destroyed and they now live nearby.

Living in a two-room rented flat costs 6,000 UAH (around 105 GBP) plus utilities - an amount covered solely by their pensions and IDP assistance. Valentyna, a trained chemist, worked for over 41 years at a chemical plant and continued working until the age of 65, even after retiring early. Still, it's not enough to feel secure: "Between the two of us, we can just afford food and rent. If I lived alone - survival would be impossible. I have to skip medication to save money, even though I have chronic illnesses."



Health issues limit Valentyna's mobility, but she remains determined to stay active. Her greatest emotional support has been the HelpAge Community Safe Space: "Every morning I get up and I know - I'm going there. I can't join the sport classes because of varicose veins, but I love painting. Some of my paintings are even on the walls! I've made friends, I have people to talk to. Without it, I wouldn't cope."

Valentyna says that what she found here above all is a sense of community. Her flatmate, who rarely leaves the house due to poor health, is showing signs of depression. "I see how important it is to have a space where people are waiting for you and understand you," Valentyna says.

When asked where she finds her strength, her answer is simple: "Every war ends. You have to live. Today is the moment — so live it. Don't wait!"

### TO BE INCLUDED IN LIFE

The network of HelpAge Community Safe Spaces operating within the project in Lviv region plays a vital role in supporting the emotional wellbeing and overall quality of life of older people. Art therapy, sports activities, singing, digital literacy training, Nordic walking, sessions with a psychologist, and access to hairdressing services are not just leisure activities - they are essential tools for preserving dignity, self-respect, and a sense of inclusion within the community.



Safe Space. It provided essential information about free or partially reimbursed access to life-saving medications - a crucial tool to help older people maintain and improve their health through the national reimbursement system.

For less mobile participants, mobile outreach visits ensure that no one is left behind. For example, the HelpAge team in Novoyavorivsk visited collective centres, shelters, dormitories, and supported housing locations where displaced older people now live. They visited the palliative care ward of Nemyriv City Hospital and the Novoyavorivsk vocational school, where they distributed hygiene kits, held a creative workshop, offered consultations, and simply spent time talking to people.

Thanks to ongoing support, older people living in these facilities remain active, socially engaged, and emotionally supported. Many have also taken up new hobbies such as embroidery and beadwork.

These integrated approaches not only improve the quality of life but also strengthen social bonds, restoring a sense of confidence, dignity, and inclusion for older people.

### "I NO LONGER ASK WHY I LIVE..."

64-year-old Zinaida from Bakhmut dedicated her entire life to helping others: for over 25 years, she worked as a nurse in an oncology department, supporting patients in

**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*

their fight against serious illnesses. However, her own life was also full of loss and hardship.

Ten years ago, Zinaida lost her son, and three years later - her husband, who could not cope with the death of their child. She found the strength to carry on, immersing herself in her work and drawing support from the church. But with the start of the full-scale war, this fragile balance was shattered.



and a lack of financial means, she dreams of having her own space, waiting for her turn to receive a room in a dormitory: "I want to live in a place where I would feel calm, free and mentally at ease."

Zinaida's health continues to deteriorate: hypertension, complications after stomach surgery, shortness of breath, joint problems - all of this on top of severe psychological trauma caused by the loss of loved ones, war, and forced displacement.

Exhausted and depressed, Zinaida entered the HelpAge project in a state of despair. "In the first months of communication, the only question she kept asking was: 'Why

displacement.

Exhausted and depressed, Zinaida entered the HelpAge project in a state of despair. "In the first months of communication, the only question she kept asking was: 'Why am I alive?'," recalls social worker Iryna. "It was heart-breaking to see this fragile and kind woman going through such unbearable internal pain."

Thanks to psychosocial support, Zinaida has found new hope: "I no longer ask why I live. Now I know – I am still needed in this world. And I want to support others, even just with words or by example," she says.

Through the project, Zinaida also received a hygiene kit, incontinence pads, warm clothing, bedding, a walking cane – which allows her to move around without feeling dependent on others and even go outside on her own – and financial assistance that helped her buy medicine and undergo a course of treatment.

Support for vulnerable older people must remain a priority in the humanitarian response.

### TRADITION, CARE, INCLUSION

Mother's Day and Vyshyvanka Day, celebrated in May in Ukraine, are more than just dates in the calendar. They offer older people an opportunity to feel part of a living culture again, to recall family stories, and to share their knowledge with the younger generation. That is why HelpAge Community Safe Spaces, as part of the project, became places where these occasions were celebrated with warmth, love and deep meaning.

In cities and villages across Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Bukovyna, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions, older people wore embroidered shirts and shared family memories. For instance, in Luzhany older people enjoyed telling stories behind their embroidered shirts. Some wore modern ones, others wore restored traditional garments. 71-year-old Mariia showed her childhood photo in her first embroidered shirt, while 71-year-old Kateryna, displaced from Kharkiv, wore a blouse she embroidered herself with beads on white silk. 68-year-old Viktoriia from Luzhany embroiders pictures that she has donated to the space.



At the same time, HelpAge strives not only to create festive atmospheres but to build barrier-free environments for all, showing that older people in Ukraine continue to be active participants in change. In Liubotyn, Kharkiv region, participants held a "barrier-free hour", exploring the values of inclusion, mutual respect and accessibility. As one participant noted: "When we understand each other's needs, barriers disappear – not just physical, but moral and psychological too." Together, we are creating a space where everyone – regardless of age or health – feels valued and heard.

In Sheptytskyi, in western Ukraine, a meeting of local NGOs, municipal authorities, social services and the IDP Council was held under the slogan "Equality begins with local solutions". Indeed, by supporting local decisions and bringing together active communities and organisations, we can jointly initiate and implement lasting change. The role of NGOs – both local and international – is crucial in this process: they best understand the needs of their communities, build trust, and ensure the inclusion of those who are too often unheard.

Culture, support and inclusion – these are the values that unite older people in HelpAge Community Safe Spaces and help build a life of dignity every day.

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

*Supported by Government of Canada and HelpAge Canada*

### CARING FOR OLDER PEOPLE AND THEIR CARERS

A new project is gaining momentum to improve the well-being of the most vulnerable older people affected by the war in eastern Ukraine – particularly those who are housebound, with or without disabilities, and their carers.

Vulnerable older people have already been identified and assessed in Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Kharkiv regions. HelpAge, in partnership with Right to Protection (R2P) and the Volunteer-68 Humanitarian Aid Centre, will reach 5,000 older people and their carers with personalised assistance – ranging from humanitarian, psychosocial, legal, and social support to help with mobility and access to services.

In May, a training was held in Dnipro for project staff on "Working with Carers," which marked an important step in improving the quality of home-based care. Participants discussed the key challenges faced by social workers and carers, learned how to create individualised care plans, and explored carer rights and the importance of peer support groups. The training not only provided practical tools but also reaffirmed a core principle: at the heart of it all is the person – their dignity, needs, and safety.





This project doesn't just provide support - it restores dignity and helps improve the quality of life for the most vulnerable older people living through war.

### "WE COULD NEVER HAVE AFFORDED THIS"

76-year-old Yevheniia has lived her entire life in Kramatorsk. She devoted herself to her family and work - raising two sons with her husband, building a home with their own hands, and helping supply coal to the local population. But life brought unbearable tragedy: in 2000, her younger son died, followed later by her elder son. Now, the older couple is alone, with no children and no support.

In February 2023, a shell landed near their house, damaging the roof. In 2025, another blast hit their chimney. "My husband and I fixed everything ourselves," Yevheniia recalls.

With a pension of just 4,300 UAH (142 CAD), there's barely enough for heating or medicine. "It's freezing in the house in winter, and my joints started to ache - it's hard to walk. The stress has triggered high blood pressure, cataracts, and encephalopathy..."



Becoming a participant in the HelpAge project brought Yevheniia much-needed support - especially psychosocial. Social worker Oksana has become both a helper and a friend. "When she brought a big box full of household and hygiene items, I was stunned. So many things! Shampoo, soap, laundry powder, and more - all essentials for the home. We could never have afforded this."

"I'm grateful that you care about us"

With regular support, people like Yevheniia find it easier to face daily challenges, feel less alone, and preserve their dignity - despite the ongoing hardships of war.

#### 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:



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