

May 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 THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG WHILE,  
I FELT SUPPORTED"**

At 87, Liudmyla never imagined she'd have to start over. She fled her Kharkiv home in April 2022 when the explosions became too frequent and too close. "I didn't leave by choice," she says. "I was afraid the house would simply vanish one day."

Now settled in Mukachevo with her daughter, she's safe but life is far from easy. Living on a small pension of 4,500 UAH (87 GBP) and 2,000 UAH in IDP assistance (30 GBP), rent and daily medication often feel out of reach. "My health is failing - heart problems, cataracts, mobility issues - and I can't afford all the medicines I need."

She's grateful to have connected with HelpAge after her family doctor mentioned its humanitarian efforts. "For the

first time in a long while, I felt supported." Through HelpAge, Liudmyla received vital supplies: hygiene items, adult diapers, a walker, a commode chair, and financial aid. "With the walker, I can move on my own again. And I used the money to buy my most necessary medicines."

But the biggest comfort, she says, is the support of her HelpAge social worker, Hanna. "She's more than a social worker - she's someone I can rely on. She helps me with medical appointments, daily challenges, and always brings kind words. HelpAge reminds me that I'm not alone."



**FINDING STRENGTH IN TRADITION**

Across eastern and western Ukraine, April brought a renewed sense of energy to HelpAge Community Safe Spaces. In the lead-up to Easter, older people - many of them displaced by war - came together to honour traditions, nurture creativity, and support one another's well-being.

At the heart of the month's activities were vibrant preparations for Easter. Traditional egg-decorating workshops were complemented by beadwork and Fabergé-style designs, with participants in cities like Samar (Dnipropetrovsk region) crafting intricate pieces that celebrated both heritage and artistry. In Prosyana, a festive Easter tree became a symbol of hope and renewal.

These moments offered more than seasonal cheer – they helped foster emotional resilience. “Creative work supports our mood and reminds us that we’re part of something larger,” shared one participant. Activities like these encourage fine motor skills and artistic expression but also bring a sense of community and continuity in uncertain times.

Music also played a powerful role in these activities. Singing sessions gave participants a chance to reconnect through shared songs and emotions. “A song is the soul of the people,” said Iryna, a social worker and choir member in Dnipro. “Through music, we express our stories, hopes, and love. It unites us.”

The “Nadiia” choir – a name that means “hope” – sang from the heart, offering each voice as a reflection of collective experience. For many, this expression was deeply therapeutic, easing feelings of isolation and restoring joy.

Art therapy continued to be a central pillar of the Safe Spaces programme. Knitting, embroidery, and crafts provided moments of focus and calm, helping participants manage stress and feel purposeful. “These small creations carry meaning,” one social worker observed. “They’re not just objects – they’re stories, stitched with care.”

Fitness sessions also remained a cornerstone of the programme, helping participants stay active and independent. With exercises tailored to different abilities, older people exercised with enthusiasm – understanding that movement is key not only to physical health, but to maintaining dignity and self-confidence.

Through these holistic activities, HelpAge Community Safe Spaces empower older people to find comfort in tradition and connection in shared experience. With each song sung, craft created, and friendship formed, these Spaces reaffirm a simple but powerful message: older people are seen, valued, and not alone.

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

*Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany*

**NEW LIFE, RENEWED PURPOSE**

Valentyna, 66, was forced to flee her home in Sievierodonetsk with her sister, her young grandson, and her loyal dog. Displaced by the war, she faced the fear of the unknown, caring not only for her family but for a sister living with cancer, and ensuring their safety through each step of their journey.

In Drohobych, after months of uncertainty, Valentyna found stability thanks to HelpAge-supported services. But it was HelpAge’s Community Safe Space that helped Valentyna truly begin to recover.

“The HelpAge project gave me more than just support – it gave me peace of mind. I can sleep again without fear,”



she says. “It helped me move from simply surviving to actually living again.”

Through HelpAge’s initiative, Valentyna reconnected with others who shared similar experiences of loss and displacement. In these safe spaces, she found comfort, community, and creative expression. “I discovered herdany – traditional beadwork. It was my first time trying something like that, and I felt a joy I hadn’t known in years.”

With the confidence and encouragement she received, Valentyna tapped into her engineering background and a lifelong love for making things with her hands. She began sewing adaptive clothing for people with injuries – a need she recognised as increasingly urgent.

“I got out my old sewing machine, 50 years old, and just started. Every stitch feels like I’m doing something meaningful again,” she shares. “HelpAge helped me see that even in displacement, I can still make a difference.”

**FOSTERING A COMMUNITY OF CARE**

This spring, HelpAge Community Safe Spaces across Lviv Oblast came alive with colour and connection. As Easter approached, older people displaced by war found joy in simple traditions – embroidering festive designs, painting eggs, and arranging bouquets of pussy willow. For many, these activities offered far more than seasonal celebration – they provided a sense of home, belonging, and purpose.

In Drohobych, 61 – year – old Halyna, displaced from Sloviansk, has become a creative force and an anchor for others. Known for her imaginative crafts – from transforming cups into lamps to hand – painting stones and silk collages – Halyna not only creates beauty, she shares it. She leads workshops where older people learn new skills, connect with one another, and rediscover their confidence.

“Creativity helps me forget the bad and feel needed,” she says. “I still dream of going home, but here, far from Sloviansk, I’m learning how to live again – and how to share joy with others.”





With HelpAge's support, older people like Halyna are not only healing – they are inspiring. In these spaces, participants explore digital literacy, stay active through Nordic walking and fitness tailored to their needs, and lift their voices in choral sessions that offer emotional release and collective strength.

In Novoiahorivsk, the spirit of collaboration extends beyond the community centres. Displaced and local older people recently joined together for a spring clean-up, clearing parks and planting flowers. "We were proud to take part," says Marharyta, HelpAge Project Officer. "It showed that older people are not just surviving – they are helping to rebuild and renew their communities."

For those unable to attend in person, HelpAge's mobile outreach teams ensure no one is left behind. At Nemyriv City Hospital, they delivered humanitarian aid and personal care, with a volunteer hairdresser offering moments of dignity and human touch. A tote bag painting session brought comfort, with cherry blossom designs blooming as symbols of hope.

These moments, small and profound, remind us that older people remain vital contributors to community life. With the right support, they continue to lead, inspire, and uplift others – even in displacement.

**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*

**"YOU'VE GIVEN ME BACK  
A SENSE OF SAFETY"**

When 66-year-old Liudmyla speaks about the start of the full-scale invasion, her voice trembles. She and her hus-

band stayed in Kharkiv as long as they could, but by April 2022, the shelling became relentless. "It was a painful decision – to leave everything we had built," she says. "We left the apartment I earned after years of factory work. I didn't know what the future would hold."

Forced to relocate to her parents' village home in the Kharkiv region, Liudmyla's new reality was not only emotionally distressing but also physically demanding. Her existing health conditions – thyroid issues, inflamed nerves, and knee pain – worsened, and access to medical care was limited. Most of her pension went toward supporting her children and helping repair their damaged apartment in Kharkiv. "Sometimes I have to choose between buying medicine or sending money to my children," she says. "Taking care of myself often comes last."

Things started to look up when she met Olena, a HelpAge social worker. Through the project, Liudmyla received essential winter clothing, firewood, hygiene supplies, and financial assistance. But for her, the support went far beyond material aid.

"The most valuable gift has been the human connection," she says. "Olena doesn't just deliver things – she listens, checks in, and always asks how else she can help."

Today, Liudmyla is beginning to look ahead. The road is still uncertain, but with HelpAge by her side, she feels stronger. "You've given me back a sense of safety, care, and belief in a better future."

## **RECLAIMING CONNECTION**

In April, across HelpAge Community Safe Spaces in Ukraine, the familiar rituals of Easter became a quiet source of strength for older people far from home. These were not just seasonal activities – they were opportunities to reconnect with identity, culture, and each other.

At a table in Kolomyia, hands moved with purpose – kneading dough, dyeing eggs, threading beads. “We try to create an atmosphere that feels personal,” said Nina, a project team member. “Celebrations are meant to be shared. When that’s missing, especially during displacement, it can deepen isolation.”

That’s why the spaces focused not only on festivities, but on inclusion. In Stryi, older people met local schoolchildren in the library to decorate gingerbread and exchange stories. The interaction wasn’t just delightful – it was deeply humanising, offering older people a chance to feel not just present, but significant.

Those unable to join public events weren’t left behind. In towns like Kelmentsi, Kolomyia and Stryi members of the “Peer-to-Peer” groups visited homebound older people, bringing companionship and home-baked goods to their doorsteps. These small gestures reinforced a simple truth: community care doesn’t have to be large-scale to be meaningful.

Older people were also shaping the future of their communities. In Kelmentsi, a group surveyed residents to better understand local needs – an effort to ensure older voices inform local priorities.



Whether through a song or a shared meal, these acts show that older people are not passive observers of recovery. They’re contributing, leading, and reminding us what it means to feel connected.

#### **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:**

