

September 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*



REBIRTH AFTER DEVASTATING LOSSES

In August 2025, one of the largest projects in Ukraine aimed at supporting older people affected by the war came to an end. The generous contribution of donors allowed us to provide thousands of elderly Ukrainians affected by the war with multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance, including hygiene kits, financial support, assistive rehabilitation devices, and psychosocial support. In addition to immediate aid, grant funding played a vital role in strengthening the capacity of both local NGOs and the older people themselves, helping to promote resilience and restore dignity under extremely challenging circumstances.

73-year-old Halyna is one of the thousands of older Ukrainians whose life was changed by the project. She spent her entire working life at the railway station Donetsk region. Together with her husband, she raised two sons. However, fate prepared difficult trials for Halyna: her husband passed away in 1982, her eldest son died during the hostilities in 2014, and her younger son developed a mental disorder due to trauma and stress.

"Our city was under occupation for three months. During shelling, we hid in basements. Sometimes the shelling lasted up to ten hours. It was terrifying – at each explosion, my blood ran cold," Halyna recalls, her voice still trembling. The war forced Halyna and her son to evacuate in May 2022 from Donetsk region to Dnipro, and later to the city of Samar. They lived in a small summer kitchen without proper conditions, heated with a stove, and ate what kind people brought them.

Halyna's pension of 3,000 UAH (£54) and IDP allowance of 2,000 UAH (£35) was barely enough for the essentials. "My son cannot get a job, and he is unable to work due to his condition," Halyna says. Due to the cold and poor living conditions, health problems began - chronic gastrointestinal diseases, cardiovascular issues, and joint pain.

"We endured the winter of 2022-2023 with great difficulty. We became very sick from the cold, and my joints started to ache. And after buying firewood, we hardly had any money left – neither for medicine, nor for food, nor for warm clothing. But we are grateful even for this, there is a roof over our heads," Halyna says. Thanks to the support of the HelpAge project, Halyna's life began to change – she received a hygiene kit and financial assistance. "I never thought that someone could care for us, sick people, even in a city far from home. Your help gave us the simplest and most necessary things – what we could not afford in these difficult circumstances of displacement," she says.

"I THOUGHT I'D LOST MYSELF"

In August, the implementation of the DEC-CI initiative "SPRAVA" (Shifting Power for Resilience and Value of Local Actors) was completed. The initiative brought together international and local partners to support those most in need. The project was implemented through the charitable foundation "Pomahayem" and its sub-grantees

60-year-old Larysa from the city of Selydove, Donetsk region, endured severe hardships. During heavy shelling she spent days in a basement without food or water. "Those were days of fear, uncertainty, and exhaustion. By some miracle I survived and waited for evacuation," she recalls.



When Larysa was brought to a shelter in the city of Dnipro, she was in a very poor physical and emotional state. But gradually, day by day, her life began to change. In the shelter she found not only a safe place but also human warmth, and the mutual support of other displaced people became her anchor.

Special importance in her recovery was played by activities organised in the shelter by the charity "1+1, No Longer Alone" within their project "Not Abandoned". Larysa enjoys attending sports and creative classes. Movement helps her keep her body in shape and drawing and handicrafts calm her soul.

"When I first arrived here, I felt there was nothing left in me - no strength, no faith. I thought I'd lost myself. But now I look forward to every class. After exercise I feel alive, and when I sit down to create something, it's like I'm reclaiming a piece of myself. It helps me to keep going," Larysa shares.

Today, Larysa smiles again. She doesn't forget what she's been through, but she believes in a better future. And she starts each new day with hope - knowing that life goes on and that there are people by her side to walk with her on the road to recovery.

Thanks to this large-scale project, thousands of people across Ukraine affected by the war have received life-saving assistance and a chance for a dignified life. Their lives have been transformed through support and care that brings hope and the opportunity to move forward.

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

Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany

"I TRY NOT TO GIVE UP..."

At 60, Victoriia had to face all the difficulties of forced displacement. She and her 61-year-old husband, Volodymyr, left the city of Kostiantynivka in Donetsk region in 2022 and over three years moved through several temporary locations, until in July 2025 they finally arrived in Drohobych, Western Ukraine.



Thirty years ago, Victoriia received a disability group, but she never gave up. Her condition forced her to leave her job at a high-voltage substation, yet she enrolled in embroidery courses at the Vocational Orientation Center for People with Disabilities.

Before the war, Victoriia moved with crutches, but due to stress caused by the war and displacement, she had to switch to a wheelchair, as her coordination was affected. Despite these challenges, she continues to work - creating handmade items at home. Her husband helps with orders via mail, while Victoriia decorates towels with embroidery. Together, they have become a real team, supporting each other in everything.

"I try not to give up, even though moving can be difficult, and the war has only made things harder. But my husband's support makes me stronger," Victoriia says. In Drohobych, the couple began attending the local HelpAge Community Safe Space. Victoriia especially enjoys the embroidery club, while Volodymyr started attending IT classes. "At first, being in a large group was a bit tiring since we were used to living just the two of us," Victoriia recalls, "but over time, it has brought joy. We gained social connections, new acquaintances, and a sense of belonging to the community, which we hadn't felt in many years." Other center participants note that Victoriia never complains, is always positive, and full of energy, regardless of her condition and the circumstances she now faces.

Victoriia and Volodymyr's main dream is to have their own home. "We don't even know the condition of the place we left. That's why we value every bit of help and support," Victoriia says. "The HelpAge Community Safe Space has allowed us not only to learn, develop, and spend our free time usefully but also to feel support, as everyone here has experienced similar challenges. We have all become like one big family."

HelpAge Community Safe Spaces create a true safety and support network for older people. They provide learning, development, and recreational opportunities, as well as practical and psychological assistance. Thanks to these centers, older people can participate more actively in community life, overcoming the challenges brought by war and displacement.

THE POWER OF VOICE AND SPIRIT OF OLDER UKRAINIANS

In all HelpAge Community Safe Spaces, initiative groups of older participants have been formed within the project. These groups bring together older people who want to support one another, advocate for their rights, and influence the life of the communities they found themselves in due to the war.



To support them and provide essential knowledge, the HelpAge team conducted a training in August on "Advocacy – Expanding the Rights and Opportunities of Older People." Participants learned what advocacy is, which tools help protect their rights, and how to plan advocacy campaigns step by step. They also discussed legislation related to creating civil society organizations, finding resources, and most importantly – how the voice of older people can and should be heard.

After the training, participants began actively exchanging ideas and planning first steps to strengthen their initiatives in their communities. "I felt that the knowledge gained during the training gives me confidence to act," said one participant. Strengthening the role of older adults in society and advocating for their rights is a key priority of HelpAge's work in Ukraine. We believe that older people can influence decision-making and become a true driving force for change.

Additionally, throughout August, older people in HelpAge Community Safe Spaces actively prepared for Ukraine's Independence Day.

During masterclasses, they created their own embroidered shirts, braided necklaces, and other symbolic decorations using heat-transfer stickers. For many, these activities were not only a creative process but also an opportunity to share stories and spend time in a warm circle of like-minded people. Most importantly, older adults poured their own energy into every creation, proving that independence begins with oneself.

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

SMALL BUT IMPORTANT STEPS TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

86-year-old Liubov, living in Kharkiv with her daughter, faced severe challenges from the very beginning of the war – the neighborhood where they lived was under constant shelling. Going down to the basement each time was extremely difficult – Liubov had already lost toes on her foot due to a serious vascular disease and diabetes. Two weeks after the war began, they had to evacuate.



Upon arriving in Lviv, Liubov experienced deep depression. And the diagnosis of dementia only worsened the situation: disorientation, memory lapses, mood swings, and nighttime panic attacks due to air raid alarms made Liubov's condition even more unstable.

Not knowing how to cope with these challenges, her daughter Olha turned to HelpAge International for help. Thanks to psychosocial support, Liubov's mental state stabilized. "Conversations with the social worker, her attention and care worked wonders – my mother started feeling calmer and more secure," says Olha.

In addition, Liubov received a toilet chair, walking aids, diapers, and hygiene kits. And thanks to referrals she received a roller for outdoor walks. "Before, I couldn't even go outside without someone's help, but now, accompanied by my daughter, I can go out, rest, and breathe fresh air," she adds.

These small steps towards independence and safety help older people who have faced enormous challenges due to the war to feel more comfort and dignity in their daily lives.

OLDER PEOPLE AS DRIVERS OF CHANGE

Since January 2025, an initiative group of older people has been active in Stryi, Lviv region, bringing together ten participants.

"All of us are 60+, and this war and displacement have been an immense stress for each of us," says 76-year-old Anatolii, displaced from Luhansk region and leader of the initiative group, during a meeting with representatives of HelpAge International and HelpAge Deutschland who visited the group in August. "At first, we were brought together by the local HelpAge Community Safe Space, where we could talk and relax, and later we found the strength to act and change our lives in the new community."

60-year-old Valentyna from Donetsk region adds: "Recently, I heard on the news that my mine, where I used to work, was destroyed. But life goes on – we have to live, not just exist, and improve life in new conditions for people like us – older displaced people who have lost everything except memories."



The group meets once a month to discuss ideas and projects. "It gives us energy, a life impulse," smiles Anatolii. "We feel needed, active. The main thing is that we are alive and can make a difference."

Over time, the group has built partnerships with local authorities and civil society organizations, organizing excursions, roundtables, workshops, and cultural events. The group also established the choir "Nadiia" ("Hope") performing at local celebrations, and collaborates with

children's and adult libraries, the youth center. The Family Club allows older couples to create, paint, make crafts, and participate in competitions, combining creativity with socialization and communication. Regular "Poetry Club" meetings and encounters with local poets are held.

The initiative group also collaborates with the local Association of People with Disabilities. This partnership led to the idea of installing a ramp for people with reduced mobility at the central library. In addition, a joint project with the city council is almost complete – creating a micro-community space in Stryi. "The space will be modern and accessible: ramps with handrails, modular benches and stools of different formats, lighting, bins, and a bike rack. It will be a place where older people, parents with strollers, and people with disabilities can rest comfortably," adds Anatolii.

Participants of the initiative group attending the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Kolomyia have been breaking age-related stereotypes by example: on the occasion of Ukraine's Independence Day, they conquered the country's highest peak – Hoverla Mountain (2,061 m).

"Every day, people like us – older adults who have lost family, home, and familiar surroundings due to the war – face challenges comparable to climbing Hoverla. We have to overcome physical barriers caused by declining health or disability, financial ones due to a meager pension that barely covers the essentials, as well as digital and social barriers. Moreover, many services and suitable housing are out of reach – many older displaced people live in conditions that do not meet their age or health needs," says 68-year-old Olena, displaced from Kharkiv.

"Every day we conquer our own Hoverla – the cliff of life becomes steeper and our strength less. And it is so important to have people by your side to help you along the route: humanitarian workers, family, the community, and the state beginning to pay attention to older people. When such a 'support group' walks alongside you, even the steepest climb can be overcome," says 65-year-old Tetiana, who had to leave her family in Kherson due to the war.

In the city of Liubotyn in the Kharkiv region, older people celebrated Independence Day in traditional Ukrainian attire, singing folk songs and honoring cultural traditions.

Older Ukrainians continue to show that their strength of spirit, experience, and desire for change can build a society that respects and values everyone, regardless of age. Initiative groups highlight the transformational role of older people in creating resilient and just communities, proving that they are not passive recipients of aid but active drivers of progress, contributing their knowledge and experience to community resilience and the protection of human rights.

Supported by Government of Canada and HelpAge Canada

CARE IN THE HARDEST TIMES

At the end of 2024, Svitlana and her husband were forced to leave their home in the village of Udachne in Donetsk region. "We lost everything we had," she admits. "We kept hoping for the best until the very end, but the shelling became more terrifying every day."

Now the couple live in a rented house in the village of Chaplynka in Dnipropetrovsk region. Their two adult children are scattered across Ukraine by the war, far from their parents.

Alongside the daily struggles of displaced older people in a new place, 61-old-years Svitlana also faces serious health challenges. She has a disability and has survived two strokes. At night, painful memories keep her awake, and sometimes an entire day passes in tears. "The emotional pain, the stress – they don't leave me," she says. Yet she tries to overcome this by working in the garden and preserving vegetables for winter. The family's only income is her pension and IDP allowance, barely enough for the basics.



In this difficult time, HelpAge's support has become a lifeline. Svitlana has already received a hygiene kit and financial assistance. "The money, the hygiene items, but especially the attention of the social worker – this is very tangible support for me," she shares.

"The war has scattered everyone, it has made us lonely in our old age," she sighs. "My greatest dream now is for peace to come, for people to stop dying. Above all, I long for the day when we can all gather as a family over a cup of tea, embrace my children tightly, and kiss my grandchildren."

Svitlana is one of 692 of the most vulnerable older people who will gain greater access to essential goods and services through multipurpose cash assistance. This approach enables HelpAge to provide a more flexible and dignified form of support, recognising that each person's circumstances are different. It means that the most at-risk older women and men will have the autonomy to set their own priorities and use the cash assistance in the way

that best suits their specific situation – whether to cover healthcare costs, food, housing, or other essential and potentially life-saving needs they would otherwise be unable to meet.

"I WAS LEFT ALONE, WITHOUT RELATIVES, WITHOUT A HOME ..."

This ongoing war in Ukraine has taken the most precious from 75-year-old Mykola from the Donetsk region. As a result of shelling in his village, his wife and son died, and his house was destroyed.

"I was left alone, without relatives, without a home, and even without a passport, as all my documents burned in the house," he shares. Mykola himself sustained multiple injuries and 60% body burns and spent a long time in hospital.

His only source of income is the minimum old-age pension. However, due to his injuries and health problems, it is difficult for him to move around, especially in a village without public transport. "Without external help, I couldn't even get to the offices to restore my documents, without which it would be impossible to even receive the pension, which is my only source of income," Mykola explains.



It was at that time that he received support through the HelpAge project via our partners – the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation. The social worker not only registered him with the State Migration Service but also accompanied him to all necessary institutions. Thanks to this help, Mykola restored his Ukrainian passport, tax code, registration certificate, and also opened a bank account. "Now I can receive my pension not through the post office, but directly to my card," he says with relief.

In addition to practical help, Mykola received psychological support. "After the death of my loved ones, I felt constant pain and anxiety. Talking with the social worker Inna helped me get through this difficult time and believe that life goes on," he says.

The project's support has become a step for Mykola towards restoring confidence in tomorrow and the feeling that he is not left alone with his grief.

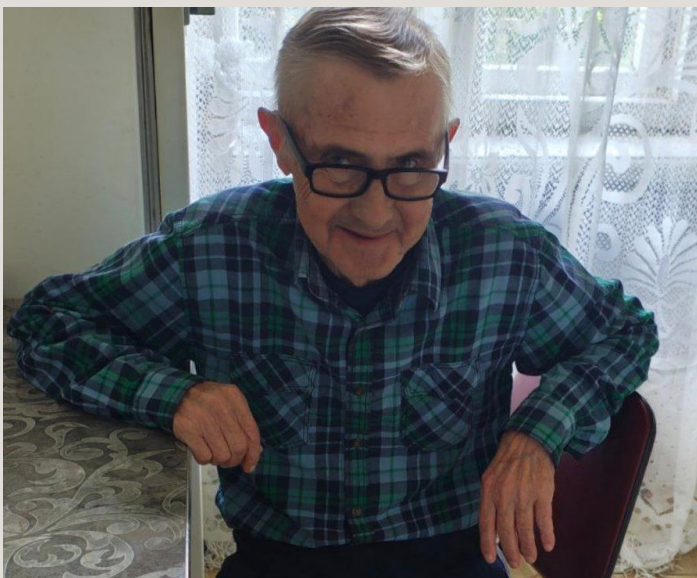
Protecting and supporting at-risk communities in Eastern Ukraine: multisectoral humanitarian assistance and preparedness

With the support of ActionAid and financial assistance from the European Union

"NOT JUST WITH WORDS, BUT WITH ACTIONS"

The project, funded under the European Union's humanitarian aid, aims to protect and support older people in the Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia regions. In total, 2,798 older people are expected to be reached, receiving home care services, hygiene kits, urinary pads, adult diapers, and assistive devices to ensure their dignity, comfort, and safety.

Among them is 68-year-old Kostiantyn is originally from Soledar. In August 2022, the war forced him, along with his wife and grandson, to leave their home. The family now rents a modest apartment in Dnipro, where every day is a struggle to cover basic needs.



The family's main income is about 20,000 UAH (409 EUR), of which only 5,000 UAH (102 EUR) are IDP payments, and the rest comes from a pension. This money is barely enough to cover rent, food, and necessary medical care. Kostiantyn suffers from chronic stomach pains, joint problems, and deteriorating vision, and the stress caused by the war and shelling only worsens his condition.

Kostiantyn learned about the work of HelpAge International from acquaintances and joined the project. Thanks to regular visits from a social worker, he experienced the joy of "simple human interaction." "When the social worker comes, it becomes easier to breathe and think about tomorrow," Kostiantyn shares, admitting that communication and attention help him reduce stress and feel that he is not alone in these trials.

"I feel that we are supported not just with words, but with concrete actions," he adds. Recently, Kostiantyn received a hygiene kit – for the family, this is not just items, but a sense of relief. Previously, they had to economize on literally everything, even on hygiene products. Now, the money saved can be spent on medicine and other urgent needs, significantly improving their quality of life and giving a sense of hope for tomorrow.

"WE SLEPT PEACEFULLY FOR THE FIRST TIME"

The story of 91-year-old Viktor and Kateryna is striking. Staying in the city of Kostyantynivka, Donetsk region, had become extremely risky for them every day. The city is under constant heavy shelling, which leads to the destruction of civil infrastructure and casualties among civilians. Since the beginning of 2025, the city has suffered over 500 shelling attacks.

The evacuation of the older couple was taken on by the Humanitarian Assistance Center "Volunteer-68." The route was planned and a crew prepared. Upon arriving in the city, a paramedic checked Viktor and Kateryna's health to ensure their safety during the journey: blood pressure and sugar levels were measured, and it was confirmed that they had taken all necessary medications.



The journey was long, but careful support made it safe. First, the couple registered at an evacuation hub in Lozova, and then reached Kharkiv. There, they were met with a room in the temporary shelter for low-mobility people "Without Limits", which operates thanks to "Volunteer-68." Viktor and Kateryna received medical care, meals, and were able to take hygiene procedures. "It was the first real rest in a long time," Kateryna admitted. "We slept peacefully for the first time."

The next day, the evacuation continued. Throughout the journey, the older couple received the necessary sanitary and social support. And finally – Chernihiv, where their daughter was waiting for them.

"Volunteer-68" is the first organization providing professional assistance in evacuating low-mobility older people. They overcome the chaos of war with careful planning and a system of care, where every step – from the dispatcher's call to the nurse's care – becomes part of a single chain of rescue. Thanks to the project, over 600 older people and persons with disabilities in Kharkiv region will have a chance for safe evacuation and protection.

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:

