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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.

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



STAYING CLOSE, DESPITE THE DANGER

As part of its multi-sectoral humanitarian support in the project, HelpAge International provides home care services to over 6,000 older people across five regions of Ukraine – Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Ivano-Frankivsk. HelpAge social workers visit older people, offering psychosocial support and delivering vital aid – hygiene kits, cash assistance, diapers and urological pads, assistive devices, warm clothing, and bedding.

Iryna is one of them. She cares for older people in Kamianske, Dnipropetrovsk region, which remains under frequent missile attacks. Hundreds of older displaced people have found temporary shelter here after fleeing the

war. But sadly, the conflict reaches them even here. "Sometimes it's very hard," Iryna shares. "When I speak with people in deep depression, I try to listen, comfort, and support them. Empathising like this is emotionally exhausting. But when I see joy in their eyes, it gives me strength. They trust me, and that is the highest reward. After night attacks, I call them to offer support, and they... comfort me. It is very motivating. I cannot stop."

Among Iryna's care recipients is 100-year-old Tetiana, displaced from Kramatorsk. "The most valuable thing is knowing there's someone who will always come to help. I know I can reach Iryna anytime," Tetiana says.

69-year-old Olena, also displaced from Kramatorsk, adds: "This support is not just care – it's hope and humanity. I don't feel abandoned. It's absolutely vital. Iryna's help allows me to keep my love for life and faith in a better future."



"For me, it's not just about providing humanitarian aid. I want everyone to feel they are not alone. That is the heart of our mission. Support is more than giving things. It's care, presence, and trust," says Iryna.

"PEER TO PEER": WHEN CARE HEALS LONELINESS

At HelpAge Community Safe Spaces established under the project, «Peer to peer» groups have been formed, where active older people provide psychosocial support to their less mobile peers, visit them, spend time together, and connect. Each participant has completed training on humanitarian principles, safeguarding, and communicating with older people and people with disabilities.



One of these groups operates in Stryi, Lviv region. "My pair, Raisa, a 76-year-old displaced person from Sievierodonetsk," shares 66-year-old Lidiia, displaced from Kharkiv, during the September visit by the global HelpAge International team – Ria Tariq, Director of Global Impact, and Murali Kunduru, Head of Localisation. "By the second visit, she was reading her own poems to me; by the third, we were hugging. She's so happy when I come."

Lidiia supports two older people. Asked what motivates her, she says: "Do you know why I said "yes" when I was invited? It was a very special moment. I remembered how lost and lonely I felt when I first arrived here, in a new city. Thanks to HelpAge, I came alive again, spread my wings, and felt I had the resources to support someone else, to share my care and attention. It comes from the heart."

"I recently visited my pair, 82-year-old Nadiia, and we reminisced about childhood," recounts 60-year-old Valentyna, displaced from Donetsk region. "She remembered kneading the dough for the house her father was building when she was ten. Later, the house was destroyed by war... She always looks forward to our visits, as there is no one else to talk to."

"Our participants don't just visit others – they bring warmth, support, hugs, and shared companionship into people's lives. This inspires them to keep going and shows that active ageing is not only about oneself, but also about giving support to others," says project specialist Nataliia.

Another active group "Peer to Peer" operates in Kolomyia, Ivano-Frankivsk region.

"Rarely does anyone come to see me... But I want to talk, sing..." admits 87-year-old Olha, forcibly displaced from Toretsk, Donetsk region. "Will you come again? I love to sing so much..."



"The "Peer to peer" initiative is about mutual empowerment, dignity, and overcoming loneliness," says Nina, project specialist. "Older people with limited mobility, including those confined to bed, don't feel forgotten. They see that people remember them and understand their challenges. It's especially meaningful that they meet those who have been through similar experiences and realise life doesn't end. That's why they hold on to their visitors and ask them to come again and again."

"Peer to peer" groups have become not only an example of mutual support but also a true symbol of active ageing. For participants, helping others is a way to stay needed, live with an open heart, and share what is most valuable – humanity.

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 THE VOICE IS STRONGER THAN THE SIRENS

62-year-old Lidiia is from a small town in Dnipropetrovsk region. She has dedicated her life to working in children's institutions and raising three sons.

Besides her family and work, Lidiia has had another passion since her youth – singing. "My motto is 'through life with a song'," she smiles. With her extraordinary voice, Lidiia has participated in numerous singing competitions, often winning prizes. "And when in 2022 the tanks came, I did not stop singing – on the contrary, I sing traditional Ukrainian songs to lift people's spirits and support them in this difficult time."

Lidiia knows what loss means. Her husband was a Chernobyl disaster liquidator, which affected his health. Five years ago, after a long struggle, he passed away. Then the war came. Today, Lidiia lives in Dnipro, facing difficulties – her small pension barely covers basic needs. To make ends meet, she took a job as a caretaker.

Despite the pain of loss and daily challenges, Lidiia finds strength to help others – in her free time, after work, and even under the sound of sirens, she bakes pies for those in need. Her nine-year-old grandson helps her. “It gives me strength. I want someone tasting my pies to remember their mother or grandmother, the flavour of their childhood.” By her own estimate, Lidiia has baked over 50,000 pies!

One day, she noticed a group of older people with Nordic walking poles. From that moment, her life changed. At the HelpAge Community Safe Space, Lidiia returned to her passion – singing in the choir. Her voice became the highlight of the group, and she became an inspiration for other participants. “When I sing, I think of our people, our land, and it touches the heart itself,” she says. “The space gave me not only my voice back but also my confidence. Now I know that life does not end with age, it only gains momentum.”



The network of HelpAge Community Safe Spaces helps people like Lidiia overcome loneliness, discover their talents, and live fully, with dignity and joy – even after the hardest losses.

BE ACTIVE. BE HAPPY. BE YOURSELF!

At HelpAge Community Safe Spaces, operating within the project framework, older people discover new opportunities for learning and social connection every day. Here, they take part in art classes, creating paintings and handmade crafts, attend IT sessions to improve digital skills and explore online resources. Those who love movement join Nordic walking, while musical souls take part in choir practice.

“I’ve found a hobby I truly enjoy – I learned to weave herdans (traditional Ukrainian bead necklaces). It was my first experience, and it completely captivated me. I find incredible peace and joy in creating these,” says 66-year-old Valentyna, displaced from Sievierodonetsk to Drohobych.

Recent HelpAge research shows that for many older Ukrainians, even a simple visit to the hairdresser has

become an unreachable luxury. In particular, 62% of older people do not have enough money even for basic needs, and 91% face difficulties accessing hygiene products. That is why at HelpAge Community Safe Spaces, older people can receive free hairdressing services. A neat haircut or styling is not just about appearance – it’s about dignity, care, and support, which are so crucial during these challenging times.



In September, HelpAge opened a fifth centre under the project in Dnipro, offering art and sports activities, IT sessions, hairdressing services, and art therapy. This space has become a new hub for supporting active ageing and strengthening the community. For many older participants, it is not only a safe space for meaningful leisure, learning, or hobbies – it is an opportunity to feel part of a community, make new friends, and receive support, helping them stay healthy, confident, and emotionally balanced.

The network of HelpAge Community Safe Spaces fosters a vibrant, mutually supportive environment, where participants feel that their lives have meaning, that they are needed, and that their experience and knowledge are valuable to the community. Here, active ageing is not just a concept but a reality: engagement, socialising, personal development, and caring for oneself and others help older Ukrainians, who face extraordinary challenges due to the war, to live fully, with dignity and joy.

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

Supported by Government of Canada and HelpAge Canada

RESILIENCE AMID THE RUINS

The city of Sloviansk in the Donetsk region lives every day to the sound of sirens and explosions. Damaged houses, destroyed infrastructure, and a lack of safety have become part of daily life. In such conditions, it is the older people and those who cannot care for themselves who suffer the most.

One of them is 63-year-old Tamara, who lives alone and has limited mobility. She has survived two strokes and continues to battle cancer and diabetes. "You can't imagine what it's like to be left alone in a frontline city. It's constant fear and despair," says Tamara, admitting that she often feels depressed and lost.

Meetings with a social worker from the HelpAge project have become rays of light in her difficult days. "With the social worker Nataliia, we talk about everything - we discuss the news and the future. She taught me ways to reduce anxiety, showed me exercises to maintain mobility, and gave me self-care advice," says Tamara.



Recently, she faced another challenge - a drone strike hit near her home, damaging the roof. It brought severe stress and a sense of hopelessness. At that time, she received not only emotional support but also essential items: diapers, hygiene products, and financial assistance, which came at a critical moment.

This story shows how important it is to support older people living alone in frontline areas. Because supporting those who need it most is not only about providing help, but also about strengthening the resilience of older Ukrainians during this difficult crisis.

"THE MAIN THING IS THAT WE ARE ALIVE"

Liubov is 87 years old. Her eyesight is very poor, but her memory vividly brings back scenes from her childhood: the Second World War, cold, hunger, fear. That was the first time she saw war. And now — again.

In November 2022, when Kherson was liberated from occupation, thousands of people were fleeing the half-destroyed city. For an older woman with visual impairment, it was almost impossible. But there were volunteers who risked their lives to evacuate her under shelling. That's how she ended up in Kharkiv, where her daughter met her.

Later, her daughter left for Europe, and Liubov was once again alone. She survived thanks to the help of neighbours, volunteers, and caring locals who supported her in her daily struggles.

Within the HelpAge project, Liubov came to the attention of the Humanitarian Aid Centre "Volunteer - 68". Her first stated need was for urological kits - essential items without which daily life had become a real challenge. The provided support helped her maintain her dignity and regain a bit of comfort.

"The main thing is that we are alive," says this quiet and modest woman.



This project plays an important role in supporting older people affected by the war, helping them restore stability and dignity in the difficult conditions they are facing.

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

"ALMOST ALL MY MONEY GOES ON MEDICINE – I CAN BARELY MAKE ENDS MEET"

83-year-old Mariia has spent her entire life in the village of Novospasivka, Luhansk region, until in April 2022 the war forced her to leave her home. She now lives in Dnipro, in a rented apartment with three other people. "I lost everything I had – my home, my belongings. But the most important thing I lost was my calm," Mariia shares.

Her health is rapidly deteriorating: she suffered a stroke, has hypertension and cardiovascular diseases, is disabled, and has almost completely lost her sight. Her only income is a pension of 4,300 hryvnias (€89) and IDP assistance of 2,000 hryvnias (€42), which barely covers her living expenses. "Almost all of it goes on medicine, and I need a lot. Sometimes I don't even know how to make ends meet," she says.

Mariia found out about the work of HelpAge International from her neighbours. Having joined the project, she began receiving regular psychosocial support from a HelpAge social worker. "Anastasia visits me often – and it has made me feel better. Now I have someone to talk to, someone to share my worries with," Mariia admits.

She also received a hygiene kit, which has been a significant help for her. "Thanks to this, I can save a little money and buy the medicines I need. For me, it is a great support," she says.



Despite all the difficulties, Mariia remains optimistic and grateful: "Your support means a lot to me – both for everyday life and for my health. I have even gained a sense of hope for the future. I know that I am not alone now."

"I'M NOT SO AFRAID ANYMORE..."

For 85-year-old Anatolii, this war in Ukraine is not the first in his life - he already lived through one as a child. But this new war has taken everything from him. Today, he is left alone with illness, pain, and memories, in a cold house in the nearly deserted village of Shypuvate in the Kharkiv region, which now lies right next to the frontline.

Anatolii is unable to walk and requires catheterization - surviving on his own was simply impossible. When an evacuation team from the Humanitarian Aid Center "Volunteer-68", one of HelpAge's partners in this project, finally reached him via the damaged road, they found Anatolii extremely exhausted. There was no time to lose.

Although the evacuation included medical support - blood pressure, blood sugar, and temperature checks, as well as a visual examination and interview - it became clear during the journey that Anatolii needed specialized medical care. Upon arrival at the Kharkiv Regional Evacuation Hub, an ambulance was called.

Anatolii's catheter was replaced, and he was handed over to the nurses and orderlies at the shelter for further care.

"His only documents were a passport and a photocopy of his pension certificate. No medical records, no official diagnosis. Just a weak, defenseless person," described the case management specialist who first met him. "We are taking him under our care and starting his path to recovery - restoring his documents, providing treatment and care. We don't know how long it will take, but we are here for him. And that's what matters most."



The issue of providing Anatolii with the necessary medical services is currently being addressed at the level of the regional Department of Health, and the process of restoring his documents has already begun. Today, Anatolii is in a safe and warm shelter for people with limited mobility, "Bez Mezh" ("Without Limits"), where he is receiving medical and sanitary care. He is surrounded by people who help him, care for him, listen, and talk to him. "For the first time in a long while, I am not alone," he says. "I'm not so afraid anymore..."

This evacuation became a chain of coordinated efforts by a large team - from evacuation drivers, nurses, and case managers to coordinators and donors who fund the project. Everyone in this chain of support plays a crucial role, and only together is it possible to save lives - to help people not only survive but also begin to feel alive again.

"Volunteer-68" is the first organization to provide professional evacuation assistance to older people with limited mobility. Thanks to the project, more than 600 older people and persons with disabilities in the Kharkiv region will have the 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:

