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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



"YOUR SUPPORT IS MY CONFIDENCE"

69-year-old Mykola from Kramatorsk was forced to leave his home in April 2022, fleeing constant missile attacks. Today, he lives in one of the shelters in the city of Chernivtsi together with other older internally displaced people. Due to cancer and a few serious health conditions, Mykola has a Group II disability and has limited mobility. For him, even ordinary daily activities - such as getting to the kitchen or the bathroom - have become a daily challenge and a source of exhaustion.

"I can no longer take care of myself the way I used to. That is why your support is my confidence and, although

limited, my independence from others," Mykola shares. In the context of displacement and restricted mobility, he feels an especially acute need for care items, warmth and the ability to monitor his health. Without external support, these basic necessities become out of reach.

Within the project, Mykola received diapers, bed pads, hygiene kits, warm clothing, a blanket and a pillow - everything necessary for a dignified daily life. Through the referral system, he also received a winterisation voucher, a torch and a blood pressure monitor, which allows him to regularly check his blood pressure. This support not only addresses urgent needs, but also restores a sense of safety, stability and control over one's own life - particularly important for older Ukrainians affected by the war.

HOW "PEER-TO-PEER" GROUPS ARE CHANGING THE LIVES OF OLDER PEOPLE IN UKRAINE

At HelpAge, we firmly believe that the best support is the kind that comes from nearby - from people who understand your experiences, losses and hopes. That is why, in all eight HelpAge Community Safe Spaces operating under the project, "Peer-to-Peer" groups are active - small communities where older people support one another, share experiences and regain confidence in their own strength.

Participants in these groups not only receive support - those who visit their less mobile peers themselves become a source of support for others. And those who are visited feel attention and presence, human connection and a renewed sense that they are not alone. These are small steps that help preserve dignity, warmth and faith in life - even when it is limited to the boundaries of a room or a bed.

"I waited for you so much. You are my angels. I want to talk to you and talk - I have so much I want to tell you," says 87-year-old Olha, displaced from Donetsk region, during a visit by the Kolomiya "Peer-to-Peer" group. Olha admits that for her, days merge into one endless day. Silence, loneliness and a sense of abandonment become a heavier burden than physical illness.



"When someone comes to people like Olha, everything changes," explains Nina, a project specialist. "Stress levels decrease, the brain starts to work more actively: a person recalls events, formulates thoughts, responds to jokes. This is one of the best forms of prevention of cognitive impairment and dementia, which often progress in conditions of isolation."

"Peer-to-Peer" groups are not just meetings. They are spaces where people can speak openly, find understanding, receive advice and, most importantly, feel that they are not alone. Many participants admit that it was here, for the first time since displacement, that they once again felt the warmth of communication and a sense of safety. And this is how the strength of a community is born - one in which every older man and woman feels valued.

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

Supported by Aktion Deutschland Hilft and HelpAge Germany

A NEW STRENGTH TO LIVE

Raisa is 85 years old. Her village in Donetsk region was completely destroyed by the war, which forced her to leave everything behind and set off into the unknown. A police officer, to whom she had previously provided shelter, evacuated Raisa from under the shelling. For an older woman without relatives, this meant not only the loss of her home but also complete uncertainty and loneliness.

Raisa moved between various shelters - in Donetsk, then in Dnipropetrovsk region, and in November 2025 she arrived in Drohobych in western Ukraine. Raisa's life has never been easy. She remembers the Holodomor of 1946: "Back then, I was still a little girl, collecting ears of grain and frozen potatoes in the fields. I remember bread ration cards and the cold," she recalls. Raisa worked all her life

at the sanitary station in Lysychansk, Luhansk region. After her husband passed away in 2007, she was left completely alone - she had no children, and her only brother had died. Today, her main needs are not only safe housing but also human interaction, support, and a sense of dignity.



After settling in a collective accommodation center in Drohobych, Raisa learned about the HelpAge Community Safe Space, operating within the project. Here she found what she had been missing the most - communication and a sense of being needed. Handicrafts, warm conversations, support from specialists and people with similar experiences, care, and human warmth helped her feel whole again and, most importantly, part of the community. "I survived a hard childhood, the Holodomor - and I will survive this war too. Because now I am not alone," says Raisa. It is spaces like these that give older people in the rear, who have lost everything, not only support but also the strength to keep living.

OLDER PEOPLE AS THE FOUNDATION OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

A resilient community starts with people who do not wait for decisions "from above" but seek answers to challenges here and now. This is exactly the challenge taken on by the initiative group of the Community Safe Space in Novoavorivsk, showing how older people can participate in local decision-making and advocate for their rights.

During two meetings dedicated to the deinstitutionalization reform, participants looked for answers to key questions: how to support independent living for older people, prevent their isolation and further institutionalization.

The first meeting took place at the end of November, where, together with the HelpAge International team and representatives of the Novoavorivsk City Council, older people discussed the deinstitutionalization reform, inclusive and accessible housing, employment for older people, and social entrepreneurship.

In small groups, participants analyzed existing and new initiatives - based on the discussions, four key areas of development for 2026 were identified: healthy aging activities, socially useful work for older people, IT training, and the development of the "Peer-to-Peer" group. At the second online meeting, participants focused on strategies to help implement the initiative group's plans in practice.



"The plans for 2026 are very ambitious, and now the cohesion of the group will be a key factor in achieving the goals," noted Anna, Protection and Referral Specialist at HelpAge International in Ukraine.

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

Supported by Government of Canada and HelpAge Canada

LONELINESS AMID THE SOUNDS OF EXPLOSIONS

75-year-old Valentyna from Kramatorsk clearly remembers her post-war childhood - cold barracks, hunger, and constant scarcity. That is how her life began, filled with hard work, care for her family, and a constant striving for a better future.

For many years, Valentyna worked as a crane operator at a factory - difficult but honest work that allowed her to obtain her own apartment. It was there that she faced the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Now Valentyna lives alone: her children and relatives have left, while she remains in a frontline city that trembles daily from shelling. "I feel very sad and lonely," she admits, surviving on a small pension that almost entirely goes to medicine.

When the HelpAge International project reached Kramatorsk, it became a real source of support for Valentyna. "Your social worker - my namesake, Valentyna - often visits me. You can't imagine what joy that brings! I spend the whole day alone, with no one to talk to. We have long conversations, she taught me how to cope with stress and supports me emotionally. Thanks to her, I no longer feel so lonely."

Within the project, Valentyna received a hygiene kit, care supplies, and a walking stick. "Now I can move around and take care of myself," she says. The woman dreams most of hugging her children and grandchildren again.

"I believe that day will come," says Valentyna, smiling. "And then I will once again feel truly at home."



«EVERYTHING ENDED IN AN INSTANT...»

Volodymyr is 62 years old. Together with his wife, he spent his entire life in the Donetsk region. The couple were used to relying only on themselves: they worked their garden, grew vegetables, and lived a simple, peaceful life. Even when the war came very close, they hesitated for a long time before leaving their home.

The decision had to be made after a tragedy. During another shelling, Volodymyr was injured right in his garden. He was urgently taken to hospital, but his leg could not be saved - doctors were forced to perform an amputation. "Our life stopped in a single moment. Yesterday I was working the land, and today I no longer know how to live," he recalls.

After the injury, the couple were forced to leave their home and rent accommodation in another city. For his wife, this became a severe psychological shock. "I was afraid that I wouldn't cope, that I would have to carry my husband in my arms," she admits.

Support came through the project and the work of a social worker from one of HelpAge's partners - the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation. Following a needs assessment, it was possible to find a wheelchair for Volodymyr, which restored his ability to move independently. The family was also registered for cash assistance, enabling them to pay rent and cover their most urgent expenses.

During work with a psychologist, other critical needs were identified: Volodymyr has asthma and requires inhalers on an ongoing basis. Thanks to referrals and cooperation with partners, a social specialist was able to find and provide him with the necessary medication.

"I can breathe normally again - you cannot even imagine how much that means," he shares.

This story shows how vital comprehensive support is for older people who, because of the war, have lost



their health, their home, and their usual way of life. The combination of social case management, psychological support, provision of assistive devices, and financial assistance not only meets urgent needs but also helps restore a sense of dignity and control over one's own life.

It is this kind of support that gives people the strength to move forward - even after the most painful losses. Thanks to the joint work of HelpAge International and its partners - the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation and the Volunteer-68 Humanitarian Aid Centre - the project reaches more than 5,000 older people in the Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, and Kharkiv regions. Assistance is provided not only to older people but also to their caregivers, creating a sense of safety and support in difficult times.

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

STRENGTH TO KEEP GOING

Valentyna is 75. Almost four years ago, in February 2022, due to active hostilities, she and her husband were forced to leave their hometown of Lysychansk and evacuate to Dnipro. Today, the couple rents a small flat, as they have no home of their own. Almost all of their pensions go towards paying the rent, and what remains is barely enough to survive.

"We constantly count every hryvnia. After paying the rent, there is almost nothing left - but you still need to live, you still need treatment," Valentyna shares. The family's only sources of income are their pension and monthly IDP payments. Because of financial instability, the woman often has to choose between medicines she needs on an ongoing basis and proper nutrition. Against the backdrop of war and forced displacement, her health has

significantly deteriorated: chronic problems with her knee joints make movement difficult, she suffers from sharp fluctuations in blood pressure, dizziness and weakness. Due to a stomach ulcer she had in the past, she is also forced to follow strict dietary restrictions.

"When there is no confidence in tomorrow, the body simply cannot cope," the woman says. Constant stress, anxiety that intensifies during explosions, lack of money and uncertainty have led to sleep problems, frequent headaches and a feeling of complete exhaustion. At the same time, Valentyna tries to stay strong and support her husband: "We have only each other left. We have to find the strength to keep going."



Valentyna learned about the humanitarian project from volunteers at a humanitarian hub in Dnipro. The support she received became important for the couple both materially and emotionally. "This help is not just things. It is the feeling that we are remembered and that we have not been left alone with our problems," she says.

Thanks to the project, Valentyna was able to partially cover her basic needs, reduce financial pressure and feel more stability in her everyday life. Supporting older people who have lost their homes and their usual way of life because of the war helps them not only to survive, but also to preserve dignity, hope and the inner strength to move forward.

"THIS SUPPORT MAKES MY LONELY LIFE EASIER"

74-year-old Petro has lived in Zaporizhzhia region all his life. Today, he lives alone in his own house in the village of Mykhailivka. His wife has passed away, his children are not nearby, and his only stable source of income is his pension - slightly above average, yet insufficient to cover all the needs related to health issues and living alone in a frontline region. Over the years, Petro's health has deteriorated.

He suffers from heart pain, and problems with hearing and vision. "Doctors are available, but serious diagnostics are needed, and that is expensive," he says. Against the backdrop of the war and constant



tension, he also experiences severe psychological pressure: chronic stress, anxiety, and exhaustion have become part of his daily life. "The war really gets on your nerves. You live in constant tension," Petro shares.

Within the framework of the project, Petro - who is a beneficiary of one of the partner organisations, the NGO Memory 86 - received humanitarian assistance, assistive devices, and psychosocial support. For a person living alone with health problems, this support has been

critically important. "It has become easier to cope financially," he says. "This support truly makes my lonely life easier."

In addition, Petro, who worked for many years in managerial positions at the district level, knows his fellow villagers well and understands their concerns and challenges, which have only intensified with age due to the war. Even now, he does not sit idle - he heads the village veterans' organisation. Thanks to his activity and commitment, specialists from Memory 86 know who needs help the most.

The project helps older people in vulnerable communities remain resilient, even when resources are limited and challenges are part of everyday life. Together with local organisations — Pomahaem Charity Foundation, the Humanitarian Aid Centre "Volunteer-68," and Memory 86 Charity Foundation — within this project, HelpAge reaches around 3,000 older people who receive home-based care services, hygiene kits, urological pads, adult diapers, assistive devices, as well as support during evacuation.

We continue to work side by side to ensure that every older person has access to the assistance they need and is not left alone to face the challenges 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:

