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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*



CONFIDENCE DESPITE LOSS

One of the largest humanitarian projects aimed at supporting older Ukrainians affected by the war came to an end in December 2025. Over three years, with the support of the German government, partners and donors, HelpAge reached more than 13,000 older people affected by the war in Ukraine. These figures are truly striking: over 8,000 older people received hygiene kits, almost 5,000 received urological supplies, 1,500 received adult diapers, 3,300 received rehabilitation assistive devices, and around 500 received blood pressure monitors and glucometers. More than 6,500 older Ukrainians were able to get through the cold winters thanks to winter kits that

included warm clothing, bedding, thermoses and firewood. Over 5,000 older people received cash assistance, which helped cover basic needs, purchase essential medicines and even food.

72-year-old Larysa is one of 8,500 older people who have received home-based care services.. She was forced to leave her home in Kramatorsk in the spring of 2022 due to constant shelling of the city. As a result of a missile strike, her home was damaged, so together with her daughter she decided to evacuate. "We understood that staying was dangerous. It was a difficult decision, but there was no other option," Larysa recalls. At the end of spring, she was evacuated by train to Lviv, where volunteers helped her find accommodation in a collective centre for internally displaced people.

Larysa has a disability and serious health conditions, including cancer, heart disease and musculoskeletal disorders. After the forced move, her health deteriorated significantly — both physically and psychologically. "Because of the swelling, I could hardly leave my room. I felt helpless and deeply depressed," she says. Limited mobility and loneliness intensified her sense of isolation.

From September 2023, as part of the project's support, Larysa received life-saving assistance: hygiene kits, a blood pressure monitor, a walking frame, a commode chair, urological supplies, diapers, a blanket and pillow, as well as cash assistance. Regular communication with a social worker also became an important source of emotional support. "I became calmer and felt that someone cared about me," the woman says. In addition, thanks to a referral to the partner organisation Caritas Kramatorsk, she received a rollator, which allowed her to go out for walks again.

"All this helped me feel a bit more independent again and look at each new day with more confidence," Larysa says.

ACTIVE COMMUNITIES START WITH ACTIVE PEOPLE

Throughout the project, eight HelpAge Community Safe Spaces were in operation, reaching more than 4,500 older people who had experienced the loss of their homes, loved ones and health due to the war. These spaces became reliable and supportive centres where older people received psychosocial support, hairdressing services and consultations with psychologists. They actively participated in fitness and Nordic walking sessions, arts workshops and choir singing, while the most active participants formed initiative groups that proposed and implemented real changes in their communities. In some places, inclusive sports spaces were created; in others, new areas for social interaction appeared; elsewhere, ramps were installed to improve accessibility; and in other communities, inclusive public spaces were established. By taking initiative, older people became real drivers of change.



In addition, more than 100 non-mobile older people became participants in peer support groups, "Peer to Peer", created within the Community Safe Spaces, finding support from peers who had also experienced displacement but found the strength to support others.

In December, 16 training sessions were held across the eight HelpAge Community Safe Spaces in eastern and western Ukraine for around 200 older participants from initiative groups and "Peer to Peer" groups.

These trainings were not about formal knowledge or theory "for reports". They became a space for people who already work in their communities and face real challenges every day: how to support the most vulnerable, how to make social services accessible and of high quality, and how to ensure that important initiatives do not end when a project is completed.

Participants discussed state social standards as practical tools for protecting and supporting older people, as well as the healthy ageing approach - not as an abstract concept, but as a daily practice that helps maintain physical and mental health, emotional balance and active participation in community life. A particular emphasis was placed on community sustainability - developing initiatives based on local resources, partnerships and the active role of older people themselves.

A separate part of the trainings focused on continuing activities after the end of project support. Participants

learned how to look for grants and local funding opportunities, plan budgets, build cooperation with local authorities, civil society organisations and other partners, and think about long-term impact from the very beginning. This approach helps initiative groups become more independent, confident and ready to continue their work.

As noted by 75-year-old Nataliia, displaced from Sloviansk and one of the active participants of the HelpAge Community Safe Space in Kolomyia: "For us, this project became much more than just humanitarian assistance. It was a space for recovery, learning and realising our own strength. Having gained new knowledge, completed trainings and received constant support, we understood that our experience and our voices have value, and that support for older people should not end when a project ends."

Each participant returned to their community with concrete knowledge, practical tools and a clear understanding of how to develop and sustain initiatives in the long term. This is how resilient communities are built - where people have the knowledge, connections and confidence to continue change together.

We are grateful to the project, partners and donors for the long-term opportunity to support older people in Ukraine, strengthen their role in communities and create conditions for lasting positive change.

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 STORY OF RESILIENCE AND LOVE

In December 2025, one more project supported by German partners came to an end, leaving behind tangible and practical changes in the lives of older people in Ukraine. For many, this support became not just assistance, but a real relief in their daily struggle with the consequences of war and forced displacement. It combined essential, often life-saving humanitarian aid, psychosocial support, and a sense of community - all of which help older people endure and preserve their dignity in the most difficult times.

Five Community Safe Spaces established under the project reached more than one thousand older people, who found not only a place for leisure and personal development, but, as many admit, a second home and family in them.

The story of 71-year-old Vladyslav and his 66-year-old wife Nataliia from Kherson is one such example. It is a story of two older people who, despite all the hardships, were able to rediscover new meaning and joy thanks to the support of the HelpAge project. Their lives were changed forever by the war. When shelling made it impossible to remain in their home region, they faced a difficult choice.

"It was a hard decision - to leave the walls where we had lived our whole lives and set off into the unknown," Vladyslav recalls. They changed more than one place of residence before fate eventually brought them to the town of Novoyavorivsk in the Lviv region.



Despite all the challenges, Vladyslav and Nataliia did not simply adapt - they opened a new, fulfilling chapter of their lives. In Novoyavorivsk, they met the HelpAge team, and once again felt part of a community, made new friends, and discovered new opportunities for personal growth. Vladyslav and Nataliia enthusiastically joined all activities at the HelpAge Community Safe Space — they actively took part in Nordic walking, which not only supported their physical health but also brought them shared joy through movement and communication.

Here, they also received much-needed psychological support and found space for self-realisation. Nataliia immersed herself in the world of creativity, while Vladyslav found comfort in writing his own poetry. These activities filled their daily lives with new meaning, proving that older age is not an obstacle to new achievements, but rather a time to discover new talents and passions.

But the true treasure of this story is their relationship - a story of warmth, mutual respect and deep love that has withstood all trials. Vladyslav admits: "The feeling of mutual love is inspiring. It is a relationship based on trust, a desire to help, to make life easier, to support one another in all interests...". He speaks tenderly about his wife's devotion, care and wisdom, which have become the unshakable foundation of their marital happiness. Her patience and constant support helped Vladyslav maintain emotional balance and, most importantly, a deep sense of gratitude for life and for every day spent together.

It was love, trust and mutual support - as well as the support of the community that became the pillar that helped them cope with the loss of their

home and grow even stronger. Vladyslav and Nataliia are convinced that age is just a number, and that true strength lies in the ability to love, live and believe in a better future. "We were lucky to find not only a new home, but also a community in our space that supports us every day. Such centres should exist in every town," they say.

DIGNITY IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

Towards the end of the year, HelpAge International focused its attention on older people living in transit centres - temporary accommodation facilities for those who were forced to leave their homes because of the war and are currently waiting for further resettlement, housing, or other forms of support. In such conditions, basic items are of crucial importance.



360 older internally displaced people received hygiene kits, as well as urological supplies and adult diapers adapted to their real needs. All assistance was prepared in line with WASH Cluster recommendations, taking into account age, health status and the vulnerabilities of the recipients. These are not just essential items — they are means that help people maintain independence, comfort and a sense of dignity, reduce health risks, and save limited financial resources, which for many older people are critically low. Earlier, within the same project, 500 older people living in collective centres in eastern and western Ukraine also received urological pads. For older people, who often face chronic illnesses and limited mobility, such support has a daily and very tangible impact.

Each distributed kit is a small but important step towards ensuring that the lives of older people remain safer, healthier and more dignified, even in the difficult conditions of forced displacement. We are sincerely grateful to our partners and donors who made this possible. Over the project's implementation, nearly 1,400 older Ukrainians were reached, finding new strength through this support to face the many challenges brought by the war.

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

Supported by Government of Canada and HelpAge Canada

"MY BIGGEST DREAM IS TO HUG MY LOVED ONES, WHOM I HAVEN'T SEEN FOR MANY YEARS"

79-old Mariia spent her entire life in Donetsk. There she studied, worked as a nurse, started a family and raised her daughter. After retiring, she dreamed of moving to the countryside with her husband and spending her later years in peace. But those plans were shattered: her husband died of cancer, and later the war forced Mariia to leave her home city.

After the occupation of Donetsk began, Mariia moved to live with relatives in the village of Petrykivka in the Dnipropetrovsk region. For a long time, she hoped she would be able to return home, as her daughter and grandson remained in Donetsk. More than five years have now passed, and Mariia continues to live as an internally displaced person, far from her loved ones, communicating with them only by phone. "What hurts the most is not illness or poverty, but the fact that I cannot hug my daughter and grandson," she admits.

Her health condition further complicates the situation. Mariia lives with diabetes, has survived COVID-19 and severe pneumonia. The consequences of those illnesses affect her every day — weakness and shortness of breath significantly limit her mobility even at home. She receives a relatively good pension by Ukrainian standards - 9,000 UAH (288 CAD) but this amount only covers basic necessities, while medical examinations, including a consultation with a pulmonologist, remain out of reach for her.

Thanks to her participation in the project, Mariia received a hygiene kit, a walking stick and urological pads - basic but extremely necessary items that directly improved her daily comfort and sense of dignity. "It's a relief in everyday life and a feeling that you are remembered," Mariia says.



Regular attention and support from a social worker are also of special importance to her. For an older woman living far from her family and facing serious health challenges, human connection and care have become just as important as material assistance. "This attention means so much to me - I know that now I am not alone," she shares.

Like thousands of other older Ukrainians affected by the war, Mariia has been able to preserve her dignity, sense of safety and hope. For her, HelpAge's support became not only a response to urgent needs, but also an important psychological resource in the prolonged experience of forced displacement and loss. "It gives me strength and faith that I will live to see my biggest dream come true — to hug my loved ones, whom I haven't seen for many years," she says.

"EVEN IN THE DARKNESS, THERE IS LIGHT"

87-year-old Vira is from the picturesque village of Lypci in the Kharkiv region. There she raised her children, tended her garden and cared for her home. The war that began on 24 February 2022 disrupted her familiar life and brought fear. "I am used to dealing with hardship, but this time it was different - missiles, explosions, darkness and cold..." Vira recalls.

As a child, Vira had already lived through a war, so she believed it could not happen again. But reality proved otherwise: for six months without electricity or gas, she survived on her own, collecting firewood and growing vegetables to stay alive. Vira remembers that when a missile flew overhead, she lay on the ground, waited - and then continued working.



But war does not stop if you ignore it. Explosions drew closer - destroying the house and spreading fear. Her son told her, "Mum, they will kill us..." And she replied, "Let's stay together, so it will be easier to find us later..." It was only when police officers literally pulled them out from under the shelling that she realised this was the end of her former life.

In May 2024, she crossed the threshold of a new home - a dormitory in the city of Kharkiv. There, she learned to feel safe again and received basic but essential support: a hygiene kit, a walking stick and urological pads from the project's partners - the Volunteer-68 Humanitarian Aid Centre.

"Thanks to this, I didn't give up and felt in control of my life again," Vira admits. "Here, they listen to me and lend a helping hand. You did not let me break. I am especially grateful to my caregiver Olia — for her patience, warmth and humanity. That often matters more than walls." Vira says that Olia's attention helps her restore her daily routine: "Even in the darkness, there is light."

For Vira, the project became not just material assistance, but an opportunity to live again with a sense of safety and dignity. Through the joint efforts of HelpAge International and its partners - the NGO Right to Protection and the Volunteer-68 Humanitarian Aid Centre - the project supports 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 during 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

"WHERE THERE IS SUPPORT, THERE IS STRENGTH TO KEEP GOING"

81-year-old Vira spent her entire life in the village in the Kharkiv region. Because of the war, she was forced to leave behind her home, familiar paths, and her long-established way of life. Almost a year ago, with the help of volunteers, she evacuated to the city of Kharkiv, where she now rents a room.

For a person of her age, the move was a real ordeal. "Everything felt unfamiliar - the city, the people, even the air. And my health is no longer what it used to be," Vira says with a sigh. A few years ago, she suffered a heart attack, lives with diabetes, and has problems with her musculoskeletal system, making everyday movement particularly difficult.

After losing her husband 16 years ago, Vira was left alone. Because of the war, her children and grandchildren were also forced to move to safer places. As a result, she faced yet another hardship – full loneliness.

Most of Vira's pension goes towards rent and medication, meaning she cannot always afford everything she needs. "Sometimes you don't think about tomorrow - you just think about how to get to the shop or the pharmacy," she says. It was during this difficult period that Vira learned about the HelpAge project and joined the support programme.

Through the project, Vira received psychosocial support and a walking stick - a simple yet vital item. "This walking

stick is not just a mobility aid. For me, it is a symbol of care and attention at a very difficult time," she shares.



Vira also says that thanks to the project's support and regular contact with a social worker, she now feels more confident and is gradually regaining a sense of safety and dignity. "Where there is support, there is strength to keep going," she concludes.

"THE GREATEST TRAGEDY IS THE WAR"

The once peaceful village in Zaporizhzhia region found itself close to the front line at the very beginning of the war, in February 2022. "We watched our flourishing village turn into ruins," sighs 77-year-old Nina. The destroyed yard, the beehives where bee colonies once buzzed, the home filled with memories - all of this was left behind when Nina and her husband were forced to evacuate in spring 2023.

"We took only the essentials. I am still glad that I managed to take my beaded embroidered icon with me. But family photographs and embroidered pictures were left hanging on the walls," Nina recalls with pain.

Today, Nina and her husband live in a rented flat in Zaporizhzhia, spending almost her entire pension (5,000 UAH, around €98) on rent. What remains barely covers the cost of essential medicines, which become more expensive with each passing month.

"I get tired very quickly and feel anxious because of the shelling - I worry about people. On top of that, my husband had to undergo an urgent operation as he was rapidly losing his sight. Despite everything, we are holding on," she says.

As part of the project, our partners from the Memory 86 Charity Foundation provided Nina with a blood pressure monitor - a simple but critically important item for an older person. "Now I can monitor my blood pressure and react in time. Equally important has been the communication with the project specialists: advice on healthy nutrition, information about accessible medical services, and genuine human attention. "Sometimes even a conversation, a



"smile or a joke gives you the strength to carry on," Nina shares. Despite loss and exhaustion, she continues her

favourite activity - embroidering a new icon as a symbol of hope and inner resilience. "The greatest tragedy is the war," she says, tightening her grip on the needle.

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:

