

Ukraine: Rapid Needs Assessment of Displaced Older People

Lvivska, Chernivetska and Dnipropetrovska Oblasts - June 2022

Context

Since the Russian military launched its offensive against Ukraine on February 24th, over 8 million people have been displaced. A significant number of them are older people (60+). While we do not yet know the full scale, according to the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), 55% of displaced households contain at least one older person.

Ukraine has the largest percentage of older people affected by conflict in a single country in the world. One quarter of the country's population are over 60 years old. In eastern Ukraine, one in three of those needing assistance since the Russian invasion in 2014, have been over 60. This makes it the world's "oldest" humanitarian crisis.

Many older people in Ukraine have health conditions and/or disabilities effecting their mobility, as compared to those who are younger. Displacement can exacerbate obstacles they may experience in accessing medication and can lead to the loss of essential items such as glasses and walkers. Older people also play an integral role in providing care to others, especially children.

HelpAge has documented in a number of countries how older people are often overlooked by the humanitarian sector, and is urging all agencies, donors, and others to ensure the humanitarian response in Ukraine is inclusive of older people and targets their needs.



Mykola and Tetiana from near Mykolaiv, now residing in a temporary accommodation center in Lviv

New HelpAge Research

To provide a snapshot of the current situation for displaced older people in Ukraine, HelpAge interviewed 569 adults, including 218 people over 60, between May 6-11, 2022 in Lvivska and Chernivetska oblasts in western Ukraine and in Dnipropetrovska oblast in central Ukraine.

The need for this assessment arose due to the lack of available age disaggregated data in Ukraine. While other actors, such as REACH and IOM are conducting needs assessments, disaggregated data by gender, disability and age is limited and not widely shared. HelpAge calls on agencies to publish anonymized disaggregated data to ensure interventions can be targeted to meet the specific needs of each population group.

Methodology

HelpAge interviewed 569 displaced adults using a short multi-sectoral needs assessment between May 6 and 11 2022. Of these, 218 were 60 or over, which is the focus on this analysis. The data collection occurred in three oblasts: Lvivska (36%) and Chernivetska (31%) in western Ukraine, and Dnipropetrovska (34%) in central Ukraine.

The data was collected by HelpAge volunteers through a purposive non-probability sampling approach, identifying people to interview based on pre-defined categories including gender, age, and disability

within set locations. Nearly half to these interviews (48%) occurred in collective accommodation centers with the remaining interviews occurring in private accommodations (20%) which were usually rented, social institutions (12%), transit centers (9%), other (4%), hotels (3%) and nursing homes (2%). This assessment used the Washington Group Questions on disability.

Collective Accommodation Sites

Since the escalation of the conflict in February 2022, thousands of collective sites have been established across Ukraine to house those displaced. These sites provide short to medium term accommodation to displaced individuals and families. The highest concentration of these centers is in the west and center of the country, where the highest number of displaced people are located. While collective centers only house a small proportion of displaced people, those who are there, are among those most at risk. They may lack the financial means to rent housing and may not have family or friends to stay with.

Initial research shows that the most common locations for collective accommodation sites are in schools and kindergartens. When a collective site is established in a public building it is typically managed by local authorities. However, some collective sites have been privately established in dormitories, hotels, or religious buildings. These are often managed by local volunteers and/or charities.

Key Findings

Cash

- When older displaced people (60+) were asked what single item they needed most, 74% reported cash. This applies across all ages, genders, and for those with a disability. Displaced people often face severe financial pressures, having been forced to leave their jobs and facing added expenses in displacement. This can include paying for rental accommodations, transportation, and new clothes. The World Bank estimates that the country's economy will have shrunk by half by the summer. Additionally, Ukraine is experiencing record inflation resulting in dramatic increases in the cost of basic commodities such as food and medicine.
- Throughout the crisis, the government has continued state pension payments to older people, but the amount often remains insufficient to cover their basic needs. Currently 95% of people who are over 65 are provided with a pension, but a large majority receive the equivalent of \$135 per month, which is below the UN's monetary poverty line (\$150). Others receive even lower amounts. For example older people whom HelpAge previously supported in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts received on average around \$75-\$120 per month.
- When asked what type of assistance they preferred, **88%** of older people favored multi-purpose cash, compared to 10% preferring in-kind assistance and 2% vouchers. IOM has reported that over three quarters of those displaced in Ukraine would prefer to receive cash through a bank card rather than other modalities, such as cash in hand. In all locations where this assessment took place, markets were functioning. In addition, ATMs were also operational and well stocked.
- Only **4% of respondents** responded that if they were given cash, they would not be able to use it safely. This varied slightly between oblasts, with 11% of those in Dnipropetrovska oblast replying that they could not use cash safely, compared to 2% and 1% respectively in Lvivska and Chernivetska.

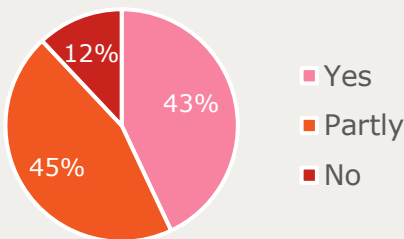


Health + Medicine

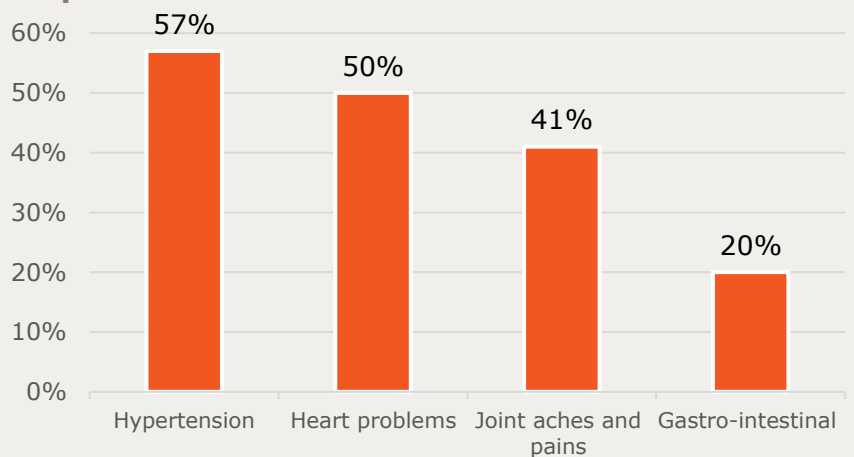


- **89%** of the displaced older people interviewed had at least one health condition, with seven out of ten stating that they had more than one. The top four conditions were hypertension, heart problems, joint aches and pains, and gastrointestinal issues. Overall, medicine and healthcare ranked as the second highest priority for older people.
- **45%** who required medication reported that they could currently only partly access their medication, while 12% said they could not access their medication at all. A significant barrier for many is their lack of financial resources to purchase their medicine, especially as the cost has dramatically increased. This is partly a result of shortages of medicine throughout the country due to breakdowns in supply chains. However, recent reports show that supplies are improving. Those who are displaced also may have the additional challenge of procuring medicine in unfamiliar locations.
- **89%** reported they were able to access health services. However, this was significantly lower in the collective centers in Dnipropetrovska oblast (50%). The lack of access is concerning and highlights the importance of regular monitoring of health access in different locations to address gaps. For older people with disabilities, health services must also remain accessible. This might include the provision of free transportation.

Currently have access to your medication?



Top 4 health conditions



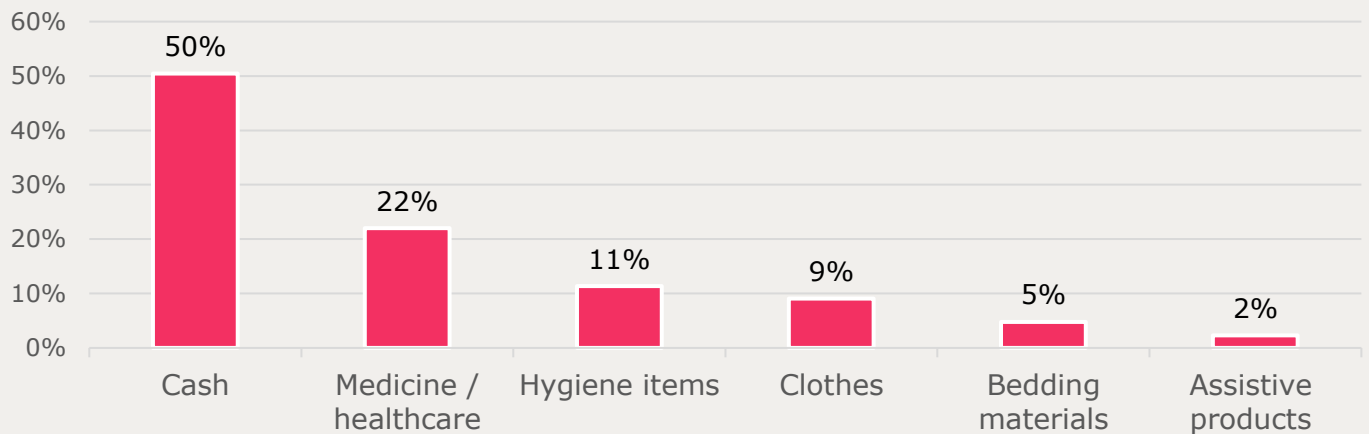
Hygiene Items + Water



- Overall, hygiene items were the third highest priority of older people interviewed. Some of the most frequently mentioned items according to previous IOM research include menstrual hygiene items and diapers (including those for adults). Ensuring that older people have access to the appropriate hygiene items is crucial for their well-being and dignity, especially for those with health conditions such as incontinence.
- **91%** of older people reported they have access to safe drinking water. However, those interviewed in Dnipropetrovska and Lviviska oblasts experienced shortages. The collective centers are often not designed to house people, so may lack adequate basic facilities including a stable water supply.

Top 6 needs of older people

(Weighted combining the question regarding the single item most needed with other items needed)

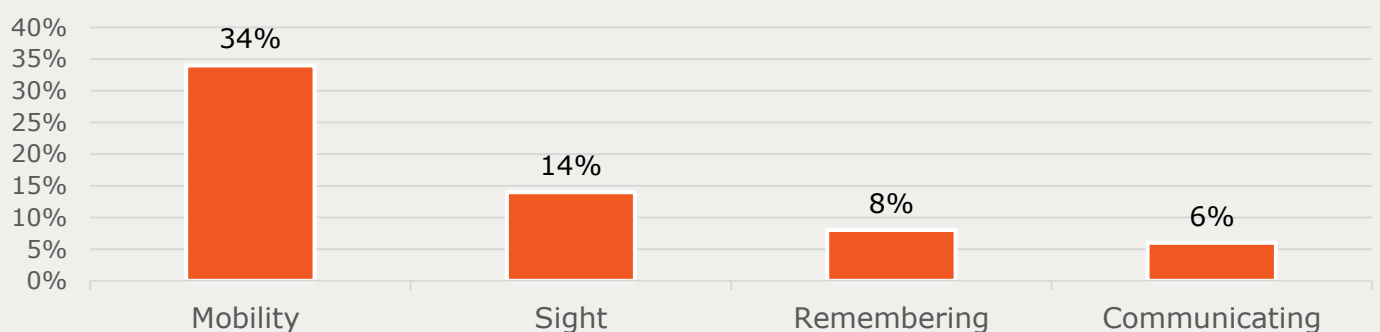


Disability

- **43%** of older people interviewed by HelpAge had a least one disability. The most common disabilities identified related to mobility, sight, memory, and communication. This is significantly higher than the 11% who reported having a disability among those 30 to 59 years old.
- Of those with a disability, the majority (**70%**) were not registered as having a disability. Obstacles to registering include fees to obtain an official confirmation of disability, which may need to be re-confirmed periodically. Some people may be reluctant to identify as having a disability. Overall, 28% of older people with a disability are registered. In Ukraine being registered as a disabled person entitles one to disability benefits, although the amount is often less than the state retirement pension.



Top 4 disabilities



Protection

- Of the older people interviewed, **88%** reported that they had not faced any violence in their current locations. Of those who reported protection risks, 8% said they were at risk of psychological abuse, and 4% chose not to specify. In addition, 2% of older women reported they felt at risk of sexual harassment or trafficking in the locations where they currently live.



Wellbeing



- The psychological impact of the conflict has been significant for many. HelpAge has met many older people who expressed sadness, despair, anguish, and the like. For example, prior to this assessment, we interviewed Anatoly, 66. He fled alone from Kramatorsk to Lviv. He told HelpAge, "Every smile is difficult. This war and this situation are worse than a nightmare." This is just one of many stories that demonstrates older people experiencing unimaginable hardship.
- Many older people, including those who have been displaced, have shown great strength in supporting others with practical and emotional assistance. But many displaced older people, like many who have fled, have experienced terrifying and distressing journeys, family separation, and loss of loved ones. They can sometimes find themselves isolated in new communities without their pre-existing support networks or means to navigate their new surroundings in order to access what they need. In addition, older people can be more reluctant to leave their homes than younger people, making the experience of displacement even more difficult. Ensuring all who need psychosocial support have access now and into the future is critical, as the anguish and distress caused by the conflict are likely to be deep and long-lasting.

Food



- **89%** of older people reported that they currently had access to sufficient food. This was slightly lower for older people in Dnipropetrovska oblast (75%). The availability of food in shops varies across oblasts, with stores in the central and western oblasts reportedly well-stocked, while those in the east and south more likely to have empty shelves. This would suggest that those interviewed by HelpAge face challenges in accessing food because of financial difficulties. As both farming and overseas supply chains continue to be disrupted, we are likely to see food prices increase over the coming months, with potential risks for food insecurity.
- Many displaced older people report a lack of space to store food. Of those interviewed in accommodation centres, **45%** said they did not have enough space (shelves and/or refrigerators) to store food. As previously mentioned, many of the collective centers and other temporary shelters housing displaced people are not designed as residences. Adequate food storage and preparation facilities could help improve residents' nutritional intake and provide them with a greater sense of dignity.

Movement



- Given the concentration of fighting in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine at the time of the interviews, most older people interviewed had fled from Donetsk (34%), Luhansk (26%) or Kharkiv oblasts (16%). Nearly half evacuated independently while the rest were either evacuated by local authorities (30%), relatives (14%) or the church (7%). These journeys have been arduous, often taking several days in cramped and overcrowded trains and buses and on foot.
- However, while many older people have fled, many more have stayed behind. Therefore, it vital that all older people, whether displaced or remaining at home, receive the support and essentials they need.

Access to Humanitarian Support



- **Less than 50%** of older people interviewed reported that they currently receive assistance from humanitarian organisations, and those with a disability are less likely to receive support. Reasons cited include lack of sufficient supplies in collective centers to meet the high demand, supplies not reaching people more remote collective centers or people living in private homes, as well as lack of sufficient or accessible information regarding where and how to access services and essential goods.
- **39%** of older people who are registered as internally displaced do not receive the Ukrainian government's targeted assistance for IDPs, including because eligibility changes, depending on which regions people are displaced from. 11% have not registered as internally displaced. Some of the reasons given include long lines at Social Protection centers and a lack of information on how to register. People with disabilities receive approximately \$68 per month as do families with children, per child. They may also qualify for free legal aid, depending on which region they come from.
- Almost a quarter of those interviewed (**26%**) do not have a family member or friend who can provide them with support. As part of ensuring support, it is important that families are reunified where possible and where family members wish to be reunited. Critical to this is the ability to contact each other. Of those interviewed, **91%** had access to a cell phone.

Leonid (71) and Galina (70)

"Our city has been heavily bombed and shelled with rockets from the very beginning of the war.

Our apartment is on the first floor of a five-story building. The house had six entrances. It's badly damaged. Only the part where our apartment is located is still habitable.

For many days there was no water, no electricity, no heating. We hid in the basement with the neighbours.

We had to queue to get water. It was distributed by tank trucks and it was

dangerous because we never knew when the next attack would come. My husband used to go to town for groceries and I was always worried if he would ever come back alive.

We arrived in Lviv on 4 April. First, we went to Kramatorsk by bus, from there by an evacuation train that was full of people. Altogether we were traveling for a day and a half.

We live in a gymnasium of the Lviv Polytechnic University, which is now a shelter. Our daughter with our grandchild is also here in Lviv. They are living in a different shelter. We meet every few days. It is very fortunate.

It's crowded in here, but we don't have to be afraid of the bombing.

We definitely want to go back. What is there to do here? We have nothing but two suitcases and our documents.

I worked as a seamstress in a factory. My husband has been an electric welder for 40 years.

Since 2014, a war has been going on in our region. Before it started, we used to talk to our neighbours about how lucky we are in this generation that we've never been to war."



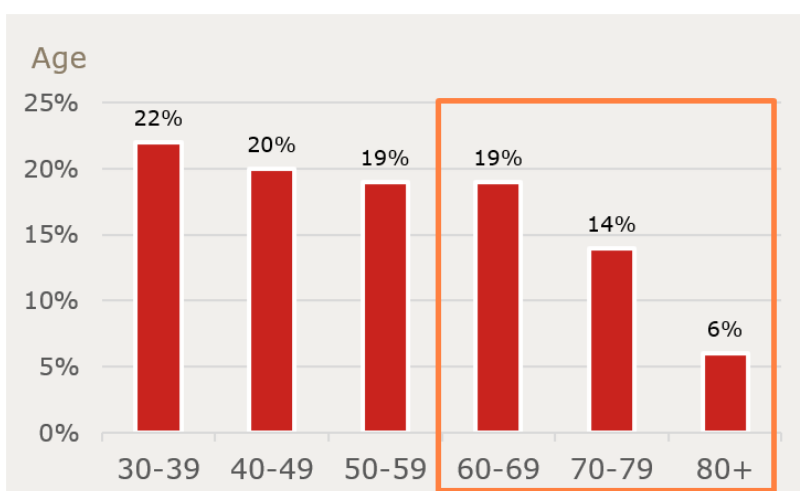
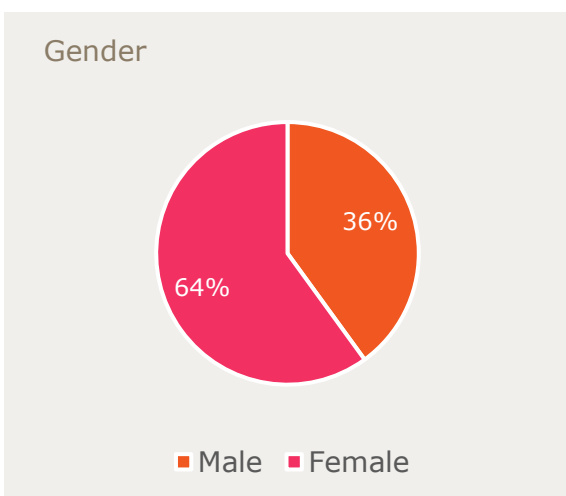
HelpAge's work in Ukraine

Since 2014, HelpAge has been supporting almost 5,000 older people in Eastern Ukraine with food, hygiene items and assistive products, as well as providing home-based care and psychosocial support services via community volunteers, many of whom are older people themselves.

Despite the intensification of fighting, HelpAge volunteers have continued to make psychosocial "check in" calls to older people in Eastern Ukraine where possible. HelpAge has also provided hygiene kits to two local municipal authorities and two local organisations to distribute.

HelpAge is scaling up its work and moving to more targeted programming, with a specific focus on older people with and without disabilities. This will include the provision of accessible multipurpose cash assistance, hygiene kits, community-based protection services, support to nursing homes, and home-based care.

Demographics of those interviewed



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