

May 19, 2022

Uzra Zeya
Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights
United States Department of State
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Ms. Zeya,

We represent national organizations working to improve the experience of aging through public policy, research, philanthropy, and civil discourse. As we learn more each day about the devastation and suffering of millions of Ukrainians, resulting from Russia's assault, we want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM)'s significant investment in the humanitarian response.

We are aware that the United States is providing large-scale humanitarian assistance to assist persons impacted by the war and that PRM partners are delivering goods and services to millions. However, we are concerned that PRM's implementing partners may not consistently reach older people with humanitarian support and that humanitarian support may not adequately address their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Older people, including older refugees, are often among those who are most at risk from the lack of access to regular medicines and medical treatments. Many have specific dietary and nutritional requirements and may face obstacles to accessing food at distribution points or in markets. Shelters sanitation, information, and other services may not be accessible, especially for those with disabilities. For those who require support in meeting their basic needs, fleeing to safety means leaving networks of family, friends, and community organizations.¹ During conflicts, older people are at risk of serious human rights abuses, including death and injury from indiscriminate weapons, targeted executions, physical violence and rape, humiliation and degrading treatment, and looting and destruction of their property.² Once displaced, they may require specific interventions for physical and psychosocial support and recovery, although may not be easily recognized as victims of serious abuses.

Currently, PRM does not have a specific policy regarding older people as a vulnerable group. We encourage PRM to consider developing such a policy. We also urge PRM to require its implementing partners to consistently include the needs of older people in Ukraine and other war zones and disasters among its priorities, including by ensuring:

- Humanitarian support, including food, water, sanitation, medicine, healthcare, gender-based violence services and psychosocial support services includes older people and is responsive to their specific needs.

¹ Help Age, "Older People in Emergencies and Humanitarian Crises," <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/emergencies/older-people-in-emergencies/>.

² Human Rights Watch, Global: Older People at Heightened Risk in Conflict, February 23, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/23/global-older-people-heightened-risk-conflict>, and, on Ukraine, Human Rights Watch, Ukraine: Older People No Longer Invisible Casualties, May 2, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/02/older-people-no-longer-invisible-casualties-war-ukraine>.

- Accessible information, including in a variety of formats, about humanitarian assistance, local services, and legal aid for older people who have fled.
- Respect for family reunification and facilitation of older people to reunite and settle with family members, if that is their wish.
- Regular data collection disaggregated by age, gender, disability, and other relevant characteristics. Age data should include specific older age cohorts.
- Financial support, including to international and local non-governmental organizations, who have experience and expertise working with older people, including older people with disabilities.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you regarding these important issues. We thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,

Ramsey Alwin, President & CEO, National Council on Aging

Cindy Cox-Roman, CEO, HelpAge USA

Lindsay A. Goldman, CEO, Grantmakers In Aging

Jo Ann Jenkins, CEO, AARP

Peter Kaldes, President & CEO, American Society on Aging

Stephanie Lederman, Executive Director, American Federation for Aging Research

Katie Smith Sloan, President & CEO, LeadingAge and Executive Director, The Global Aging Network

CC: Ambassador Julieta Valls Noyes, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Humanitarian Overview: Older People and the Conflict in Ukraine

One in four people in Ukraine is over the age of 60. Currently, 7.7 million Ukrainians are internally displaced, with 57 percent of displaced households having at least one older person. Among households that have not relocated, 57 percent also include an older person.³ In many towns most devastated by recent and active hostilities, older people and people with disabilities are the only people who remain.⁴ Older people also remain in nursing homes and residential facilities in conflict areas.⁵

³ IOM, Ukraine — Internal Displacement Report — General Population Survey Round 3 (April 17, 2022), <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-3-11-17-april-2022>, and OCHA, Ukraine: Humanitarian Situation Report, April 26, 2022, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2022-04-26_Ukraine%20SitRep%20Humanitarian%20Impact%20final.pdf.

⁴ OCHA, Humanitarian Situation Impact Report, April 4, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-impact-situation-report-1200-pm-eet-4-april-2022>.

⁵ HelpAge, Ukraine Situation Report, April 4, 2022.

In addition, nearly 5.6 million Ukrainians have fled as refugees. An estimated 9 to 11 percent of them are older.⁶

Approximately 32 percent of Ukrainians in need of humanitarian support are older, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Their urgent and longer-term humanitarian needs include access to food, water, medical care, psychosocial support services, adequate shelter, and hygiene.⁷ Many of those displaced report needing assistive devices, including eyeglasses.⁸

⁶ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation, May 3, 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>; UNHCR, Refugee Arrivals from Ukraine, April 18, 2022, <https://www.impact-repository.org/document/reach/868860ac/REACH-Whole-of-Ukraine-Refugee-Border-Monitoring-Update-2022-04-18.pdf> (11 percent reporting traveling with an older person over 65+); and IRC, Rapid Needs Assessment Poland, April 1, 2022, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91748> (9 percent of survey respondents were over 60).

⁷ OCHA, Humanitarian Situation Impact Report, April 4, 2022; Help Age, Rapid Needs Assessment, Eastern Ukraine, March 4, 2022, <https://helpageusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Needs-of-older-people-in-Eastern-Ukraine-4-03-22-1.pdf>; HelpAge, Rapid Needs Assessment, Lublin, Poland, April 2, 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/poland-needs-older-refugees-2-april-2022>; and HelpAge, Rapid Needs Assessment, Moldova, <https://helpageusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Rapid-Needs-of-Older-Refugees-in-Moldova-10-03-22-3-Page-1.pdf>.

⁸ HelpAge Rapid Needs Assessment, Lublin, Poland, April 2, 2022 and HelpAge, Rapid Needs Assessment, Moldova, March 10, 2022.