In recent times, the situation in Ukraine has worsened, with the conflict intensifying and more people having to leave their homes over the past few months. Many of those displaced have found refuge in the eastern parts of the country, especially in Dnipropetrovska and Kharkivska Oblasts. Those over the age of 60 are finding it increasingly hard to make ends meet, access pensions, and tap into social support systems they desperately need. Also, the high cost of medicines means many are forced to go without necessary treatments.

The ongoing conflict has cast a shadow over the entire country, leading to widespread stress and anxiety. This has, in turn, led to a spike in mental health problems and a growing need for support services that are struggling to keep up with the demand. Economic worries, concern for the safety of loved ones, the pain of being uprooted from homes, and the distress of being separated from family are common and deeply felt. A worrying trend is the repeated displacement experienced by many, with about 30% of those over 60 having to move multiple times. Moreover, for those staying in collective shelters, there’s a notable lack of facilities that cater to those with disabilities. Moreover, there’s a severe shortfall of social workers, making it even tougher for local services to provide the support so many rely on.

Furthermore, older refugees in Poland and Moldova face their own unique challenges, including language barriers that hinder their access to services and information. In these countries, older Ukrainian refugees often grapple with isolation and loneliness, exacerbated by being far from their homeland and communities. In 2023, HelpAge USA helped spearhead activities to support them and a report, which you can read more about by visiting www.helpageusa.org/older-ukrainian-refugees-in-poland/.

Within HelpAge International’s response efforts, our commitment to enhancing the lives of older people remains unwavering. In Ukraine, although our GAC-funded project in the east has concluded, we’re on the verge of initiating new projects and extending our presence into additional regions, including Zakarpattia in the western part of the country. Moreover, we are pleased to announce that Tim Bainbridge has recently joined us as the new country director. Tim brings a wealth of experience from managing large-scale humanitarian operations in Serbia, Southern Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, promising a significant contribution to our ongoing and future endeavors.
Over 153,000 people directly supported

- 28,155 older people (20,010 women / 8,145 men) who have mobility issues and are often isolated are being provided with home-based care from trained HelpAge staff to help improve their wellbeing, maintain independence, and access basic goods and services. Notably, many also receive a range of other assistance, including cash, hygiene kits, and winterization items. These projects are funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC), Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC), Canada Ukraine Foundation (CUF), German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO), US Aid, ECHO, and CARE International.

- 6,836 older people regularly visited 15 community safe spaces (5,205 women / 1,631 men) where they can access a range of free support services, including fitness classes, arts and crafts, hairdressing, cultural excursions, and a psychologist. These centers are operational in several locations in Ukraine in the west (Lviv, Ivano Frankivsk, and Chernivtsi Oblasts) and the east (Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv Oblasts). This work is funded by GAC, DEC, GFFO, US Aid, SIDA, GHWF, US Appeals, and CARE International.

- 15,147 older people received multipurpose cash assistance (8,406 women / 3,338 men), which was sent through the Ukrainian post office to cover their basic needs between three to six months. These projects are funded by the GAC, DEC, GFFO and by CARE International.

- 46,476 people were supported through a range of activities from provision of shelter, food, hygiene items, clothes, transportation, and psychosocial support. These activities were carried out by 32 very small local organizations in Eastern and Western Ukraine, who received £30,000 to support their work. These grants were provided in January 2023 and served as an increase to a previous grant received in summer 2022, which ranged from £15,000 to £20,000. In September 2023, 10 more local organizations received grants of £20,000 to be used by the end of December. Now, we are in the process of providing a cash grant to an additional 10 local organizations. This project was funded by the DEC, CUF, and Hilton Foundation.

- 29,065 hygiene kits (19,012 women / 7,903 men) were distributed in Ukraine, which included toothpaste, shampoo, dish detergent, sponges, razors, and towels.

Breakdown by oblasts since Feb 22 (does not include those who benefited from small partner grants)

- Dnipropetrovska: 26,965
- Chernivska: 18,116
- Ivano-Frankivska: 13,364
- Lvivska: 10,308
- Donetsk: 8,080
- Kharkivska: 6,614
- Zaporizska: 2,106
- Kyivska: 2,000
- Poltavska: 792
- Zhytomyrska: 400
- Chernivska: 50

(8,406 women / 3,338 men)
As part of the kits, 4,598 also received adults diapers (3,233 women / 1,365 men), while 2,339 were provided with urological pads (2,085 women / 254 men). The kits were funded by GAC, DEC, USA Aid, ECHO, US Appeals, CARE, SIDA, and OCHA.

- **10,375 older people with disabilities received assistive products (7,564 women / 2,435 men).** These include canes, toilet chairs, walkers, and crutches. The products were funded by GAC, GFFO, ECHO, USA Aid, CARE, and SIDA.

- **8,655 winterization kits**, funded by ECHO, were distributed in Ukraine. These kits included blankets and warm clothes. In addition, in autumn on 2023, 2,261 (1,552 women / 709 men) received winter vouchers between 13,200 Ukrainian Hryvnia (360 USD) and 2,590 Ukrainian Hryvnia (70 USD) to be spent on the purchase of key winter items from Epicentre, a large retailer in Ukraine. This was funded by GFFO, SIDA, and US Appeals.

- **1,044 individuals received legal consultations** regarding a range of issues, from IDP status to disability benefits, from our partner Right to Protection in the east. This was funded by the GAC project.
Ukraine advocacy and communication update

To mark the second anniversary of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2024, HelpAge International released a short film highlighting the voices and experiences of older Ukrainians. Titled “We Are Still Here,” the film features stories of three older people in a frontline region of Kharkiv. These stories speak of safety, health, and financial challenges, as well as awe-inspiring resolve and resilience. It is a stark reminder of the war’s impact on older people and the importance of including their issues in the response and recovery agenda.

The anniversary also served as a viewpoint for HelpAge’s work in Ukraine over the past two years and, more importantly, the diverse experiences of older people—including the dynamics of their lives and the adjustments they’ve had to make in order to cope with the new normal. Victoria Panchenko, program lead in Western Ukraine and one of HelpAge’s longest serving staff members, shared her personal experience with the conflict and the evolution of the team’s support to older Ukrainians.

Workshop on older people’s rights and needs

HelpAge brought together older Ukrainians in the Dnipropetrovsk region for a workshop on their rights and needs. The workshop aimed at improving their understanding of these topics and informing advocacy efforts for age-related policies and reforms in Ukraine. It also offered a platform for sharing experiences on available support and priorities for long-term solutions.

“Information about humanitarian assistance is available but not always accessible,” 65-year-old Olha said. She’s been displaced to the Dnipropetrovsk region as a result of Russia’s full-scale invasion. “Text updates are usually sent out on social networks, but the problem is that you need a smartphone to sign up for these apps, which a lot of us don’t have.”

“I have problems with my leg, and I live on the sixth floor of the shelter for displaced people. Of course, the walking cane I received helps, and neighbors are very helpful, but it’s still difficult,” Oleksandra, 70, notes. She shares a room with five other people and, while she appreciates the togetherness of the community, she wants to be able to afford some privacy.

“Long-term housing solutions are necessary so older people can have some independence and stability,” 59-year-old Olha explained. Taking care of her 89-year-old mother, she is not able to work and earn a living. “And we need a fair pension system so people can live in dignity.”

Advocacy with the Government of Ukraine

In the reporting period, HelpAge was formally invited by the Ministry of Social Policy to join a number of working groups, alongside WHO and UNDP.

So far, we have already started attending two working groups, convened by the deputy-minister for social policy: a working group on home-based care and a working group on improving legislation on the development of social services for supporting living.
HelpAge’s Voice and Gender Workshop has been conducted in Lviv, Ukraine, from December 5–7, 2023. A total 21 participants (15 women / 6 men) from HelpAge Ukraine and five partners participated. Over three insightful days, participants delved deeper into understanding and integrating gender mainstreaming in Ukraine humanitarian response programs and organizational structures; using their knowledge of the setting they operate in to strengthen cooperation; and amplifying community voices.

The key learnings from the workshop were: a) HelpAge tools and frameworks around gender equality, voice, forms of identities, and forms of power; b) gender and power analysis; c) stakeholder mapping and power analysis for advocacy and programming; d) forming a national platform of civil society Organizations working on healthy/active aging; e) key principles of conflict sensitivity, as well as understanding root causes and manifestations of conflict in relation to programs; and f) process and steps to develop a mainstreaming action plan and practice for programs in Ukraine.

It has been an enriching experience full of learning, collaboration, and a strengthened resolve to make a real difference.

Taking care of older women and men with and without disabilities, we believe it is important to ensure their safety and protection. This was discussed at the training of trainers (ToT) on safeguarding held for HelpAge Ukraine staff from March 13-14, 2024, with the support of Age International and HelpAge International.
The graduates of this ToT will further cascade the learning to the rest of HelpAge staff, social workers, and partners across Ukraine.

Safeguarding is an organization’s responsibility to ensure that staff, activities, or programs do not cause any harm to those we support. The workshop participants discussed the concepts, core principles, and standards for safeguarding, including protection against sexual, exploitation, abuse, and harassment—adhering to organizational code of conduct and the core humanitarian principles, as well as the HelpAge’s pledge to being accountable to the people affected. We strive to adhere to the highest standards and ensure that the HelpAge Ukraine humanitarian response is effective, accountable, safe, and dignified.

Our Gender and Inclusion Advisor also represented HelpAge at the extraordinary Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Network meeting on Friday, March 29, 2024. The UN Resident Coordinator in Ukraine Denise Brown and the UN Under-Secretary General Christian Saunders also attended the meeting.

After the death of her husband a few years ago, 74-year-old Halyna lives alone in Kryvyi Rih—a town in the east of the country over two years into the war.

“My life is forever changed. I now live from one anxiety attack to another. Most of the young people have left and a lot of my friends have died. I now sit alone on the bench outside where we used to gather.”

Halyna has a disability that limits her mobility. However, she tries to remain active. To deal with the stress and find some company, Halyna attends classes at her local HelpAge community safe space. “I’ve always found handiwork very soothing. Sirens would start blaring outside and I would reach for my embroidery knit, like some crazy person,” she laughs. “Then I thought, why do it alone when I can do it with others!”

Since then, Halyna has thrown herself into craft. She makes scarves, napkins, tablecloths, and pillowcases. She even started painting. She has also learned to lean on the support network of other older people she has met at these classes.
Poland - Program delivery since February 2022

4,392 people directly supported through local partners

- 3,837 at-risk refugees received cash assistance. This involved three different rounds of distributions implemented by The Polish Center for International Aid in July–December 2022, October–March 2023, and April–August 2023. These were all to separate beneficiaries. In the last phase of the project, the transfer value increased from 710 to 1,000 Polish Zloty (173 to 243 USD) to respond to the increased cost of living in Poland. These grants were meant to last beneficiaries for six months. This program was funded by DEC, GAC, CUF, Hilton Foundation, and GFFO.

- 10 local initiatives were selected by our partner, Association E, and launched in 9 different regions of the country. These partners were selected due to their strong presence in the local community with many working closely with the local government. This project was funded by Hilton Foundation. The total number of beneficiaries reached is 1,103, of whom 1,090 are older people (807 women / 296 men). Out of these, 555 people were direct beneficiaries, while 867 were indirect beneficiaries, who participated to the local initiatives project. In addition, 105 people have benefitted from psychological and legal support, and 27 from physiotherapeutic support. This program was funded by DEC.

Moldova - Program delivery since February 2022

Over 46,600 people directly supported (~40% refugees, 60% locals)

- 20,216 were provided with food. This includes refugees from Refugee Accommodation Centers across Moldova who have been provided with three hot meals a day. These projects were funded by the World Food Program (WFP), CUF, and DEC.

- 2,194 received food packages, including dried fruits, nuts, canned fish, coffee, and porridge. This was funded by Islamic Relief Canada (IRC).

- 6,375 received personal hygiene kits. The content of the kits took into consideration the gender and age of recipients. The individual hygiene kits included items such as cream, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, shower gel, powder detergent, protective masks, wet wipes, and socks. This project was funded by the CUF, DEC, GAC, World Vision, and UNFPA.

- 3,905 were provided with dignity packs on arrival at the 32 collective centers, which included items such as a comb, flashlight, bath towel, manicure scissors, menstrual pads, razor blades, deodorant, socks, hand cream, and rope bags. This project was funded by the DEC and UNFPA.

- 2,462 were provided with winterization kits including blankets and winter clothes. In addition, 100 received cash for winter. This project was funded by IRC and World Vision.
• 8,094 older people were given access to psychosocial, legal, counseling, and socialization services in several community safe spaces. This was funded by GAC, CUF, World Vision, and UNFPA.

• 4,364 received food, hygiene, or medical vouchers. This project was funded by the DEC, WPF, and World Vision.

• 1,269 received multipurpose cash assistance. This project was funded by GAC and World Vision.

• 1,109 older people benefited from home-based care. In addition, 681 received psychosocial counseling from training experts. This project was funded by GAC, UNFPA, and World Vision.

• 572 older people received assistive products such as canes, wheelchairs, crutches, shower seats, and toilet seat supports. This was funded by DEC, GAC, and World Vision.

• 2,388 were provided with gender-based violence (GBV) training. Meanwhile, 766 received support from a range of GBV services. This was funded by WFP and UNFPA.

**Communication**

Visit the Ukraine crisis webpage to get the latest updates on HelpAge’s work, including testimonies from older people and our colleagues on the ground in Ukraine; needs assessments; interviews; and new releases.