

# Ucrania: Rapid Needs Assessment of Displaced Older People

Lvivska, Chernivetska and Dnipropetrovska Oblasts– 3 June 2022

## Context

Since the Russian military offensive against Ukraine was launched on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, over 8 million people have been displaced. A significant number of those who have fled their homes are older people (60+). While we do not yet know the full scale, according to 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, while 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 face a range of heightened and specific challenges including being more likely to have health conditions and/or disabilities effecting their mobility, as compared to those who are younger. These challenges can be compounded during displacement as there is a greater likelihood of reduced access to their medication and/or the loss of essential items such as glasses and walking frames. However, older people also play an integral role in providing care to others, especially children. In Ukraine this is particularly the case as 64% of families have been separated, exacerbated by many men being conscripted into the army. Older people are often overlooked by the humanitarian sector and there is a risk that this also happens in Ukraine.

To help ensure that HelpAge can implement programming tailored to the specific needs of older people, 569 displaced older adults alongside other displaced adults were interviewed between 6 to 11 May 2022 in the oblasts of Lvivska, Chernivetska in western Ukraine and Dnipropetrovska in central Ukraine.

## Methodology

To provide a snapshot of the current needs, 569 displaced adults were interviewed by HelpAge International using a short multi-sectoral needs assessment between 6 to 11 May 2022. Of these, 218 were 60 or over, which is the focus on this analysis. The data collection occurred across the three oblasts of 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 centres with the remaining interviews occurring in private accommodation (20%) which was usually rented, social institutions (12%), transit centres (9%), other (4%), hotels (3%) and geriatric homes (2%). Disability was also calculated in this assessment using the Washington Group Questions.

The need for this assessment arose due to the lack of available age disaggregated data. While needs assessments are being conducted by other actors, such as REACH and the IOM, disaggregated data by gender, disability and age is limited and not widely shared. HelpAge advocates that the anonymized



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

disaggregated data be made publicly available to ensure that interventions can be appropriately targeted to meet the specific needs of each population group.

### Collective 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 where displaced families can sleep. The highest concentration of these centres is in the west and centre of the country, which currently host the highest number of displaced people. While collective centres only house a small proportion of displaced people, they are among those most at risk. This is because they may lack the financial means to rent or family/friends to stay with. Initial research shows that the most common locations for collective 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 were most in need of, **74%** reported cash. This applies across all ages, genders, and for those with a disability. Displaced people often face severe financial pressures as a result of having to leave their jobs as well as covering the expenses caused by their displacement. This can include paying for rented accommodation, transport, and the purchase of new clothes. The World Bank estimates that the country's economy will have shrunk in half by the summer, highlighting the financial struggles many families are facing. Furthermore currently across Ukrainians there is record inflation resulting in huge increases to cost of basic commodities such as food and medicine.
- Throughout the crisis, the government has maintained 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 what is equivalent to US\$135 per month, which is below the monetary poverty line set by the UN (US\$150). Others receive even lower amounts, for example the previous older people that HelpAge worked with in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts received on average around US\$75-US\$120 per month.
- When asked what type of assistance they preferred, **88%** of older people favoured multi-purpose cash, compared to 10% preferring in-kind assistance and 2% vouchers. An IOM assessment found that over three quarters of those displaced would prefer to receive cash through a bank card compared with other modalities, such as cash in hand. In all locations where this assessment occurred markets were functioning. In addition ATMs were also operational and were well stocked with money.
- Only **4%** responded that if they were given cash, they would not be able to use it safely. This varied slightly between oblast with 11% of those in Dnipropetrovska replying that they could not use cash safely, compared to 2% and 1% respectively in Lvivska and Chernivetska.

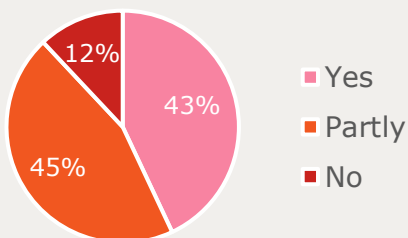


## Health + Medicine

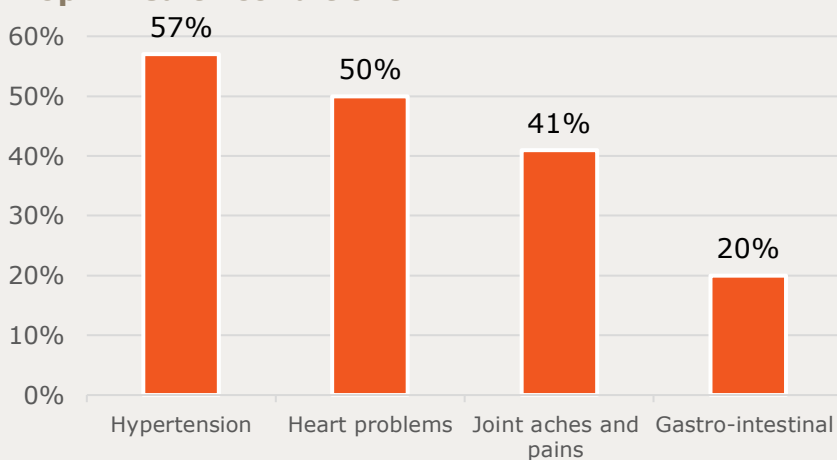


- **89%** of the displaced older people had at least one health condition, with seven out of ten stating that they had more than one. The top four conditions were hypertension, heart problems, joint aches and pains, and gastro-intestinal issues. Overall medicine and healthcare ranked as the second highest priority for older people after cash.
- **45%** who required medication reported that they could currently only partly access their medication while 12% reported they could not access their medication at all. A significant barrier for many is their lack of financial resources to purchase their medicine. There are also shortages of medicine throughout the country due to breakdowns in supply chains, displacement of medical staff and, in some cases, the closure of local pharmacies. However, recent reports show that supplies are improving. Those who are displaced also have the additional challenge of trying to identify how to procure medicine in unfamiliar locations.
- **89%** reported they were able to access health services. However, this was significantly lower for the collective centres in Dnipropetrovska (50%). The lack of access in these collective centres is concerning and highlights the importance of monitoring health access across different locations and throughout the crisis to ensure gaps are addressed. For older people with mobility 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



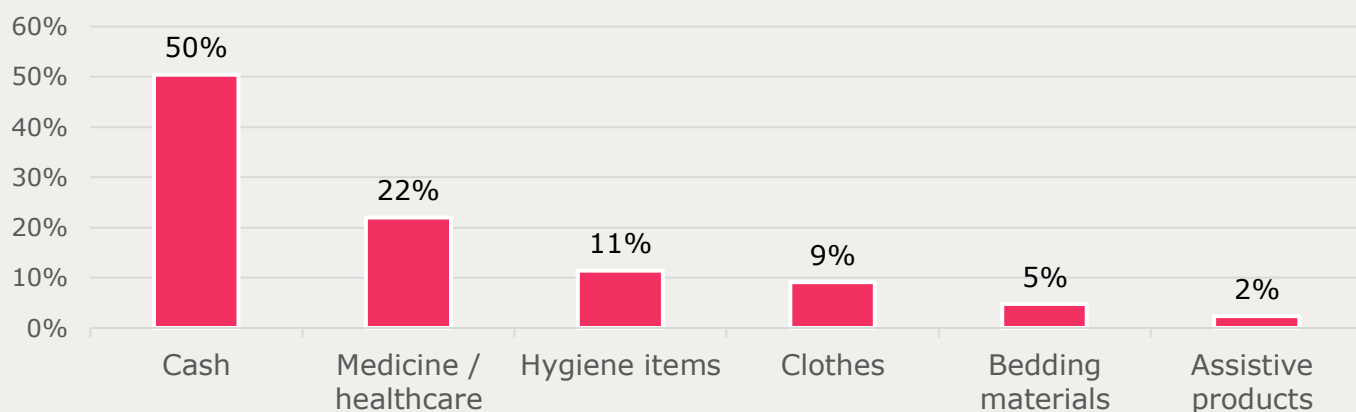
## Hygiene Items + Water



- Overall, hygiene items were the third highest priority of older people interviewed. Some of the most frequently mentioned items reported by the IOM include menstrual hygiene items and diapers (including those for adults). Ensuring that older people have access to the appropriate hygiene items is crucial, especially for those with health conditions such as incontinence.
- **91%** of older people reported they have access to safe drinking water. However, the lack of access is especially stark within the collective centres of Dnipropetrovska and Lviviska. These collective centres are often not purpose built to house people, so may lack adequate basic facilities including a stable water supply.

## Top 6 needs of older people

(these have been weighted combining the question asking the single item they most needed with what other items they needed)

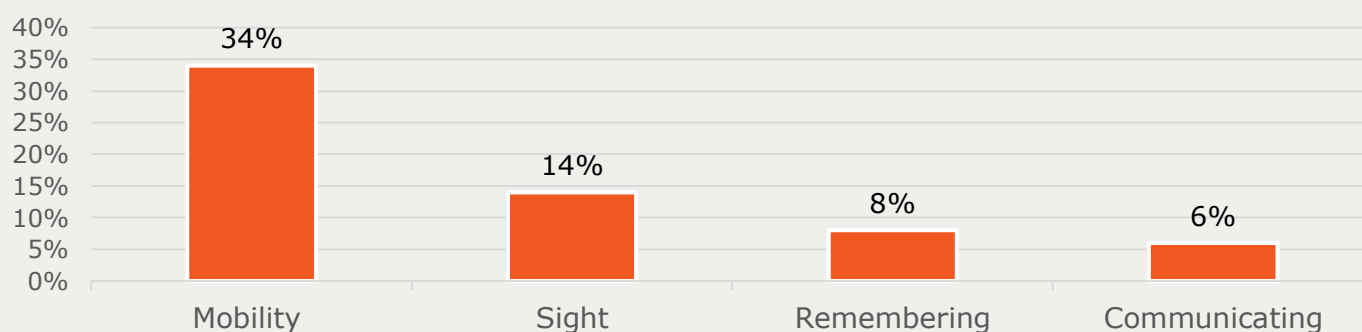


## Disability

- **43%** of older people had a least one disability. The most common disabilities identified related to mobility, sight, remembering, and communicating. This is significantly higher than the 11% who reported having a disability among those 30-59 years-olds surveyed.
- Of those with a disability, the majority (**70%**) were not registered as having a disability. This is in part due to challenges older people face with registering as it requires money to get an official confirmation, and this often needs to be re-confirmed periodically. However, this could also be because of a reluctance to describe themselves as having a disability. Overall, 28% of older people with a disability are registered. In Ukraine being registered as a disabled person provides one with access to disability benefits but this amount is often even smaller the state 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 risk, 8% said they were at risk of psychological abuse, and 4% chose not to respond. In addition, 2% of older women reported they feel at risk of sexual harassment or trafficking in the locations they are currently residing.



## Wellbeing



- The psychological impact of the conflict on many has been significant. This has often come up in the many interactions that HelpAge has had with older people. For example, prior to this assessment we interviewed Anatoly who was 66 years old. He fled to Lviv alone from Kramatorsk. He told HelpAge “every smile is difficult. This war and this situation is 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 themselves, have shown great strength in supporting others with practical and emotional assistance. But many displaced older people, like many who have fled, have experienced traumatising journeys, family separations and even bereavement. They can sometimes find themselves isolated in new communities without their pre-existing support network or means to navigate their new surroundings so they can access what they need. Furthermore older people are a times more reluctant to leave their homes compared to younger people, making the experience of displacement even more challenging. Ensuring all who need psychosocial support have access now and into the future is critical, as the mental scars of the conflict are likely to be deep and long-lasting.

## Food



- **89%** of older people responded they had access to sufficient food for now. This was lower for older people in Dnipropetrovska (75%). The availability of food in the shops varies per region with stores in the central and western regions reportedly well-stocked, while those in the east and south more likely to have empty shelves. This would suggest that those interviewed face challenges in accessing food as a result 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, so we need to remain vigilant for further food insecurity.
- An issue which is facing many displaced older people is the lack of space to store food. Of those interviewed in collective centres, **45%** said they did not have enough space (shelves and/or refrigerators) to store food. As previously mentioned, many of the collective centres and temporary shelters that displaced people live in do not have adequate facilities. It is critical that these shelters provide displaced people with the ability to store as well as cook their own food. This could help improve their nutritional intake and provide them with a greater sense of dignity.

## Movement



- Highlighting the current focus of the fighting in the Donbas, most older people were fleeing from the Donetsk oblast (34%), Luhansk oblast (26%) or Kharkiv oblast (16%). Nearly half evacuated themselves 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 over-crowded trains, buses and on foot.
- However, while many older people have fled, it is important to remember they many more have stayed behind. Therefore, it vital that those who need support, be they displaced and non-displaced, are provided with what they need.



## Support Provided



- Less than half of older people reported that they are currently receiving assistance from humanitarian organisations, with those with a disability are less likely to be receiving support. The type of assistance provided includes cash assistance, food, hygiene items, medicine, accommodation, and clothing.
- **39%** of older people who are registered as internally displaced are not receiving their social benefits (IDP targeted assistance). These benefits include receiving approximately \$68 per month for every child and person with a disability as well as being eligible for free legal assistance. Although this only applies for those displaced from specific regions. Furthermore 11% have not registered as internally displaced. Some of the reasons given include long queues at the Social Protection centres and a lack of knowledge on how to do register.
- Almost a quarter (**26%**) do not have a family member or friend who can provide them with support. This lack of support network is concerning, and it is important that families are reunified where possible to ensure they can support each other. 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-storey 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 travelling for a day and a half.

We live in a gymnasium of the Lviv Polytechnic University, that 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."



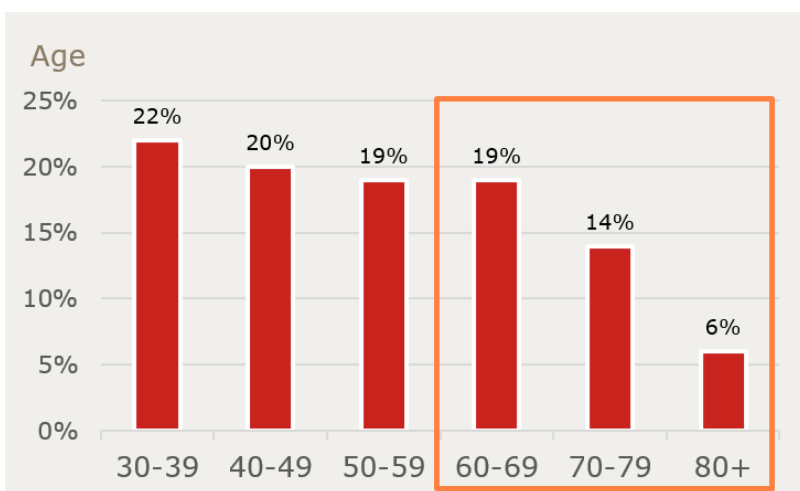
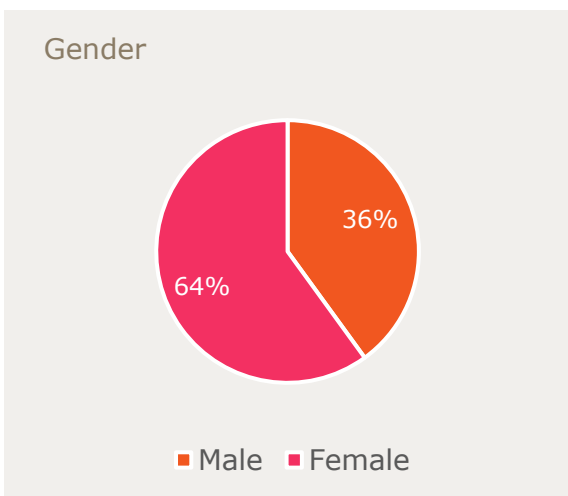
## HelpAge international's work in Ukraine

Since 2014, HelpAge International 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 care homes, and home-based care.

## Demographics of those interviewed



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