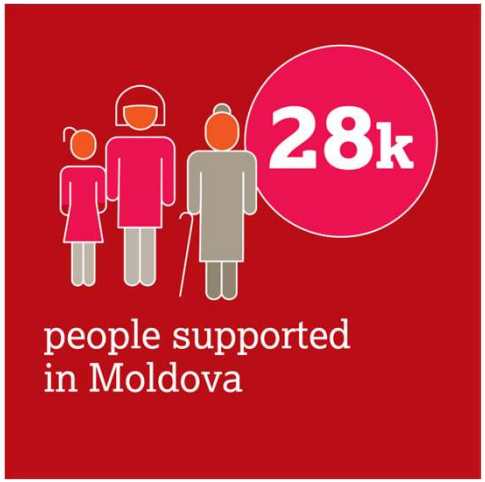
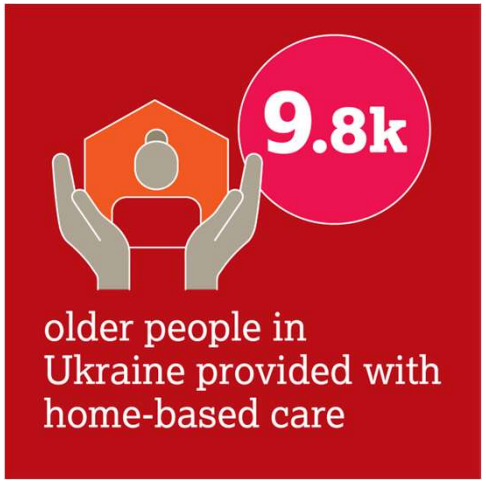
Protection of Older People in Humanitarian Settings

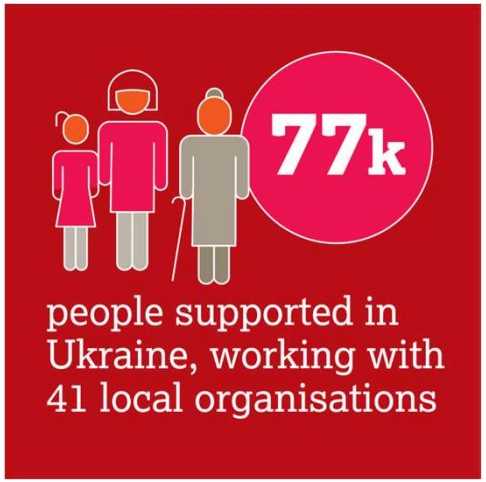
HelpAge International
May 2023

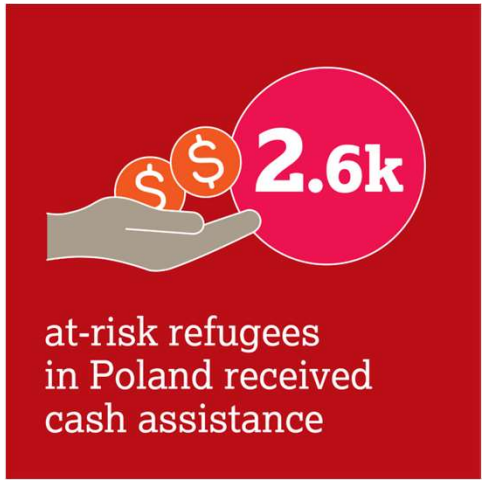
Film: The Light in the Darkness

HelpAge Ukraine Response: One Year Later









Why is it important to consider protection needs of older people in humanitarian responses?

- Our population is aging, it is estimated that **by 2050, 22% of the global population will be over 60 years** & **nearly 80% of the world's older people will live in developing economies**, where disasters are more likely to occur, and their effects are felt more acutely
- The situation in Ukraine has been described as the **oldest humanitarian crisis in the world**, with 8.9 million people, or **24% of the population, over 60**.
- Older people have immense **strengths and capacities** to contribute to society (i.e., caring for others, role models, Indigenous wisdom, life experience, community leaders, etc.)
- Older people's specific needs are often neglected in humanitarian protection and assistance
- The protection issues that older people face may arise from human rights violations, from problems at individual, family or community level that are **exacerbated by a crisis**.
- Therefore, it is essential to undertake a **comprehensive assessment, to consider contextual issues, and to ensure older people's participation in assessments and decision-making**.

What is protection (as it relates to older people)?

The UN Principles for Older Persons call for ensuring the **independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment and dignity of older people**. The principles reinforce the specific protection needs of older people, such as **security, access to social and legal services, and access to a fair system of justice**.

"Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength."

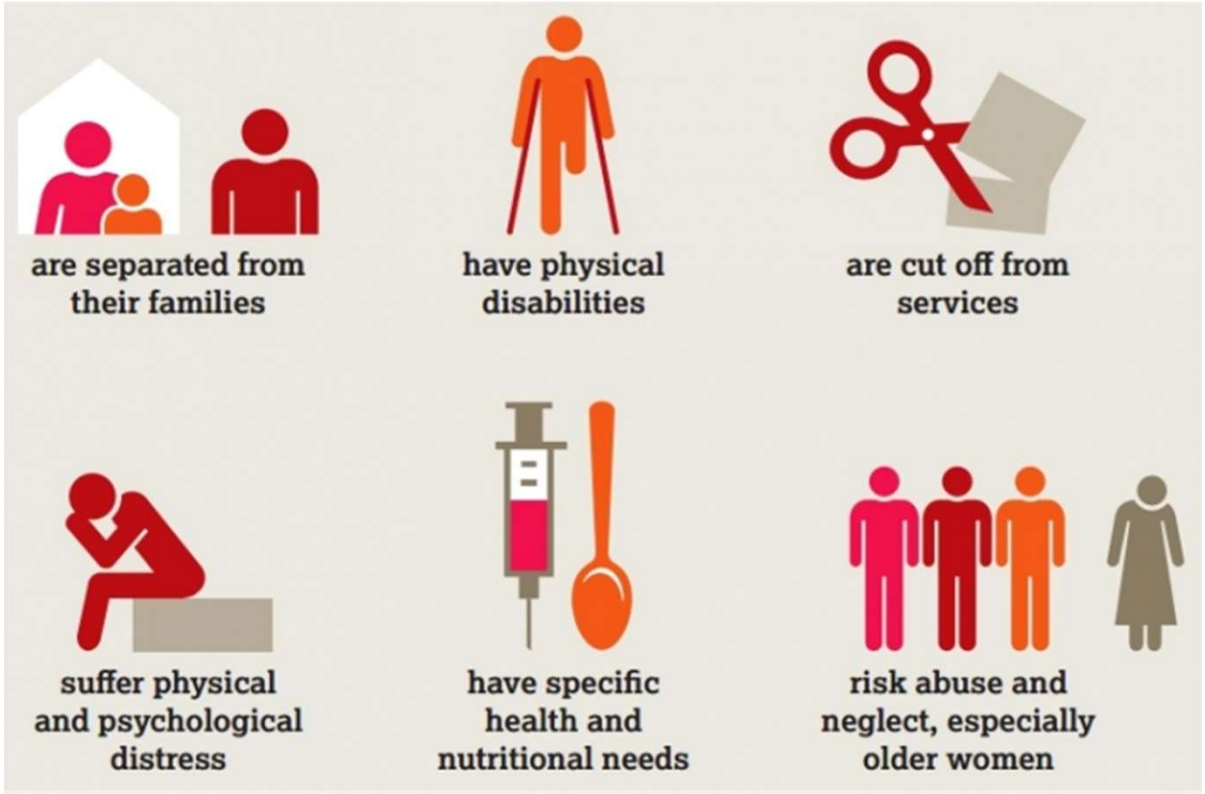
- *Betty Friedan*

Protection Inclusion Standards

(from the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities, 2018)

- 1: **Identification of protection concerns:** Older people and people with disabilities have their protection concerns and capacities identified and monitored.
- 2: **Addressing concerns and barriers:** Older people and people with disabilities with protection concerns have access to protection services and are protected from risks of physical and psychological harm.
- 3: **Participation and empowerment:** Older people and people with disabilities are included in prevention of violence, exploitation and abuse, and in empowerment activities.

Protection risks of older people



How to support older people in emergencies	
Secure attachments and relationships	Nurturing and physical closeness is important. Let people identify who they want to be close to. Do not, however, assume family relations are friendly.
Safety	Older people need to know they have options in making a choice about their safety. Secure a safe environment, but respect wishes if the older person prefers to remain in his/her home.
Talking about the event	Reactions, thoughts and feelings are influenced not only by the critical event itself, but also by past memories. Allow time and space to talk about the past as this will provide trust and strength to deal with current concerns.
Cultural differences	Older people may have different cultural and traditional backgrounds; services that are suitable for the majority may not necessarily fit every minority group.
Information	Factual information about what happened and what is likely to happen (who will help the older person, where the person will stay at night, etc.) gives a feeling of security and control. Information may need to be repeated multiple times.
Establish routine	Routines are normal and comforting so helping them to re-establish these are important.
Reassure	It is reassuring to be told that concentration and communication difficulties, physical complaints, etc. are what can be expected in the aftermath of a critical event.
Be supportive and build confidence	Older people can naturally contribute a great deal and can be encouraged to use their strengths and abilities at the same time as preserving their dignity.
Most importantly, create opportunities for older people to feel useful and valued.	

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How to address older people's protection needs

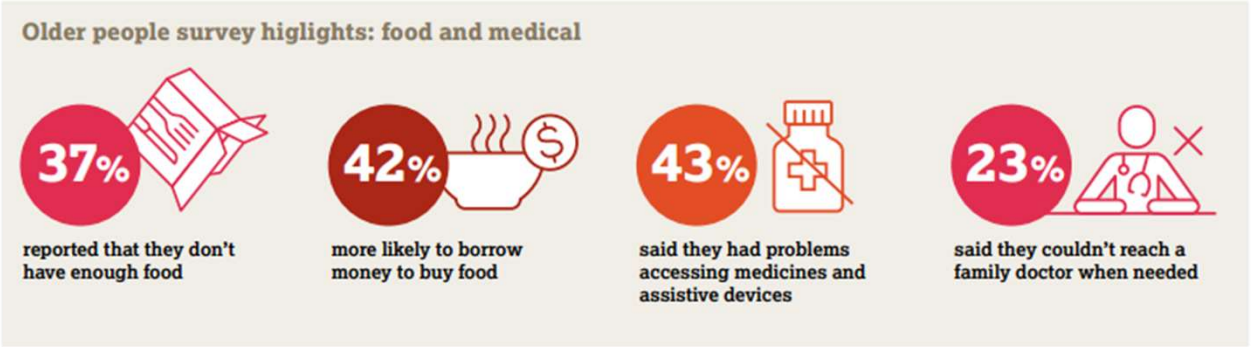
1. Assess the protection issues faced by older people in emergency
2. Define the protection strategy
3. Implement protection activities
4. Build partnerships
5. Monitor and evaluate the protection response

Assess the protection issues of older people

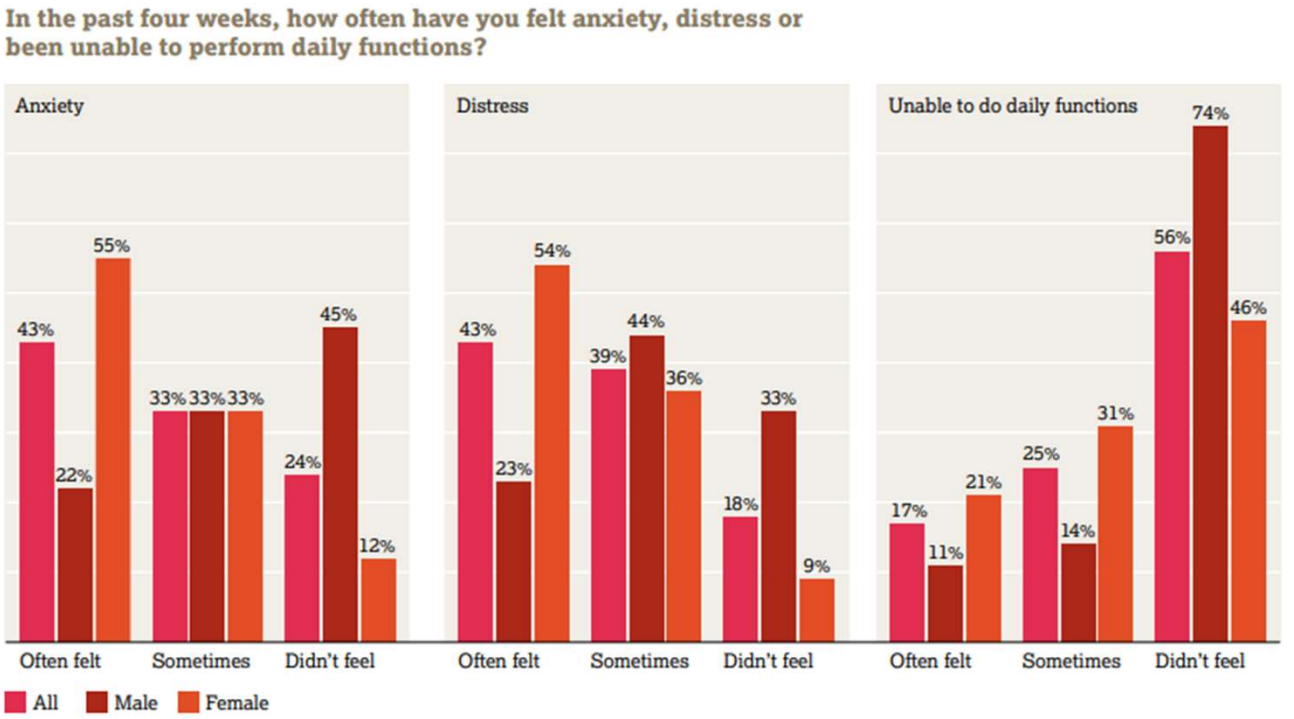
- Ensure that assessment and monitoring tools are **Sex, Age and Disability Disaggregated (SADDD)**
- **Identify vulnerable older people** at risk of protection abuses.
- **Adapt** the way you communicate with the older person, including consideration of possible sensory disabilities and levels of literacy.
- **Do not only communicate with the carer**, even if the older person is not able to provide information by him or herself.
- **Ensure you understand the relationships** between the older person and their family and community.
- **Observe**: are the older person's living conditions different from other members of the household or community?

Needs of Older People in the Ukraine Response

- Many older people told us they experience significant barriers in **accessing food, medicine, assistive devices, and medical care**, among other services.
- **Financial hardship** was the greatest obstacle to meeting basic needs, as well as lack of support for people with low mobility to leave their homes to **access essentials and medical care**.
- **Few older people have employment**, and their **pensions are often too low to cover essentials**. The overwhelming majority of older people continue to live in their homes but reported a variety of difficulties in their living conditions.
- Many also reported anxiety, distress, separation from family, isolation, and lack of information and access to professional psychosocial support.



Psychosocial needs of older people in Ukraine



In the presentation of responses, 'refuse to answer' has been removed because of the very small percentages (3% or less)

Challenge your assumptions!

Jonathan Moore/HelpAge International

Lyubov, 85, lives by herself in Zaporizhzhia and volunteers everyday to support internally displaced families.

Jonathan Moore/HelpAge International

Michail, 65, says volunteering has given him a purpose and helped managed the psychological effects of the war.

Resiliency of older people

"I feel like a part of the community, I like volunteering. I feel better because I work as a volunteer. And I try to do this further. And in the future, even when the war is over, I will be involved in the volunteer movement."

Tetyana, 70

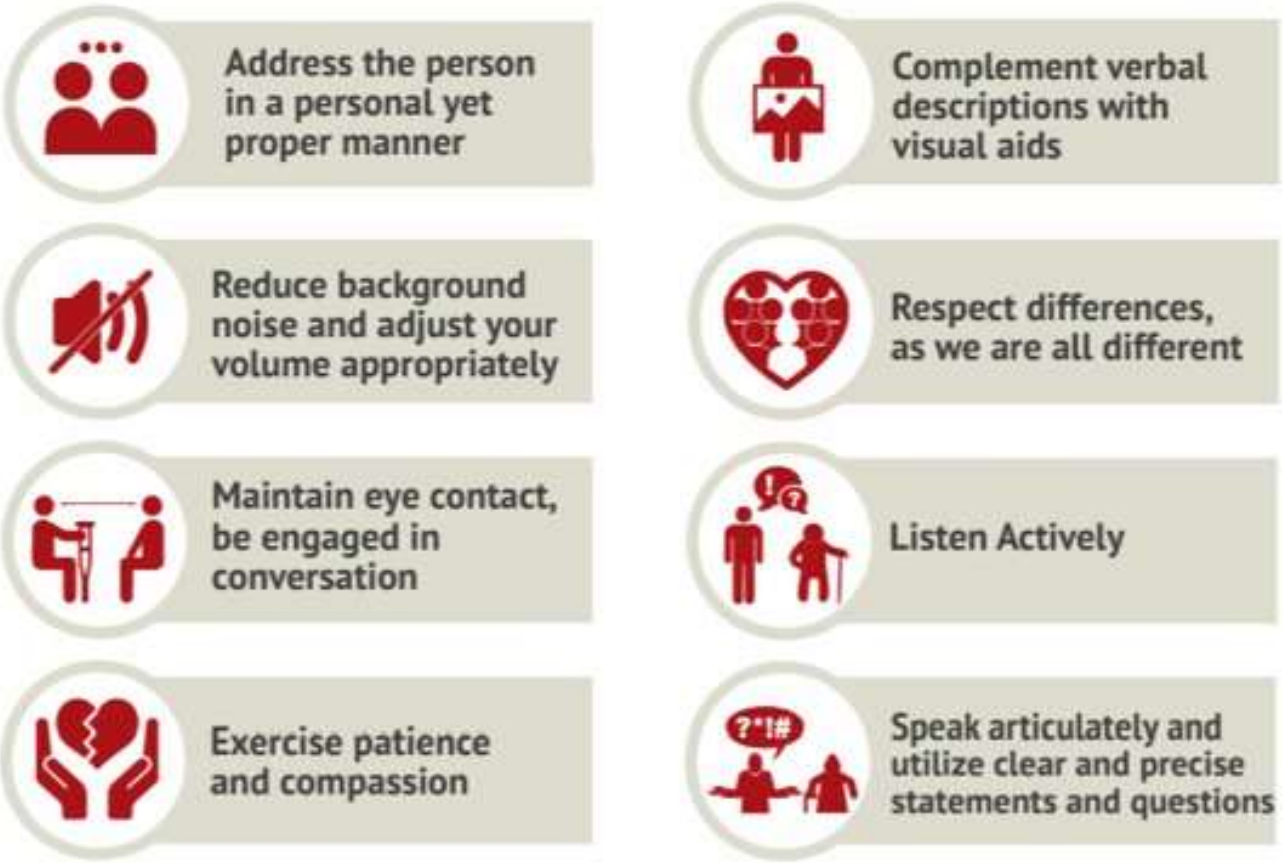
"How is it possible to be happy when there is a war in Ukraine? Well, I feel happy when my children and my grandchildren are near, and when I am with them."

Sergiy, 64

"I think that family ties have, on the contrary, become stronger, including distant relatives. It is possible to say that not only family ties have changed and become stronger. Feelings for other people have also changed. And it can be felt."

Borys, 60

Tips for communicating with older people



Recommendations

1. In line with their human rights obligations, humanitarian actors should prioritise support for older people, in particular older women, and people over 70, due to the specific risks they face and the barriers to accessing essential goods and services and humanitarian assistance, including access to financial assistance, information, food, medicines, healthcare, transportation, in-home care and support services, and psychological support services

2. Humanitarian actors should ensure that older people have a voice in decision-making, in line with their human rights obligations and commitments to accountability to affected populations. Specifically, they should actively support the engagement, participation, empowerment, agency, and autonomy of older people and incorporate their perspectives and experiences in plans, programmes, and monitoring.

3. Humanitarian actors should regularly collect, analyse, report, and use data on older people disaggregated by age cohort, gender, and disability. They should use the information to inform policy and programmes, and publicly share their data and findings with others to achieve greater reach and inclusion of older people.

4. Humanitarian actors should develop and implement policies and hire and train staff with the skills and knowledge to deliver age, gender, and disability responsive approaches, in close consultation with older people.

Recommendations

5. Information about assistance, including entitlements and distribution modalities, should be communicated via television, radio, organisations working to support older people, and social service organisations, as well as via phone calls, SMS, and messenger apps. Information should be distributed in a variety of formats, including in sign language, braille, easy-to-read formats, and using images.

6. Means of communication should be provided for older people, including mobile phones and internet, televisions, radio, generators, or power banks, along with education and support services on using the devices.

Resources

HelpAge International:
- Protecting and assisting older people in emergencies (2005)
- Older people in emergencies: identifying and reducing risks (2012)
- Protection interventions for older people in emergencies (2013)
- More at risk: How older people are excluded in humanitarian data (2019)
- "I've lost the life I knew": Older people's experiences of the Ukraine war and their inclusion in the humanitarian response (2023)
- Humanitarian Inclusion Standards (2018)

UNHCR:
- Age, Gender, Diversity Policy (2011)
- Working with Older Persons in Displacement (2013)

IASC:
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), Humanitarian action and older persons – An essential brief for humanitarian actors. (2008)

Thank you!
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