



Ukraine Must Protect Rights of Older People Suffering Greater Impact of Russian Invasion

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Abstract: The Russia-Ukraine war is causing extreme hardship for elderly Ukrainians, many of whom face ill health, limited mobility and lack of money. The Ukrainian government must work together with humanitarian organisations to safeguard the human rights of older people.

On February 24, 2022, the world was shaken by news of the full-scale Russian invasion of neighbouring Ukraine. As nearly a quarter of the Ukrainian population is over 60, this humanitarian crisis is having a particularly large [impact](#) on elderly people, who face acute challenges compared to other groups, due to greater likelihood of poor health, limited physical mobility and lack of funds. These circumstances make them [reluctant or unable](#) to flee their homes, consequently

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they are at more risk of being killed or injured. [Around a third](#) of the civilians killed in the first year of the war were over 60, while many others face huge financial, practical and emotional hardship.

There are [4.2m older people](#) in need of humanitarian assistance in Ukraine. For those with disabilities and chronic diseases, evacuation is especially arduous as they need social assistance and support with transportation. Among the displaced persons, 46 per cent of families live with at least one elderly relative. Most older people [prefer to stay](#) in their long-term homes. Some want to remain to protect their ancestors' [possessions](#), others have no alternative; however, 79-year-old Valentyna Konstantynovska chose to be armed and receive basic combat training to defend her homeland.

Financial challenges and lack of affordable housing

Lack of funds is the [major obstacle](#) for older people trying to access food, clothing, medicines, assistive equipment and healthcare. State pension is the main source of [income](#) for the majority of older people in Ukraine. Despite the continuity of state pensions throughout the crisis, money is [scarce](#) as the average pension is around US\$75-US\$135 per month, barely enough to cover most older people's vital needs. These financial challenges are exacerbated by age discrimination in recruitment with the [over-50s](#) more likely to be unemployed. Older women face considerably more financial challenges and barriers accessing essential [goods and assistance](#); men's pensions are 30 per cent higher than women's and there are nearly three times as many internally displaced older women than older men, putting women at greater risk.

Alongside the pension, Internally Displaced People receive government [financial aid](#) equivalent to US\$50 a month or US\$75 for those with disabilities. However, subsistence-level benefits leave pensioners unable to pay high rental costs, forcing them to return to dangerous areas or live in overcrowded state institutions, where they face a host of difficulties [including](#) abuse, neglect, ill-treatment from staff members, inappropriate use of psychotropic or other types of medication, isolation and segregation of residents. Some of these institutions are failing to supply crucial needs, even food, in some cases; in one residential home, [six elderly people](#) were found starved to death.

Volunteers and temporary shelters are also [unable](#) to provide older people with essentials due to the limited resources or capabilities. Most of the temporary shelters are not [physically accessible](#), especially for those with disabilities who cannot climb stairs, use bathrooms, climb onto beds, or walk between or around buildings without additional assistance. Concurrently, long-term housing solutions remain [unresolved](#). For those left homeless by the shelling, apartments are unaffordable as after the mass displacement, average rental prices have [increased](#)

by 96 per cent and, in some cases, soared by as much as 225 per cent. Many pensioners have now spent any savings they had so [economic hardship](#) is adding to the stress of daily life for people like 72-year-old Raisa Andreyevna, who lives alone and works as a janitor to survive since her family moved to a safer place.



Other difficulties and insufficient support

Living in a conflict-affected area usually means enduring life-threatening as well as unbearable conditions; many houses are seriously damaged or destroyed and heating, electricity, food, medical and pharmacy services are limited or unavailable. Since many older people live alone and/or have mobility problems, [accessing](#) sufficient food and clean drinking water has become even more difficult. In some areas, all the markets have been bombed and older people have to [walk long distances](#) on foot to reach the nearest shop, where they may have to stand in long queues to purchase food and water.

Overcrowded hospitals serving wounded soldiers and civilians are making medical care mostly unavailable for [chronically ill](#) people. The massive closure of pharmacies caused the absence of vital medicines has hit older people harder, particularly those in isolated rural areas. Untreated [chronic health conditions](#) like diabetes and high blood pressure mean sufferers lose their independence and develop disabilities, resulting in further suffering. Absence of utilities is another massive hurdle; one man buried his elderly [neighbour](#) who died when a power failure shut down the oxygen machine that neighbour had relied upon.

A further obstruction is [lack of access](#) to prompt and pertinent information about evacuations, available humanitarian aid and other goods and support services, as such information is mostly disseminated via the internet, which discriminates against

many elderly people who are not computer-literate or do not have a computer. Lots of older people also report a variety of [emotional difficulties](#), anxiety, danger, distress, separation from family, and isolation.

Human rights at risk

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights preserves the right to an adequate standard of living, including sufficient food, clothing, and housing. Throughout the Russia-Ukraine war, millions of older people's needs are not being fully identified and addressed. Older people report lack of access to basic goods and services crucial for survival. Older persons and their specific needs deserve [particular attention](#) to enable full realisation of their rights and ensure equal treatment and dignity. These requirements apply to all elderly people whether they choose to stay in place or are on the move.

The government and civil and humanitarian actors must prioritise support for older people. For example, in order [to guarantee](#) the right to health, older people with limited mobility should be provided with medical care at home. Older people have the right to information on an equal basis with others, therefore mobile phones may need to be distributed or information published in accessible formats and disseminated through other means for those who do not use the internet. Another significant concern is including the voice of older people in decision-making, in line with international human rights obligations.

Ukraine has been coping with massive Russian military attacks for more than a year. It is confronting numerous ongoing daily challenges, including lack of financial, humanitarian and other resources. Although these difficulties make it incredibly hard to consider and guarantee the welfare of all vulnerable groups, the Ukrainian government is still failing to identify and adequately respond to the special needs of older people for whom accessing essential goods is extremely [demanding](#). Older people have also been overlooked by international bodies and governments. Victims of systemic ageism have been left behind, isolated and in urgent need of food, water, heating and mental health support. The need for a more inclusive approach is essential. Fundamentally, the Ukrainian state, humanitarian, international organisations and NGOs must work together to ensure equal enjoyment of fundamental human rights for older people.