

PROJECT OVERVIEW

«First Contact» Programme

Supporting people with spinal cord injury during treatment and rehabilitation through peer instructors with their own lived experience of life after injury — to prevent complications, speed up adaptation, and enable a return to active life in the community.

170+

new people with SCI identified in 2025

600+

people with SCI in the support database

11

peer-to-peer instructors

8

regions of programme implementation

PROBLEM

Due to the war, the number of people with spinal cord injury (SCI) in Ukraine has risen sharply, while the rehabilitation system suffers from a shortage of specialists. A gap opens between discharge from a medical facility and support in the community. In 2025 alone, over 170 new people with SCI were identified (database — 600+). Insufficient quality rehabilitation leads to complications and hinders a return to a full life.

GOAL

To provide comprehensive support to people with SCI during treatment and rehabilitation through peer instructors, prevent complications, raise awareness, and foster adaptation and a return to active community life.

OBJECTIVES

- identify patients with SCI in medical and rehabilitation facilities and add them to the support database;
- prevent complications (pressure sores, selection of assistive devices, bladder and bowel management) and support adaptation;
- raise awareness among patients and medical staff about SCI consequences and recovery methods;
- support people with SCI and their families in communities according to an individual plan;
- inform local authorities about inclusion, accessibility, and correct terminology.

BENEFICIARIES

Direct: people with SCI during treatment/rehabilitation and after returning to the community, as well as their families. Indirect: medical workers, local authorities, and wider communities. Support is provided by peer instructors across eight regions of Ukraine.

ACTIVITIES

- peer instructors working with patients in medical and rehabilitation facilities;
- motivational meetings, demonstration of independent-living skills, and experience sharing;
- individual support for people with SCI and their families in communities;
- regular awareness and educational events in communities;
- training and lectures for representatives of local authorities;
- weekly and monthly monitoring, coordination, and reporting.

RESULTS

Over 170 people with SCI receive first contact and ongoing support each year, expanding the database (600+). Complications are prevented, adaptation accelerates, and awareness among medical staff and authorities grows. Participants join GAR's other programmes and may later become instructors themselves.

PARTNERS

Permanent partners are the World Health Organization (WHO) office in Ukraine and Choose Love. GAR is a co-founder of the «League of the Strong» NGO. It also cooperates with the Barrier-Free initiative, the Patients of Ukraine Foundation, and professional associations of physical rehabilitation specialists.

IMPACT

The programme fills the gap between medical rehabilitation and community life and builds a sustainable peer-to-peer support model that fosters inclusion and people's return to active life. The model scales easily to other regions — preceded by the preliminary identification of people with SCI and the training of local instructors.

Duration: 12 months (ongoing)

Budget: USD 120,000

All projects online

