



Protection of persons with disabilities in Ukraine

In the current protection crisis unfolding in Ukraine, humanitarian actors must pay particular attention to those who are most at risk of threats to safety and rights violations – including women, children, older people, and people who are blind and/or deaf, persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, those who have mobility limitations, and persons with high support needs.

The Global Protection Cluster calls on all parties to the conflict and humanitarian actors to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in Ukraine, in accordance with:

- Their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular Article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies.
- The UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019) on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict.
- International Humanitarian Law and the Humanitarian Principles.

Background and current protection threats for persons with disabilities in Ukraine

In 2022, there are 2.7 million persons with disabilities registered in Ukraine¹, however it's anticipated that this figure is likely closer to 6.6 million. Further, UNICEF estimate that at least 82,000 children are segregated from society, including residing in orphanages, psychiatric facilities, residential boarding schools, and other institutions, however, again, this figure is likely much higher.² Given the barriers to independent living for children with disabilities in Ukraine, thousands of adults with disabilities also reside in institutions, many of whom have known no other home. This means that their ability to cope independently can be limited and therefore, they are conditioned to become dependent on others for assistance with both basic and complex activities of daily living.

The violations of rights to independence among others, for children and adults with disabilities has been exacerbated by conflict in Ukraine which began in the East in 2014, leading to more people disappearing or being abandoned since this time.³ In 2014 and the years following, there was no information on what happened to people who were living in institutions in non-Government controlled areas (conflict zones); there was a severe lack of services for older persons who had become estranged from family and lack of access to social protection; and there remained significant barriers to exiting collecting centres, meaning that these centres became another form of institutionalisation for persons with disabilities.⁴ Women and girls with disabilities in Ukraine are also at disproportionate risk of sexual and gender-based violence during the conflict, particularly so, for women with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.⁵

¹ [State Statistics Service of Ukraine](#) (2018)

² [Disability Rights International](#) (2015)

³ [Disability Rights International, European Network on Independent Living \(ENIL\) & Validity Foundation](#): 2021 EU- Ukraine Human Rights Dialogue

⁴ [UNHCR \(2016\): Strengthening Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement in Ukraine](#)

⁵ [European Disability Forum \(EDF\)](#) (2022)

Since the onset of renewed Russian aggression in February 2022, children and adults with disabilities residing in Ukraine are facing compounded protection threats which have directly increased their risk of abandonment, violence, injury and death. Persons with disabilities lack access to evacuation support and in the context of the current emergency, have been left behind, unable to access information and seek safety from the military offensive.^{6,7} As per the Decree of the President of Ukraine on general mobilization №69 / 2022, male care givers for persons with disabilities and older persons are not able to be excused from military service and are therefore forced to leave their family members behind without any protection or support.

Persons with disabilities residing in Ukraine at the time of writing, report that the situation for children and adults with disabilities is horrendous. Shelters in Kyiv are inaccessible resulting in persons with disabilities being forced to stay home without access to information, awaiting a safer option.⁸ Persons with disabilities living in institutions, already segregated from their communities, are at heightened risk of abandonment, given that staff themselves have had to evacuate with their families.

Existing capacities to support persons with disabilities in Ukraine

The Government of Ukraine ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its optional protocol in 2010. The Ukraine has a vast and mobile disability movement which includes over 100 Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) . The Government of Ukraine has engaged in monitoring processes with regards to their implementation of the UNCRPD, along with their civil society-based counterparts. Some OPDs remain partially active in Ukraine at the time of writing and remain the best source of information and support to inclusive emergency response operations carried out by humanitarian organisations and local authorities.

Recommendations for humanitarian actors operating in Ukraine to enable support to children and adults with disabilities:

- Ensure persons with disabilities are meaningfully involved in all humanitarian action through their representative organisations.
- Ensure persons with disabilities are accounted for and not abandoned. Protection monitoring should include a mapping of institutions where children and adults reside in conflict-affected areas. This information should be used to support local authorities in planning for ongoing protection of residents and procedures for safe relocations.
- Ensure access to basic needs for those remaining in their residences, including institutions. This support could be provided through mobile outreach teams.
- Ensure accessible information about safety and assistance protocols, evacuation procedures and supports are made available for all people affected by the crisis.
- Ensure that measures are in place to fully evacuate and relocate children and adults residing in institutions when threatened, they cannot be left behind.⁹ Relocation and evacuation measures should not force more persons with disabilities to live in institutions in the long

⁶ Ibid

⁷ [International Disability Alliance \(2022\)](#)

⁸ [European Disability Forum \[EDF\] \(2022\)](#)

⁹ Inclusion Europe; February 2022

term.¹⁰ Ensure displaced persons with disabilities are not segregated in separate accommodation.

- Collect data on persons with disabilities utilising the Washington Group Short Set, to understand where they reside and enable tracking of movements; information on the specific barriers that persons with disabilities face to safety and protection should also be collected and analysed through a gender, age and disability intersectional lens.
- Ensure full access to basic services including transport, assistive devices, shelter, water and sanitation, care giver support and healthcare, including essential medicines.
- Take action to ensure that shelters are accessible to persons with disabilities with basic measures such as portable ramps and ensuring proximity to toileting spaces.
- Provide targeted assistance to families consisting exclusively of people in need of external personal care (e.g., all family members with disabilities; families where an older mother cares for an adult daughter or son with behavioural difficulties, etc.) and develop plans for emergency support for such cases.¹¹ Prioritise these families for assisted movement to Western Ukraine and/or eventually into neighbouring territories for UNHCR protection.
- Ensure persons with disabilities are not separated from their primary care givers and that all interventions support existing care giver dynamics.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Inclusion Europe; February, 2022