



RIGA DECLARATION – Towards a peaceful future and building a disability-inclusive Ukraine

27 July 2022 - Riga, Latvia

We, SUSTENTO, the European Disability Forum, and all participants to the conference "With today's experience for the future of Ukraine", condemn the war started by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. We draw attention to the ongoing trauma and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities because of this war, and the need to ensure that recovery and reconstruction work results in a more inclusive society.

Persons with disabilities face barriers in every context, whether they are trapped at home due to inaccessible evacuation services, part of the internally displaced population excluded from temporary shelter, or have fled Ukraine and are trying to start afresh in a new country, often without recognition of their rights and needs and without the appropriate support to live independently. These barriers are always serious and are often life-threatening. We draw particular attention to the situation of children and adults living in segregated residential institutions in Ukraine, and those who are at risk of being placed in similar institutional settings outside the country, deprived of their right to live independently with their families in the community. Furthermore, this brutal war is causing physical and psychological trauma that will lead to more disability in the longer term.

In Ukraine, the official number of persons with disabilities is 2.7 millionⁱ. In April 2022 two million persons with disabilities were registered as displacedⁱⁱ and, by July 2022, 13% of families who fled Ukraine include persons with disabilities.ⁱⁱⁱ

This situation is unacceptable considering that the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the European Union (EU), and all the European Union Member States have ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and are therefore bound by its obligations, in particular CRPD Article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. Similarly, all States involved in the war are duty-bound to respect the humanitarian principles, international humanitarian law and human rights law, which outlaw such discrimination.

We also express our strong support for Ukraine's path to reconstruction, and linking this to the country's EU candidate status, we emphasise that this is an opportunity to rebuild an inclusive and resilient society. Such reconstruction requires prioritisation of accessibility and Universal Design from the beginning, with investment of specific budget to ensure that these principles are fundamentally non-negotiable. This strategy must be underpinned by human rights and with full consultation of civil society, including meaningful participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organisations. Basing its reconstruction on this approach, Ukraine can become an example to the world.

We strongly urge the EU, the EU Member States, the Ukrainian Government, the United Nations, and the whole humanitarian community to:

1. Ensure meaningful participation of representative organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs/DPOs) in all decision-making processes at all steps of the humanitarian program cycle, including reconstruction and resilience building, moreover, not only by considering the expertise provided by these organisations, but also by supporting them with the necessary resources and building the capacity of these organisations. Also engage with the diversity of wider civil society, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in this work.
2. Ensure that all persons with disabilities are accounted for, protected, and provided with immediate access to humanitarian aid, including all basic needs and any specific requirements
3. Pay particular attention to include those most at risk (including children, women, persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, deafblind persons, persons with high support needs, and those confined to institutional settings), as well as those who do not fall under the scope of the EU Temporary Protection Directive
4. Provide all information in accessible formats
5. Dedicate sufficient funding to accessibility and reasonable accommodation during the earliest planning stages of all activities
6. Disaggregate population data by disability using the Washington Group questions
7. Provide full and effective access for all to evacuation activities and to humanitarian corridors
8. Effectively implement already-existing frameworks and guidelines, in particular the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action^{iv}
9. Build disability-inclusive resilience in line with the Sendai Framework^v and the UNDRR Roadmap for Europe and Central Asia 2021-2030^{vi}
10. Identify and use relevant architectural, infrastructural, and information accessibility as key components of the reconstruction process in Ukraine, and make this one of the conditions for financial support of rebuilding programs
11. Avoid funding the building or refurbishment of institutions during reconstruction, and use best practice examples of community living – including engagement with a wide range of organisations – to contribute to the process of deinstitutionalisation of children and adults with disabilities in Ukraine
12. In hosting countries, prevent the institutionalisation of persons with disabilities who have fled Ukraine, ensure that long-term integration procedures are fully accessible to persons with disabilities, including housing, employment, health, education and social protection, and prevent the current overload of national mechanisms from negatively impacting ongoing CRPD implementation

As a final remark, we declare that we, as a community of experts in the field of disability inclusion, representing people with disabilities throughout Europe, are ready to participate in all the above-mentioned areas of work and reserve the right to constantly monitor the situation and the fulfilment of our requirements.

ⁱ <https://www.msp.gov.ua/timeline/invalidnist.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/ponad-2-miljoniv-lyudej-zareyestruvalis-yak-vnutrishno-peremishcheni-osobi-pislya-vprovadzhennya-voyennogo-stanu>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94176>

^{iv} <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-inclusion-persons-disabilities-humanitarian-action/documents/iasc-guidelines>

^v https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaimplementationfordrren.pdf

^{vi} <https://www.undrr.org/publication/european-forum-disaster-risk-reduction-roadmap-2021-2030>