



2 December 2022 – For immediate release

## International Day of Persons with Disabilities: The international community must support persons with disabilities in Ukraine

Ahead of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (3 December), we call on the Russian Federation to immediately end its war against Ukraine. We also call on the EU, its Member States, the Ukrainian Government, the United Nations and the whole humanitarian community to ensure the over 2.7 million persons with disabilities affected by the war in Ukraine are fully supported by the humanitarian response. We demand, in particular, that increased support is given to persons with disabilities and their families who will face cold and inclement weather and further deprivations throughout winter. All planned recovery and reconstruction efforts must be inclusive and accessible and fully involve persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.

### Impact of the Russian war against Ukraine on persons with disabilities

Figures from June suggest that over 143.000 persons with disabilities were displaced due to the war. Many more continue to suffer under constant attacks and Russian aggression.

Among those persons, there is [Nastya](#), a 5-year-old child whose family faced difficulties fleeing to Krakow. [Andrii and his wife](#), who were supported by the Latvian Disability Council (SUSTENTO) in finding new wheelchairs and jobs. And there were also people that live segregated in institutions, including [225 persons that had to flee from a residential institution in Donetsk](#).

Our member, the [National Assembly for Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine](#), gathered messages from people with disabilities. The 4 key messages include:

1. "We aspire not only to be heard but also to understand our concerns and the challenges we face every day";
2. "We are facing consequences that are hard to imagine";
3. "The fears of winterisation overwhelm us and prevent us from living";
4. "This war destroys the destinies of our children; Children with disabilities are almost completely excluded from the process of education, communication with peers, from childhood."

We urge the EU, the EU Member States, the Ukrainian Government, the United Nations, and the whole humanitarian community, to involve representative organisations of persons with disabilities in all humanitarian decision-making. This approach must cover:

1. All stages of humanitarian aid, with emphasis on preparedness for response;
2. Persons with disabilities in all contexts, including those still living in their homes in Ukraine, those internally displaced within the country and those seeking asylum and refuge in other countries;
3. The disability-inclusive reconstruction and EU Accession of Ukraine – including a carefully planned, effective and comprehensive process of transition to community living.

## Humanitarian aid and emergency responses

For deaf persons like Antonina, a resident of Kharkiv, "[the bombs came without warning](#)". This article from journalist Jane Arraf for the New York Times illustrates one of the many failings in including persons with disabilities in emergency responses. Other failings include [bomb shelters that are not accessible for persons with disabilities](#) (due to stairs or other barriers).

Some forms of humanitarian aid also fail to reach persons with disabilities. A [recent study on the feasibility of cash grants](#) showed that these are highly needed. The report, produced by the National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine, Global Disability Inclusion, and the European Disability Forum, shows that unrestricted cash (cash assistance not restricted to consumption of certain types, such as vouchers that only work to buy food) is the preferred type of assistance for persons with disabilities due to the many accessibility barriers they face and the needs they have.

We, therefore, call on all actors to:

1. 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;
2. 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;
3. Include organisations of persons with disabilities in Ukraine in their humanitarian response and recovery and reconstruction planning
4. Provide all information in accessible formats
5. Provide full and effective access for all to evacuation activities and to humanitarian corridors
6. 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

7. Build disability-inclusive resilience in line with the Sendai Framework and the UNDRR Roadmap for Europe and Central Asia 2021-2030.

## Guaranteeing support

Finding [accessible transport and assistive devices, such as wheelchairs](#); Accessing [healthcare, education or support services](#); [Finding a job](#). These are just some of the many challenges that face persons fleeing Ukraine.

Disability organisations and other civil society organisations have stepped up to fill the gaps left by governments and the UN. However, responsibility for this lies with governments and international and humanitarian organisations. There is little or no reliable official data on the situation of Ukrainians with disabilities who have fled the war.

**Yevgeniya Pavlova** from the [National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine](#) said:

"We are deeply concerned about the lack of official data on the number of killed and injured persons with disabilities, and the lack of information about those people with disabilities who still remain in temporarily occupied territory (in particular those in institutions) or that were deported to Russia. There is a lack of official data about the number of children and adults with disabilities that have been subjected to violence, torture, and harsh treatment".

We call for solidarity, encouragement and cooperation. We all need to join our forces to protect the rights of people with disabilities, to prevent violations and to stop the hostilities."

We call on the EU, hosting countries and international organisations to:

1. Prevent the institutionalisation of persons with disabilities who have fled Ukraine;
2. Ensure that long-term integration procedures are fully accessible to persons with disabilities - including housing, employment, health, education and social protection;
3. Ensure that the Ukrainian government has proper support to ensure the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

## Disability-Inclusive Reconstruction processes

International actors – including the EU and all its countries – must pledge their utmost support and resources to Ukraine's path to reconstruction.

We consider that Ukraine's future must entail an inclusive and resilient society. Such a future requires prioritisation of accessibility and Universal Design, with financial support to ensure these principles. This reconstruction must also be underpinned by human

rights and be done in full consultation with civil society, including meaningful participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organisations.

**Daria Sydorenko**, from "[The League of the Strong](#)" said:

"Now in Ukraine, it is the time of challenges and opportunities, opportunities to carry out such necessary reforms as deinstitutionalisation, development of social services, inclusion of people with disabilities in public life and many others. We, the League of the Strong, member and partner organisations as well as representatives of the Ukrainian civil sector, despite the deterioration of working conditions, are ready to take responsibility and move the processes forward. At the same time, we hope for your support and participation."

We call on the Ukrainian Government, the EU, and international organisations to:

1. 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.
2. Avoid funding the building or refurbishment of segregating institutions; use best practice examples of community living to contribute to the process of deinstitutionalisation of children and adults with disabilities in Ukraine.
3. Dedicate sufficient funding to accessibility and reasonable accommodation during the earliest planning stages of all activities;
4. Disaggregate population data by disability using the [Washington Group questions](#).

## **Our work**

Together with 12 partner organisations across eight countries, and thanks to the support of CBM International, the European Disability Forum has coordinated a programme that has:

- Addressed the immediate needs of more than 20,000 people and their families;
- Advocated for disability inclusion in the wider humanitarian response at local, national and European level;
- Supported strengthening of the disability movement in the medium to long-term

Our achievements to date are available [in a recent report](#). The work continues into 2023.

**Gunta Anca**, EDF Vice-President, said:

"Persons with disabilities affected by the war in Ukraine need our support, inside and outside Ukraine. The European Disability movement strongly condemns this war. Our members, including organisations of persons with disabilities in Ukraine, are doing all they can to assist persons with disabilities and their families. The situation is getting harder as winter sets in and attacks on civilians and basic infrastructure continue. We call on governments to increase their efforts – we need more resources and support, and we need to ensure accessibility of information, procedure and buildings, especially

those buildings reconstructed during and after the war. We also need the international community to support Ukraine in constructing a brighter, accessible future for persons with disabilities – a future where they live included in the community as they continue on their path to join the European Union."

## Related notes

- [More information about our work supporting persons with disabilities affected by the war.](#)

## Notes to editors

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The [European Disability Forum](#) is an umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities that defends the interests of 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform that brings together representative organisations of persons with disabilities across Europe. It is run by persons with disabilities and their families. EDF is a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe