Statement on the situation of persons with disabilities in Armenia: Written submission for the EU delegation

*17th October 2022*

This statement has been written for the EU preparatory meeting with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) ahead of the Human Rights dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Armenia on the 7th November 2022.

The [European Disability Forum](https://www.edf-feph.org) as well as [Disability Rights Agenda (DRA)](http://www.dra.am/) in Armenia welcome Armenia's adoption of the Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" in 2021, which, among other rights, recognizes and protects the right of persons with disabilities to be protected from discrimination. However, it is worrisome that several cases of violation of the law have already been recorded, including the fact that the government, contrary to the requirements of the law, has not adopted the Complex Program on Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities for 2022-2026. That document was supposed to ensure systematic, targeted, continuous, and effective implementation of state policy.

According to the RA Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, public and industrial buildings should be reconstructed within three years to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. There is no effective accessibility monitoring mechanism and inaccessible buildings continue to be built in the country, including with the funds of the state budget. However, the government does not make significant efforts to address this issue, and systemic measures aimed at ensuring accessibility are not planned for 2023 either.

Despite the announced deinstitutionalization policy, the government does not show enough will to transition towards services in communities and closing institutions. Next year, compared to 2021, the government plans to reduce the number of people receiving home care by about 700. Instead, the number of people living in institutions will increase by 94 people. There are also raising concerns regarding potential reforms of the law on sterilisation that could lead to the authorisation of forced sterilisation of persons with disabilities.

Due to the tense situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, it is especially urgent to ensure independent living and community-based services for around 450 persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities living in Armenia's biggest Psychoneurological Boarding House in Vardenis.

Concerning information has been received regarding the rights of displaced persons with disabilities from the regions affected by the Azerbaijani aggression since September 13, 2022. According to a local organisation of persons with disabilities (OPD), systematic evacuation was not carried out in some targeted rural communities, as a result of which only those who had the opportunity were able to leave for a safer place. In some cases, when the evacuation was carried out by communities, the evacuation of families of persons with disabilities was organized at the end. Also, there is no disaggregated data based on age, gender, and disability, including the number of victims among civilians, displaced persons, etc. According to open data, about 11,000 people were injured as a result of the 2020 war, and 1,498 of them were recognized as having a disability[[1]](#footnote-1). As a result of the 2022 aggression, at least 7600 persons were displaced from Gegharkunik, Syunik and Vayots Dzor provinces[[2]](#footnote-2).

Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we consider it important to increase efforts aimed at cooperation, dialogue, and exchange of experience between Armenian OPDs and European OPDs, especially in mental health, deinstitutionalization and disaster risk reduction and emergency response.

We also call on the EU to use its influence by calling on the government of Armenia to:

* adopt a comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the Law “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” with sufficient budget and benchmarks for the removal of barriers, with enforceable and effective sanctions for non-compliance;
* establish monitoring mechanisms with the involvement of persons with disabilities to ensure that accessibility standards, such as [ISO 21542](https://www.iso.org/standard/50498.html) on the usability and accessibility of the built environment (aligned with the European Standard [EN 17210](https://standards.cencenelec.eu/dyn/www/f?p=CEN:110:0::::FSP_PROJECT,FSP_ORG_ID:65077,2274045&cs=1EBB531650B5200F9683431EC41E4AED1)) are met, as well as relevant sanctions for non-compliance with accessibility standards are enforced;
* develop, implement and provide adequate human and financial resources for an effective deinstitutionalization plan, particularly for developing independent living services in the community with the support of personal assistance, including guaranteeing that no institutions be renovated beyond the most urgent measures necessary to safeguard residents' physical safety;
* ensure the safety of all persons with disabilities in its conflict-affected areas by all possible means, systematically register internally displaced persons with disabilities, and provide them with an adequate standard of living, including mental health services, safe spaces, and vocational training for persons with disabilities;
* increase the participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations in all international cooperation programmes, in accordance with article 33 (3) of the Convention.

For more information, feel free to contact:

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1. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Clarification on medical-social examinations and re-examinations of veterans with disabilities in 2020, July, 2022 <https://www.mlsa.am/?p=36015> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, Ad Hoc Public Report on Consequences of Azerbaijani Military Attack on the Republic of Armenia, September, 2022, <https://ombuds.am/images/files/bb0ed8808617aa8b63c6a52e2891c7b3.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)