

People with Disabilities in Ukraine – A Call for Action

Muhammad Mainuddin Patwary;^{1,2}  Sarah Polack;³ Albina Zharkova;⁴ Sarya Swed;⁵ Sheikh Shoib⁶

1. Environment and Sustainability Research Initiative, Khulna 9208, Bangladesh
2. Environmental Science Discipline, Life Science School, Khulna University, Khulna 9208, Bangladesh
3. International Centre for Evidence in Disability, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, London, United Kingdom
4. Department of Family Medicine, Sumy State University, Ukraine
5. Faculty of Medicine, Aleppo University, Aleppo, Syria
6. Department of Psychiatry, Jawahar Lal Nehru Memorial Hospital, Srinagar, Kashmir, India

Correspondence:

Muhammad Mainuddin Patwary
Environment and Sustainability Research Initiative
Khulna 9208, Bangladesh
Environmental Science Discipline
Life Science School
Khulna University
Khulna 9208, Bangladesh
E-mail: raju.es111012@gmail.com

Conflicts of interest/funding: The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research received no external funding.

Keywords: conflict; humanitarian crisis; people with disabilities; public health; Ukraine; universal health coverage

Received: November 8, 2022

Accepted: November 27, 2022

doi:[10.1017/S1049023X22002400](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049023X22002400)

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Patwary MM, Polack S, Zharkova A, Swed S, Shoib S. People with disabilities in Ukraine – a call for action. *Prehosp Disaster Med.* 2023;38(1):139–140.

An estimated three million disabled people live in Ukraine.¹ According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA; New York USA) estimation, 13% of persons requiring humanitarian aid in Ukraine were disabled even before the Russian invasion in February of this year (2022).¹ As the Russian invasion continues, disabled people and their families face significant barriers to protection, basic services, health care access, and humanitarian aid and are at disproportionately higher risk of being left behind.

The situation is dire for many disabled people affected by the war in Ukraine. Long journeys, overcrowded stations, and inadequate and inaccessible transit can make it challenging for some disabled persons to escape. Public shelters are often located in basements that are inaccessible for some disabled people, for example wheelchair users. Further, crucial information on safety and evacuation is often not provided in accessible formats like Braille and sign language, making it difficult for individuals with sensory impairments to seek essential protection.²

Disabled people are, on average, at greater risk of poor health and face barriers to health services and this is magnified by humanitarian crises. Prior to the current invasion, research found disabled people in conflict-affected areas of Ukraine faced physical and financial difficulties accessing health and rehabilitation facilities, often having to choose between affording food or health care. The damage to infrastructure in the recent conflict is further impeding access to health care professionals, leading to more unmet medical and rehabilitation requirements. The mental health effects of conflict are well-recognized, and disabled people are particularly susceptible due to evacuation and resource access issues and exposure to violence and social isolation.³

Women and girls, children, and older persons with disabilities are at higher risk related to their multiple intersecting social identities. For example, studies show children with disabilities are more likely to be neglected and mistreated than non-disabled children.⁴ Evidence also shows that people with intellectual disabilities are at high risk of stigma, discrimination, and marginalization.⁴

We call for unity and an immediate cessation to the Russian invasion. We support the International Disability Alliance's (IDA; Geneva, Switzerland) calls for all parties to follow international humanitarian law to protect disabled people in Ukraine, in particular Article 11 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which has been signed by both Russia and Ukraine.² Thus, the following recommendations could be adopted for the well-being of disabled people in Ukraine:

- There is increasing need for effective implementation, assessment, and explanation of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* to impact humanitarianism.
- Strengthen disability inclusion in all stages of humanitarian response and programs; for example, the Humanitarian Inclusions Standards⁵ and the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.⁶
- “Nothing about us without us:” Persons with disabilities are a diverse group with a broad range of needs, skills, and capabilities. Disabled people and their representative organizations must be engaged and consulted in the planning of and delivery of the humanitarian response in Ukraine.
- Collect data on disability and use them for advocacy and to inform, to strengthen, and to monitor disability inclusion within programs; for example, resources from Humanity and Inclusion.⁷
- Pay attention, in particular, to internally displaced disabled people in Ukraine who have lost their homes and require support, including with housing, medical expenses, and food. Additionally, it puts a strain on the social affairs divisions in western Ukraine.



- Because of this, local disabled persons are unable to access adequate medical and social aids. Undoubtedly, several forms of psychological care for attack survivors who are handicapped or fragile. This is a particular branch, especially for those with mental disabilities who occasionally experience bombing. The majority of humanitarian agencies concentrate on the injured.
- Needed assistive technology and strengthen systems to improve access to mental health and psychosocial services.
- During and in the aftermath of conflicts, ensure quality and inclusive education for disabled children.

- Under *Universal Health Coverage*, governments should ensure that health care and social protection systems are gender-sensitive and include all vulnerable populations.

Author Contributions

Muhammad Mainuddin Patwary: Conceptualization, writing-original draft, review, and editing.

Sarah Polack: Writing-review and editing.

Albina Zharkova: Writing-review and editing.

Sarya Swed: Writing-review and editing.

Sheikh Shoib: Writing-review and editing.

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