

THE KVINNA TILL KVINNA FOUNDATION

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

DISABILITY, GENDER AND SECURITY

Content

INTRODUCTION	3
A NOTE ON DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE	5
IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON DISABILITY RIGHTS	6
MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION IN HUMANITARIAN AND CRISIS RESPONSE, RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION	8
DISPLACEMENT AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES	10
SHIFTING FROM INSTITUTIONAL CARE	11
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND ORGANISATIONS WORKING ON DISABILITY RIGHTS	12
RECOMMENDATIONS	13

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Introduction

In the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe region, riddled with various forms of conflict, from protracted to all-out war, the topic of disability rights through the lens of gender and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) is relatively unexplored. In this paper, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation analyses and highlights several key issues and priorities for women and girls with disabilities,¹ through the prism of inclusivity and meaningful participation in crisis response, humanitarian efforts, conflict transformation and peace negotiations, humanitarian efforts, and post-conflict reconstruction and recovery. The rights of displaced women and girls with disabilities, access to a variety of services, as well as fragmentation within the community will also be addressed. These insights were collected through a series of interviews and workshops on this topic, conducted with Kvinna till Kvinna partner organisations and community members across the region.

On a global scale, the rights of women and girls with disabilities frequently remain outside of the Women Peace and Security framework and holistic security considerations. Women and girls with disabilities are uniquely impacted by war and conflict, including through increased rates of gender-based and other forms of violence during conflict.² Their specific needs and priorities are not considered in conflict and post-conflict environments and response strategies. Despite their potential to contribute unique perspectives to key processes, they do not hold agency and do not participate meaningfully in decision-making on policy and community levels in conflict transformation and peace negotiations, designing humanitarian aid, or post-conflict recovery processes. There is a prominent lack of detailed, standardised, disaggregated data,³ research, and analysis in this regard, including in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe region. There is currently no known tracking of

representation of women with disabilities in peace processes, either in formal or informal roles,⁴ and this is not prioritised by major actors.

Between 1992 and 2019, women comprised, on average, only 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 percent of signatories in major peace processes globally.⁵ In the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, these figures are even less and in the vast majority of cases – women are non-existent.⁶ Against the background of such meagre statistics for women's participation, the inclusion of those with intersecting experiences of marginalisation is an issue that is constantly deprioritised by all those involved. This is certainly the case in the region, where the exceptional contributions of women with disabilities to peace, conflict transformation, humanitarian response, reconstruction and recovery processes, and the situation of displaced communities, have been neglected almost entirely. This paper is an attempt to shed light on some of the main priorities and challenges in this regard.

¹ When referring to women and girls with disabilities, we mean women with all types of disabilities, including physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities, as well as those with multiple or invisible disabilities

² Abuali, Batool. *Youth blog: Why we need women with disabilities in peacebuilding*, UN Women, 5 August 2021, <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/08/why-we-need-women-with-disabilities-in-peacebuilding>

³ Ortoleva, Stephanie, *Women with Disabilities: The Forgotten Peace Builders* in Loy. L.A. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev. 83 (2010) https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/events/20oct10_sortoleva.doc

⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Joint submission on promoting and protecting the human rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations*, 5 April 2021, https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/05/joint-submission-promoting-and-protecting-human-rights-women-and-girls-conflict-and#_ftnref8

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Kvinna till Kvinna, *Listen to Her – Gendered Effects of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and Women's Priorities for Peace*, 2019, <https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/publications/listen-to-her-gendered-effects-of-the-conflict-over-nagorno-karabakh-and-womens-priorities-for-peace/>



Kristine Kirakosyan is coordinator of peer support and mentoring in the Armenian disability rights organisation Agate, which was founded in 2007 to empower women with disabilities.

Photo: Nellie Shishmanjan

- Globally, 1 out of 5 women experience disability, compared to 1 out of 8 men. More than 1 billion people experience some form of disability.⁷
- Crises increase the number of persons acquiring new disabilities and result in worsening health for persons with disabilities.⁸
- Persons with disabilities face a heightened risk of dying during humanitarian crises and emergencies, as they encounter additional difficulties evacuating, fleeing and staying safe.⁹
- Gender-based violence (GBV) is a serious concern during humanitarian crises. Women and girls with disabilities already have a heightened risk of many forms of violence, which is further elevated in a crisis.¹⁰
- In conflict settings, persons with newly acquired disabilities are often men. In contexts where men are the primary or sole breadwinner, time out of work due to recovery or newfound disability discrimination in employment can have profound impacts on household poverty.¹¹

⁷ UN Women, *Strategy – The Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities: Towards Full and Effective Participation and Gender Equality*, December 2018, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/Empowerment-of-women-and-girls-with-disabilities-en.pdf>

⁸ Cote, Alexandre (UNICEF), Morgon Banks, Lena (LSHTM) et al., Eds. *Global Disability Inclusion Report: Accelerating Disability Inclusion in a Changing and Diverse World, Conference Edition*, Global Disability Summit, 2025, p.128, https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/GIP03351-UNICEF-GDIR-Full-report_Proof-4.pdf

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131

A note on disability-inclusive language

There is an ongoing debate in terms of the language used when discussing disability rights, individuals, and communities. The person-first language ('people/women with disabilities') stance argues that people should come before disabilities and should not be labelled 'disabled', as that approach 'equates the person with a condition'¹² and that focus should be placed on the individual, rather than their disability.¹³ On the other hand, identity-first language, proposed by the Social Model of Disability, maintains that disabilities are part of one's identity and the term 'disabled people/women' maintains that disabilities are brought on by inaccessible environments and social barriers, rather than the individual.¹⁴ This model refers to 'people/women with impairments', rather than 'people/women with disabilities' and has been a model that has been increasingly gaining ground, especially among young people and some disabled communities.¹⁵

All of the above are valid arguments, and it is essential to understand how to speak about or with people with disabilities, including as able-bodied allies and advocates. It is essential to note, however, that these terms largely stem from the English language and vocabulary, and that the diversity of languages used within communities in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe contexts should take precedence.

Also, in some cases, incorrect interpretations and translations of existing terminology could lead to dire consequences. For example, after Ukraine had made significant steps to eradicate discriminatory language and streamline inclusive terminology, language-related concerns have resurfaced following the introduction of WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

(ICF). Due to translation errors in the Ukrainian version of the ICF, new terms have emerged that focus on a person's limitations and health conditions. This poses a risk that these medicalised terms may replace existing inclusive terminology.

Kvinna till Kvinna's partner organisations have different approaches, some use person-first language and others identity-first, some state that people/women with disabilities should not be defined by an adjective ('disabled') while others support the notion that disabilities are the result of external factors and lack of accessibility/inclusivity of surrounding environments. This is not about policing the language of others but acknowledging that these debates exist. The preference of the individuals that the dialogue is held with or about should be given precedence. The bottom line is that the voices of the community of people with disabilities must be central in shaping the terminology related to disability. For ease of reference and previous practice, this paper will use the term 'people/women with disabilities.'



¹² ADA National Network, *Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities*, <https://adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing#:~:text=In%20general%2C%20refer%20to%20the,can%20be%20disrespectful%20and%20dehumanizing>

¹³ Endeavour Foundation, *Disability-Inclusive Language: A Handy Guide*, 21 May 2025, <https://www.endeavour.com.au/about-us/our-stories/blog-posts/should-i-say-disabled-or-person-with-disability>

¹⁴ Disability Rights UK, *Social Model of Disability: Language*, <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/social-model-disability-language>

¹⁵ Endeavour Foundation, *Disability-Inclusive Language: A Handy Guide*, 21 May 2025, <https://www.endeavour.com.au/about-us/our-stories/blog-posts/should-i-say-disabled-or-person-with-disability>

Impact of conflict on disability rights

The South Caucasus and Eastern Europe region has a long history of protracted conflicts and wars.¹⁶ There have been some studies and analyses into the gendered impact of these different forms of conflict on women and girls. This impact, however, is different for women and girls with disabilities.

For people with disabilities, war presents a unique set of challenges that those without disabilities do not experience in the same way. These challenges include obstacles in accessing information and resources, maintaining their health, finding suitable and adequate shelters, obtaining access to basic necessities and services, safe and dignified evacuating at every stage of the conflict, and being engaged in post-conflict recovery planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Across the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, in times of crisis and conflict, the rights of women with disabilities have been continuously deprioritised. In an active war, state institutions and society shift to crisis mode and tend to deprioritise resource distribution and inclusion of the needs of more marginalised communities. Hostilities and armed conflict put a strain on state agencies and society, which in turn affects their priorities in terms of resource distribution and response strategies.

People, and especially women, with disabilities encounter different risks and challenges because of war compared to people without disabilities. The challenges that people with disabilities faced during the initial phases of the Russian war against Ukraine, for example, demonstrated the limited effectiveness of the system of social protection of people with disabilities. Rescue and evacuation during the war was frequently undertaken by people with disabilities themselves, having to face accessibility barriers in a crisis environment and

derive makeshift solutions. This, while demonstrating the unpreparedness of the state structure to provide accessible evacuation models, has driven women with disabilities to take up active roles in providing both first-responder efforts and accessible humanitarian support.

Across the region, evacuation efforts of persons with disabilities have revealed serious gaps. Systematic evacuation procedures were largely absent, families were often evacuated only at the final stage of the process, accessible shelters and other alternative accommodation were rarely provided. There remains a significant lack of disaggregated data on the needs of vulnerable groups.¹⁷

War and conflict have given rise to new and alarming trends across the region. In Ukraine, since 2022, a new threat has emerged for women with disabilities in terms of their exploitation in efforts to evade military mobilisation or cross the Ukrainian border. Marrying a woman with a disability allows men of conscription age to leave Ukraine legally. This has led to multiple online advertisements seeking women with disabilities for fictitious marriages in exchange for payment. As reported by one of Kvinna till Kvinna's partners, and given the sensitivity of this issue, there is no statistical information or data available on the extent of this problem or the number of women who agree to such proposals. However, difficult financial circumstances and a lack of understanding of the consequences may lead to serious risks. Firstly, such arrangements present safety and security concerns for women with disabilities who agree to marry and travel abroad with men they know little about. Secondly, according to Kvinna till Kvinna's partner, there have already been cases where women with disabilities were held criminally liable when the marriage was found to be fictitious. This

¹⁶ Including Russia's war against Ukraine, which began in 2014, with a full-scale invasion launched in 2022 and still ongoing, and the mass exodus of the entirety of the ethnic Armenian population from the disputed Nagorno Karabakh territory after Azerbaijan's hostilities in 2023 and the Second Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020. The self-declared republic of Nagorno-Karabakh ceased to exist from Jan 1, 2024.

¹⁷ The European Disability Forum, Disability Rights Agenda (DRA), *Joint Statement on the situation of persons with disabilities in Armenia: Written submission for the EU delegation* <https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2023/12/2022.10.17-Armenia-DRA-Submission-to-the-EU-Delegation.docx>

speaks of a concerning gendered dimension of the effects of conflict on women with disabilities.

Conflict and gender dynamics intersect with and amplify the barriers that women and girls with disabilities experience. In the region, individuals (the vast majority of whom are men) who have gained disabilities as a result of military engagement seemingly receive more respect, privileges and benefits than other people with disabilities. In highly militarised societies, such as those in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe, the level of regard and esteem for veterans of war and ex-combatants with disabilities is so high that everyone, including other people with disabilities, accepts this status quo.¹⁸

Through another lens, veteran women with disabilities also face various forms of discrimination and lack of specialised support. In Ukraine, while many

guarantees are outlined on paper, in practice, accessing these rights remains difficult. In addition to respect, gratitude, and esteem also described above, these individuals may face stereotypes, particularly regarding their mental health.¹⁹

Moreover, in terms of intersecting aspects of conflict and gender, due to societal stigma and attitudes, women with disabilities are generally seen as devoid of sexuality and that they are unable or unwilling to have children. This creates further difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).²⁰ Additionally, this aspect exposes women with disabilities to further exclusion and ostracising in a militarised or post-conflict environment, where the accent is frequently on motherhood as a key to 'reproduce the nation' by 'supplying future soldiers' and 'protectors of the motherland'.²¹



The Armenian organisation Agate empowers women and girls with disabilities to become self-confident leaders who can protect their rights in society.

Photo: Nelli Shishmanyan

¹⁸ Davies, Sarah; Saleh, Ola; Snip, Inge; *No Time to Give Up: Building Feminist Futures in the South Caucasus*, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, December 2024, <https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-No-time-to-give-up.pdf>

¹⁹ Global Disability Fund, *Situational Analysis on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine, Country Full Report*, March 2025, <https://globaldisabilityfund.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/SITAN-Ukraine.pdf>

²⁰ Davies, Sarah; Saleh, Ola; Snip, Inge; *No Time to Give Up: Building Feminist Futures in the South Caucasus*, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, December 2024, <https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-No-time-to-give-up.pdf>

²¹ Kvinna till Kvinna, *Listen to Her – Gendered Effects of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and Women's Priorities for Peace*, 2019, <https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/publications/listen-to-her-gendered-effects-of-the-conflict-over-nagorno-karabakh-and-womens-priorities-for-peace/>

Meaningful participation and inclusion in humanitarian and crisis response, recovery and reconstruction

Just as women and girls with disabilities are largely excluded from humanitarian and crisis response planning, they are equally excluded from reconstruction and recovery strategies and policies. The lack of disaggregated data on people with disabilities across the region also results in humanitarian and crisis response measures, and recovery efforts, without consideration for inclusivity and accessibility.

The importance to include people with disabilities and the organisations that represent them in key decision-making processes is emphasised in the 2019 UN Security Council Resolution 2475 on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict. The Resolution urges Member States to “enable the meaningful participation and representation of persons with disabilities, including their representative organisations, in humanitarian action, conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation, reconstruction and peacebuilding, and to consult with those with expertise working on disability mainstreaming.”²²

Women’s rights organisations working to promote disability rights are also the primary actors fostering leadership opportunities and skills among women and girls with disabilities, including those with psychosocial and intellectual impairments, who are one of the most excluded groups. This enables them to meaningfully engage in these mechanisms and platforms. This is also done through small grants opportunities disbursed to displaced and conflict-affected women with disabilities to lead the implementation of inclusive initiatives within their communities.

Public awareness raising and non-formal education opportunities, online and offline, serve to

break barriers and address societal stigma about the role of women and girls with disabilities, contributing to a shift in public attitudes and allocating more spaces for meaningful participation. These initiatives – once again designed and implemented primarily by women’s rights organisations – include dedicated courses and storytelling about prominent leader women with disabilities, presented in accessible formats.

Despite these efforts, women’s rights organisations working to advance disability rights, especially those located outside capital settings, do not have adequate access to decision- and policymaking platforms and spaces mandated by either national or international actors. This is due to a gap in awareness or deprioritisation of a holistic perspective, and, at times, administrative and financial convenience on the part of the organisers, which means that these platforms are frequently organised in capital settings.

Gendered dynamics and disparities also become apparent in further restrictions for women with disabilities from meaningful participation, as men with disabilities often enjoy more social mobility and independence than women. Women with disabilities often have childcare responsibilities, which they are unable to defer.²³ The same is in the case of mothers of children with disabilities, where no specific support services are available to allow the mother to participate in other spaces.²⁴

Meaningful participation in a variety of Women Peace and Security-related processes is also affected by a level of fragmentation, exclusion, and marginalisation within the community itself. People with intellectual impairments and mental

²² UN Security Council, *Resolution 2475 on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict*, Adopted by the Security Council at its 8556th meeting, on 20 June 2019, [https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2475\(2019\)](https://docs.un.org/en/s/res/2475(2019))

health disorders face discrimination and exclusion from even those spaces that are otherwise accessible to people with other types of disabilities.

Aside from the urban-rural divide, lack of meaningful participation is also fuelled by intergenerational gaps, with older actors often serving as 'gate-

keepers' and younger actors often not recognising the legacy and efforts of the older generation. Inter-community tensions between displaced and host communities also play a role, further contributing to these rifts, which, in turn, undermine meaningful and holistic participation for women with disabilities in a variety of fora and processes.²⁵

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Photo: Alina Harnush

²³ Davies, Sarah; Saleh, Ola; Snip, Inge; *No Time to Give Up: Building Feminist Futures in the South Caucasus*, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, December 2024, <https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-No-time-to-give-up.pdf>

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ As per the CRPD, 'Report of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on its Twenty-Seventh Session (15 August-9 September 2022)', 13 October 2022, UN Doc CRPD/C/27/2, "These observations are also underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the relevant Committee, which urges parties to ensure emergency and crisis response protocols, evacuation strategies, humanitarian aid content and distribution, in consultation with people with disabilities and disability rights organisations, ensuring their meaningful participation in the design, implementation, and monitoring of these efforts."

Displacement and conflict-affected women with disabilities

Due to the multitude of different conflicts, the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe region is home to diverse and large-scale communities of displaced people, those that were displaced in the 1990s, the 2020s, and are still facing the crisis of displacement. Beyond displacement, communities living in all the contexts across the region are affected by conflict in one way or another. These crises have impacted people with disabilities and women with disabilities differently.

Six months after the October 2023 exile, about 16 percent of the total population exile from Nagorno Karabakh²⁶ were people with disabilities. This group faced severe challenges in Armenia, such as difficulties in obtaining disability certificates and benefits under a new assessment system, limited accessible housing and transportation (with wheelchair-accessible taxis costing up to 15 times more than regular ones), inadequate specialised services and assistive devices, and a high risk of social isolation or institutionalisation. Displaced women and girls with disabilities were particularly vulnerable, often withdrawn from school or work due to costs, accessibility barriers, and safety concerns, while prevailing gender norms further restricted their independence and participation in decision-making.²⁷

Displaced people must have access to registration services in order to become eligible for state assistance and benefits, and, frequently, women are the ones filing applications for the entire family.²⁸ In many cases, however, the state registration and benefit system has been inaccessible to women with disabilities,²⁹ and the specific needs and

priorities of displaced people, such as subsidised access to assistive equipment, were not factored into the state allowance and benefit plan.

Displaced and conflict-affected women with disabilities are at a heightened risk of exposure to conflict-related sexual violence. This is due to a multitude of factors, such as isolation, loss of access to assistive equipment or support people and networks, limited mobility, communication barriers, etc.³⁰ The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) highlights 'that women and girls with disabilities are often at greater risk, both within and outside the home, of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation', and emphasises the need to incorporate a gender perspective in the promotion of people with disabilities' human rights and fundamental freedoms.³¹

Poor and inaccessible or non-adapted living conditions and housing are frequently one of the main reasons why people with disabilities refuse evacuation and choose to remain in dangerous circumstances, placing their physical and mental security further at risk.³² Many crisis and temporary housing solutions for displaced people across the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe lack means of accessibility, including ramps, lifts, accessible restrooms and sleeping areas, and other features necessary for people with disabilities. Living conditions in settlements for displaced people are often crowded and basic necessities are lacking, including access to generators to provide electricity during power outages, as well as stable internet connection and communications.

²⁶ A conflict-affected enclave, disputed between Azerbaijan and Armenia, after the First Nagorno Karabakh war in early 90's, predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians until September 2023, when over 100,000 ethnic Armenians were displaced as a result of Azerbaijan's military offensive. The territory is currently fully under Azerbaijan's control.

²⁷ UN Women, *Disability Inclusion and Gender Dynamics of the Armenia Refugee Crisis, Six months after the crisis*, Gender Alert II, https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/gender_alert_ii_eng_01.05.pdf

²⁸ Kapur, Bela, *A Woman's Work: Strengthening Women's Access to Benefits after the Second Nagorny Karabakh War*, Kvinna till Kvinna, 2022, <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/publications/a-womans-work-strengthening-womens-access-to-benefits-after-the-second-nagorny-karabakh-war/>

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Women Enabled International, *Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Conflict and Humanitarian Emergencies*, <https://womenenabled.org/wp-content/uploads/Women%20Enabled%20International%20-%20Rights%20of%20Women%20and%20Girls%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20Conflict%20and%20Humanitarian%20Emergencies%20-%20English.pdf>

³¹ CRPD, 'Report of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on its Twenty-Seventh Session (15 August-9 September 2022)', 13 October 2022, UN Doc CRPD/C/27/2

³² Kvinna till Kvinna, *The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation on Fundamental Rights in Ukraine: Submission for the Ukraine Country Report in the Context of Enlargement*, 16 May 2025

Shifting from institutional care

Deinstitutionalisation – a political and a social process, which provides for the shift from institutional care and other isolating and segregating settings to independent living³³ – is one of the key issues and advocacy priorities identified by Kvinna till Kvinna's partner organisations across the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe. They have put efforts into mapping the needs and priorities in terms of deinstitutionalisation reform, devise evidence-based recommendations and guidelines, and collaborate with responsible parties to advance long-term sustainable solutions.

During emergencies and armed conflict, deinstitutionalisation plans are often compromised or stalled. Displacement can lead to increased or protracted institutionalisation, especially if and when displaced people with disabilities are placed in institutions due to lack of alternative housing or support, or due to deprioritisation in crisis. For instance, the mass displacement from Nagorno Karabakh in 2023, resulted in a 22 percent increase in institutionalised people with disabilities in Armenia.³⁴

In Ukraine, the full-scale war has also led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities being institutionalised. Due to a lack of accessible and available housing, people with disabilities are increasingly being offered placements in institutional facilities. As a result, the number of adult residents in institutions increased by approximately 7,790 people during 2022-2023. Among them, at least 4,553 were internally displaced persons with disabilities.³⁵

During recent crises in the region, there have been cases where institutionalised people with intellectual and psychosocial impairments were displaced through emergency procedures, and then re-institutionalised in their new host environments

under more restrictive conditions, without access to their families and social networks, and without specific state support mechanisms.³⁶ Moreover, there were also instances where people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities who previously lived in their communities, were institutionalised after displacement due to an absence of adequate independent living and community support services.³⁷

In some contexts, deinstitutionalisation frequently means relocating people with disabilities from larger closed institutions to smaller home-style settings which hold no more than five to six people. Regulations, however, remain the same and people with disabilities housed in smaller-scale institutions still do not have access to their own assets, economic opportunities, or independent decision-making capacity. They remain isolated and cannot participate meaningfully in key processes, including setting the WPS agenda.

According to the CRPD, states should strive to accelerate deinstitutionalisation efforts during emergencies and crises, and that the planning and monitoring of these efforts should be implemented with the meaningful participation of people with disabilities, especially survivors of institutionalisation, and women's rights organisations working on disability rights. This would also provide the gender-responsiveness of these plans, as women and girls with disabilities are often at heightened risk of gender-based, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and of institutionalisation.³⁸ CRPD also calls for deinstitutionalisation to be included in national emergency protocols, including those for safe and accessible evacuation and transportation.³⁹

³³ The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), Deinstitutionalisation, <https://enil.eu/deinstitutionalisation/#:-:text=Deinstitutionalisation%20is%20a%20political%20and,be%20included%20in%20the%20community>

³⁴ The European Disability Forum, Disability Rights Agenda, *Written Submission on the Status of Institutionalization of Individuals with Disabilities in Armenia*, 8 October 2023, <https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2023/12/Written-Submission-on-Armenia-DRA-and-EDF.pdf>

³⁵ Fight for Right, *Study of the Institutional System of Ukraine Prior to Deinstitutionalization* (in Ukrainian), <https://ffr.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/DOSLIDZHENNYA-INSTYTUTSIJNOYI-SYSTEMY-UKRAYINY-NAPEREDODNI-DEINSTYTUTSIONALIZATSIYI.pdf>

³⁶ Chilingaryan, Anahit; Antonyan, Mariam; *The Problem of Institutionalization of People with Psychosocial and Intellectual Disabilities within the Context of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War*, CIFILE Journal of International Law, Vol. 4, No. 8, 1-27, September 2023, https://www.cifilejournal.com/article_168168.html

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ CRPD, *Guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies*, 9 September 2022, UN Doc CRPD/C/27/3

The situation of persons with disabilities living in institutional settings during wartime presents additional security risks, as mass evacuation of people with disabilities from institutions is extremely difficult. According to Kvinna till Kvinna's partners, as of June 2024, 20 institutional facilities in Ukraine with at least 3,000 residents remained under occupation in the Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, Kherson, and Donetsk regions. Many facilities were abandoned by staff or taken over by the occupying authorities, cutting residents off from food, medical care, and basic

services. Moreover, there is no existing mechanism for repatriating these individuals from occupied territories.⁴⁰

In addition, many institution residents lack access to information about relevant context updates, early warnings, security threats, and safety measures. As of 2023, at least 25 institutions in Ukraine were damaged due to shelling and/or hostilities, resulting in casualties among facility residents.⁴¹

Women's rights activists and organisations working on disability rights

Women's rights organisations frequently find themselves as first responders during military crises breaking out across the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe contexts while ensuring the provision of gendered humanitarian aid (e.g. menstrual products) and psychosocial and legal support. Similarly, organisations working at the intersection of women's and disability rights are the primary leaders of crisis response and humanitarian assistance measures and strategic support for people and women with disabilities due to the states' inability to provide relevant accessible services and evacuation.

Along with actively working to respond to the crisis, women's and disability rights organisations from the Kvinna till Kvinna network have studied international best practice on accessible humanitarian and evacuation response. They have conducted research and produced analysis, guidelines and recommendations on the specific needs and priorities of conflict-affected and displaced women and girls with disabilities. They have provided displaced and conflict-affected women and girls with disabilities, including survivors of gender-based violence, with basic legal and psychosocial support. They have

mapped and provided information in accessible formats on available state resources, services, and programmes, for the displaced community, as well as women and girls with disabilities living along conflict borders. They have worked to provide and facilitated access to emergency and specialised assistive equipment as part of humanitarian response and beyond, including wheelchairs.

While the efforts put forth by women's and disability rights organisations are indispensable, their scale and magnitude are relatively limited because of the women's rights organisations themselves lacking access to adequate, flexible and sustainable resourcing, capacity and human resource needs; and staff face burnout, stress, and secondary trauma. Women's rights organisations led by women with disabilities are 'not only receivers, but active providers of support' to the rest of the community, as noted by one of the leading activists from the region.

Women's rights organisations working on disability rights are also frequently the ones advocating for inclusive policies both on national and international levels and platforms.

³⁹ Kvinna till Kvinna, *The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation on Fundamental Rights in Ukraine: Submission for the Ukraine Country Report in the Context of Enlargement*, 16 May 2025

⁴⁰ Fight for Right, *Analytical Review: the Situation of persons with Disabilities in Institutions in the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine* (in Ukrainian), 2025, <https://ffr.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Analichnyj-oglyad.-Stanovyshhe-lyudej-v-instytutstiyah-na-tymchasovo-okupovanyh-Rosiyeyu-terytoriyah-Ukrayiny.pdf>

⁴¹ Fight for Right, *Study of the Institutional System of Ukraine Prior to Deinstitutionalization* (in Ukrainian), <https://ffr.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/DOSLIDZHENNYA-INSTYTUTSIJNOYI-SYSTEMY-UKRAYINY-NAPEREDODNI-DEINSTYTUTSIONALIZATSII.pdf>



Recommendations

Given the above, and to fully and effectively implement existing frameworks, recommendations and guidelines, including:

- the ODIHR Recommendations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Participate in Political and Public Life in the OSCE Region (Dublin Recommendations), with specific focus on the recommendation on gender-sensitive and intersectional representation;⁴²
- the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion on Gender Equality and its objective to highlight and promote the role of women in conflict prevention and peace reconstruction processes;⁴³
- the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 14/05 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation;⁴⁴
- and the OSCE WPS Roadmap including its recommendation to implement WPS commitments, taking into account persons in vulnerable and marginalised positions.⁴⁵

⁴² OSCE ODIHR, *Recommendations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Participate in Political and Public Life in the OSCE Region (Dublin Recommendations)*, 3 December 2023 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/1/559254.pdf>

⁴³ OSCE, *Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality*, 7 December 2004 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/d/23295.pdf>

⁴⁴ OSCE Ministerial Council, *Decision No. 14/05 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management, and Post-conflict Rehabilitation*, 6 December 2005 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/b/17450.pdf>

⁴⁵ OSCE, *WPS Roadmap – OSCE-wide roadmap for the implementation of commitments on Women, Peace, and Security*, 2025, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/1/590384.pdf>

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, together with partners in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe region, encourage the Organisation for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Member States, international donors, networks, and policy makers to:

Humanitarian and crisis response, recovery and reconstruction

- Design all humanitarian and crisis response, recovery, and reconstruction strategies with full, meaningful, and just participation of people and women with disabilities, as well as the organisations representing them and working to protect their rights, with special attention afforded to women and girls with disabilities and gendered perspectives;
- Ensure accessible infrastructure, public facilities and security features through recovery plans that take into account gender- and disability-responsive planning and design and that are evidence-based;⁴⁶
- Set up regular consultation mechanisms for and with people with disabilities and women's rights organisations working to advance disability rights to ensure gendered and disability-inclusive policy-making. This means budgeting for accessible transportation, sign language interpretation, accessible materials, and the consideration of the accessibility of locations. It also means decentralisation and the need to organise consultative platforms in non-capital settings;
- Ensure that accessibility and gender-responsiveness are a core principle in all recovery and reconstruction efforts to rebuild more inclusive communities, including in terms of physical and information infrastructure.⁴⁷

Displacement

- Ensure that displaced people have adequate access to registration services in order to become eligible for state assistance and benefits, and that this information is made available in accessible formats;
- Support the inclusion of specific needs and priorities of displaced people, such as subsidised access to assistive equipment and accessible housing, in state allowance and benefit plans;

- Allocate resources for the prevention and response to the exposure of displaced and conflict-affected women with disabilities to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and incorporate a gender and anti-CRSV perspective in the promotion of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of people with disabilities;

- Ensure the accessibility of both short-term and long-term housing solutions for displaced persons with disabilities. If accessibility cannot be ensured from the outset, adequate resources should be allocated to equip the housing with proper means of accessibility, including ramps, lifts, accessible restrooms and sleeping areas. Housing solutions should provide adequate space as well as basic necessities, including gendered hygienic supplies, access to sources of alternative power during electricity cuts, stable internet connection, and communications.

Deinstitutionalisation

- Support the implementation of deinstitutionalisation strategies and action plans, especially in crises; provide accessible services to ensure proper integration of people with disabilities in communities; and ensure that they benefit from all services and protection mechanisms available during armed conflict;
- Use evidence-based data collection and analysis to expand the scope, operationalisation, and efficiency of deinstitutionalisation strategies and action plans; including data and research on the prevention of institutionalisation and re-institutionalisation;
- Ensure, once emergency deinstitutionalisation takes effect and displaced people with disabilities are removed from closed institutions, that they are not re-institutionalised after conflict subsides;
- Regularly and meaningfully involve people with disabilities, as well as women's rights organisations and CSOs, in the implementation, monitoring and review of deinstitutionalisation strategies and action plans, ensuring the gender-responsiveness of these mechanisms;

⁴⁶ CRPD, 'Report of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on its Twenty-Seventh Session (15 August-9 September 2022)', 13 October 2022, UN Doc CRPD/C/27/2

⁴⁷ Felix, Andre, *The Warsaw declaration: disability-inclusive recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine*, European Disability Forum, 11 May 2024, <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/the-warsaw-declaration-disability-inclusive-recovery-and-reconstruction-of-ukraine/#:~:text=Prioritise%20the%20transition%20from%20residential,that%20segregates%20persons%20with%20disabilities>

- Include emergency and sustainable deinstitutionalisation efforts as one of the primary focus areas in emergency response planning, as well as recovery efforts.

Support to women's rights activists and organisations working on disability rights

- Ensure access to adequate, flexible, and sustainable funding, capacity development and human resources for women's rights organisations working on disability rights, including dedicated resources to address staff burnout, stress, and secondary trauma, and provide psychosocial support;
- Fund women's rights and disability rights organisations' work to combat stigma and discrimination around disability, including their advocacy work for anti-discrimination laws and policies, awareness-raising and opportunities for positive interactions between persons with and without disabilities;
- Provide accessible formats and platforms for women human rights defenders with disabilities to engage in key policy processes, not only directly related to disability rights, e.g. EU accession, humanitarian response, peacebuilding, etc;
- Provide resources to further analyse the impact of conflict on the nexus of gender and disability rights in the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe and explore awareness raising and educational opportunities, as well as ways to empower women with disabilities.

And lastly:

- Ensure the timely collection of disaggregated data by gender, age, and disability, to the extent possible, using accepted frameworks and tools, such as the Washington Group questions and applying the OECD DAC Disability Marker where relevant, including for the purposes of providing information and analysis to support the EU accession process;^{48 49}

- Effectively implement already-existing frameworks and guidelines, in particular the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), relevant OSCE frameworks, UN SCR 2475 (2019) on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.⁵⁰



Photo: Alina Hamosh

Oleksandra Vovchenko from the Ukrainian organisation Fight for Right takes part in an event in Kyiv.

⁴⁸ Felix, Andre, *The Warsaw declaration: disability-inclusive recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine*, European Disability Forum, 11 May 2024, <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/the-warsaw-declaration-disability-inclusive-recovery-and-reconstruction-of-ukraine/#:-:text=Prioritise%20the%20transition%20from%20residential,that%20segregates%20persons%20with%20disabilities>

⁴⁹ UN SCR 2475 (2019) on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict also calls for relevant thematic and geographic reports – such as, e.g., country reports in the context of EU enlargement – to include “information and related recommendations on issues of relevance to persons with disabilities, in the context of armed conflict”, as well as “to include ... data disaggregated by disability within existing mandates and within existing resources”.

⁵⁰ Felix, Andre, *The Warsaw declaration: disability-inclusive recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine*, European Disability Forum, 11 May 2024, <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/the-warsaw-declaration-disability-inclusive-recovery-and-reconstruction-of-ukraine/#:-:text=Prioritise%20the%20transition%20from%20residential,that%20segregates%20persons%20with%20disabilities>

**For all women's rights,
in every corner of the world.**