



CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction and objectives

Persons with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in situations of risk and emergency, facing significant challenges in terms of protection, safety, and inclusion in disaster management. As of 2021, an estimated 1.3 billion people – 16% of the global population – have a significant disability. Of these people, around 142 million experience severe levels of disability¹. This is due to a variety of factors, including lack of access to critical information, physical barriers, and discrimination in emergency planning and response efforts.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognizes the need to protect and ensure the safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and emergency. Article 11 of the CRPD states that "States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure

¹ World Health Organization. (2022). Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities. Geneva: Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600>



the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters²".

Despite the CRPD's emphasis on the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and emergency, many countries continue to neglect the inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster management. In this regard, a review of State Parties reports highlights the general scope of national emergency plans³. Plans that do not embed disability inclusion explicitly can have dire consequences, leaving persons with disabilities at increased risk of harm and further marginalization.

Research also indicates that persons with disabilities are severely impacted by the effects of climate change, which can exacerbate existing inequalities and pose additional challenges to inclusion in disaster management. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change on persons with disabilities, stating that "persons with disabilities are at heightened risk of adverse health outcomes, including mortality, morbidity, and psychological distress, from climate-sensitive health outcomes"⁴.

In addition, conflicts and humanitarian emergencies can also have a devastating impact on persons with disabilities. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), persons with disabilities are often at increased risk of violence, abuse and neglect in conflict and post-conflict settings, and they may face significant barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance⁵.

² Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York: United Nations; 2006

³ United Nations, 2018. Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with Persons with Disabilities.

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2014). Climate change 2014: impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability. Part A: Global and sectoral aspects.
https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WGIIAR5-PartA_FINAL.pdf

⁵ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (2018). People with disabilities and armed conflict.



The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need to enhance the inclusion and engagement of persons with disabilities in emergencies. According to the United Nations, the pandemic has "exposed and exacerbated the inequalities faced by persons with disabilities in their daily lives and in emergency situations"⁶. Persons with disabilities have faced significant barriers to accessing healthcare, education and other critical services during the pandemic, and they have been disproportionately affected by the economic and social impacts of the crisis.

In response to these challenges, the Member States of the United Nations requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk to the General Assembly at its seventy-eighth session, in line with General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/154. To inform this report, an expert group meeting (EGM) will be organized to discuss good practices and challenges in the implementation of Article 11 of the CRPD.

In addition, Member States requested the Secretary-General (A/RES/77/240) to address the development, use and implementation of easy-to-understand language as an accessibility resource and tool for persons with disabilities. The use of easy-to-understand language is a key component of accessibility, as it ensures that information is communicated clearly and concisely and is accessible to persons with cognitive and learning disabilities, including in situations of risk. Importantly, understanding regulatory frameworks, processes, and the functioning of institutions is a precondition to participating fully in society, particularly for persons with intellectual and learning disabilities.

Key topics

This EGM will bring together experts and practitioners from a range of fields, including disability rights, humanitarian aid and emergency response, to share good practices and experiences, identify challenges and gaps, and develop recommendations for action. The

⁶ United Nations. (2020). Disability-inclusive response and recovery from COVID-19. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/covid-19.html>



meeting will also examine the inclusion, protection and safety of persons with disabilities in enhancing efforts in the area of peace and security.

The outcomes of this EGM will inform the Secretary-General's report on the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and contribute to the promotion and mainstreaming of easy-to-understand communication for accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The meeting will aim to address the following key questions:

- What are the current challenges in ensuring the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and emergency, and how can they be addressed?
- What are some good practices for including and empowering persons with disabilities in emergency planning and response efforts?
- How can stakeholders work together to ensure that the needs and rights of persons with disabilities are prioritized in all stages of the disaster-management cycle?
- What are the challenges and limitations in the promotion of easy-to-understand communication, and how can they be addressed?
- What are some examples of successful initiatives or programs that have used easy-to-understand communication, and what lessons can be learned from these experiences?

Format of the meeting

The expert group meeting will be fully virtual and will include accessibility features such as sign language interpretation and CART. The meeting will be held over three days, with each day consisting of one session of two hours. Each session will include presentations by experts and stakeholders followed by a moderated discussion. The meeting will be facilitated by DISD with support from relevant UN agencies and civil society organizations.

Invited experts will have up to 15 minutes to present their contribution to an assigned theme. They will also be asked to provide written summary notes that will also serve as input to the meeting report.

Outcome of the meeting

DISD will prepare a brief report of the meeting, summarizing the discussions and recommendations. This document will also be produced in easy-to-read format. With the permission of the participants, their presentations will be posted on the meeting's website. The written notes should include key evidence on the current status of the theme that has been discussed, along with analysis and implications. These inputs will be used to develop recommendations that will feed into the Secretary-General's Report, which shall also be produced in easy-to-read format.

Mandate: DESA/DISD

The Programme on Disability Sections is within the Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Our global mission is to promote the rights and advancement of persons with disabilities within a broad mandate provided by the World Programme of Action (1982), Standard Rules (1994), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), as well as other relevant human rights instruments and development agreements.



AGENDA

Expert Group meeting: The protection of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and the uptake of easy to understand communication

On-line (Zoom), 2, 3 and 4 May 2023

Table 1. First day: Tuesday, 2 May 2023

Time	Session	Structure/content
9:00 am - 9:20 am Eastern Standard Time (EST)	Opening segment	Opening remarks House rules, aim of the report, overview of the two days
9:20 am - 11:00 am EST	Session 1: Engagement and inclusion in national and international policies, strategies and plans	Presentations followed by Q&A/discussion 1. Stefanie Dannenmann-Di Palma (UNDRR) 2. Sebastien Jodoin (Mcgill University) 3. Elham Youssefian (IDA) 4. Ricardo Pla Cordero (UNHCR) End of Day 1 wrap up



Table 2. Second day: Wednesday, 3 May 2023

Time	Session	Structure/content
9:00 am - 10:00 am EST	Session 2: Awareness, knowledge, and capacity on disability inclusion in situations of risk	<p>Summary of Day 1</p> <p>Presentations followed by Q&A/discussion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kirstin Lange (UNICEF) 2. 3.
10:00 am – 11:00 am EST	Session 3: Disability inclusion in situations of risks: moving forward	<p>Presentations followed by Q&A/discussion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annie Hans (Humanity and Inclusion) 2. 3. Charlotte Vuyiswa McClain-Nhlapo <p>End of Day 2 wrap up</p>

Table 3. Third day: Thursday, 4 May 2023

Time	Session	Structure/content
09:00 am – 11:00 am EST	Session 4: Promotion and uptake of Easy-to-Understand communication	Summary of Day 2 Presentations followed by Q&A/discussion 1. Margarita Serrano García (OHCHR) 2. 3. Ailis Hardy (Inclusion International) 4. Ola Abualghaib (UNPRPD)