

Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian aid and Civil Protection alike

by TZIVRA Roy (Source : My IntraComm)

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Since its proclamation in 1992 by the United Nations General Assembly, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities has been celebrated annually on 3 December around the world. It aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and to mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. The theme of the 2023 edition is: "United in action to rescue and achieve the SDGs for, with and by persons with disabilities". We talked with colleagues from DG ECHO working on disability inclusion as well as partner organisations who will participate in the upcoming policy dissemination event. To reflect the cross-cutting nature of disability inclusion in DG ECHO's line of work, we got insights from Agnieszka Pyszny-Pastouret, Policy Officer in the Humanitarian Aid Thematic Policies unit C.1 as well as from Anna Battistutta, Policy Officer in Civil Protection Horizontal issues unit B1.

Could you tell us more about your policy work on disability inclusion?

Agnieszka: Persons with disabilities constitute 16% of the global population, this percentage is likely to increase in emergencies. Making our humanitarian assistance inclusive and accessible to those most vulnerable remains an important priority, we have a dedicated Guidance which outlines our policy line. DG ECHO continues to engage with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), for instance in October the European Commission co-hosted the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network annual meeting in Brussels.

Anna: The issue of inclusivity of persons with disability is relevant for EU Civil Protection (CP) as well. CP is also committed to mainstreaming disability inclusion in its actions, such as in the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) capacity development, project funding, operations, scenario building initiatives and in raising awareness on disability inclusion. The 8th edition of

the European Civil Protection Forum will host a full workshop dedicated to the topic of 'Disability inclusion in emergencies' and will set the scene for interesting exchanges between first responders and persons with disabilities to trigger policy discussions. At the same time, the EU is developing its Disaster Resilience Goals (DGRs) in the area of civil protection and is paying particular attention to the causes of vulnerability, including disability.

Could you tell us more about what we can do concretely in the area of humanitarian aid?

Agnieszka: DG ECHO consistently reiterates to its humanitarian partners that disability inclusion is a responsibility for all actors and disability should be mainstreamed in all sectors of the response. It is important to remind this to colleagues ahead of the submission of project proposals, while reading the single form should ask themselves: "can this be considered inclusive and accessible for a beneficiary with disability?" Moreover, as a concrete step, we encourage our partners and ECHO staff to follow the new e-learning course on disability inclusion available at the ECHO Learning Solution Environment ([ELSE](#)) platform. We also encourage all staff to engage in dialogue with OPDs active in the country in which you are working and listen to their recommendations.

Gordon Rattray, European Disability Forum: Persons with disabilities are among those most impacted by humanitarian crises, and least involved in decision-making about emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. Key actions to change this include promoting meaningful participation, empowering persons with disabilities and their representative organisations while disaggregating data by disability and removing [barriers](#).

Could you give us a concrete example of mainstreaming disability in your project implemented in the Philippines?

Access Consortium: Our approach mainstreams and integrates disability inclusion in all phases of the project cycle — from identifying persons with disabilities and their specific needs and capacities, addressing these needs by using them to inform project design and implementation across humanitarian sectors, to monitoring and evaluation. This entire process is participatory, fully engaging persons with disabilities and upholding their dignity and safety.

Could you tell us more about what we can do concretely in the area of civil protection?

Anna: On disability inclusion, an issue faced is that it is not always clear who are the contact points within the Commission. Relevant representatives from Commission Services should gather and start discussions on how can we jointly and horizontally address this issue. . On top of that, continuing funding projects that include, inter alia, awareness raising actions, exercises, capacity building to assist people with disabilities in disasters, development of standards for response capacities (e.g. shelter), should certainly continue but with an increased sustainability of dissemination. Disability inclusion should be considered in all aspects of Civil protection, from prevention and Preparedness to Response.

Based on your experience in this field and with the project what recommendations would you have for DG ECHO?

Marijana Berket, Safe and Equal in Emergencies (SEEME) project: The most important aspect would be to enhance communication on the matter with Member States. Thanks to the project, we carried out a survey on the „status quo“ of inclusivity of persons with disabilities in civil protection. When examining the outcomes of analysis activity, we came to conclusion that this subject should be more emphasized in the Member States. We only received answers from four Member States which underlined the little interest. The answers themselves were not as extensive as we expected and it seems that not much is done in this field. At the same time, we strongly recommend that the Commission finance more projects on this subject as awareness raising is the first step to bring the issue on the table.