



# Strengthening Disability Inclusion in Community-based Disaster Preparedness

Thematic Guidance Note

February 2021

## Background

In 2020, an independent, comprehensive evaluation of disability inclusion within the DFAT-funded Disaster READY program was conducted. Based on the findings, practical guidance has been developed for disability inclusion within disaster preparedness activities.

This suite of thematic guidance includes:

- Influencing government-led disability inclusive disaster risk reduction
- Partnerships to enable disability inclusive disaster risk reduction and
- Using evidence to inform and monitor disability inclusive disaster risk reduction.

This guidance note focuses on strengthening disability inclusion in community-based disaster preparedness.

## Priority Issues for Preparedness

- People with disabilities are disproportionately disadvantaged by disasters and are more likely to be injured or die during a disaster than people without disabilities.
- Underlying disadvantages, such as higher risk of poverty, stigmatising attitudes, exclusionary policies and an inaccessible built environment further marginalise people with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response.
- Lower literacy caused by fewer opportunities to attend school results in people with disabilities having less access to disaster information and early warning messages. Further, information is rarely available in formats that are accessible to all.
- People with disabilities and their priorities are infrequently identified in community mapping exercises, resulting in invisibility of their requirements in community disaster response plans.
- Evacuation centres are frequently inaccessible to people with disabilities, for example lack ramps and accessible washrooms.
- People with disabilities are likely to lose assistive devices<sup>1</sup> during a disaster, which subsequently affects their ability to leave the house and participate in education, work and other roles.
- Underlying disadvantages experienced by women and girls with disabilities exacerbate the risk of gender-based violence and abuse following a disaster.
- Participation of people with disabilities in community disaster coordination mechanisms is limited, resulting in disaster response plans which exclude their needs and priorities.

## Raise awareness of the rights and situation of people with disabilities

- Positive attitudes towards people with disabilities are a precondition for their inclusion in mainstream disaster preparedness efforts.

<sup>1</sup> Assistive devices include glasses, wheelchairs, crutches, walking sticks, white canes, hearing aids etc.

- Collaborate with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and people with disabilities to raise national and community-level awareness of the issues faced by women, men, boys and girls with disabilities during disasters, and their right to inclusion in preparedness and response.
- Demonstrate and promote how disability inclusive disaster preparedness meets national policy commitments.

### **Ensure community disaster preparedness strategies are disability inclusive**

- Improve the composition of community disaster committees so that men and women with disabilities are represented and their priorities are voiced.
- In community assessments, use questions and methodologies which locate people with disabilities and identify their requirements and priorities.<sup>2</sup> Ensure the priorities of diverse people with disabilities are identified – including men, women, girls and boys with a range of disabilities. Engaging people with disabilities as data collectors can encourage discussion about disability inclusion.
- Support community disaster committees to draw on evidence collected during community assessments and the voices of people with disabilities to mainstream the priorities of people with disabilities into disaster plans.
- Support training for community disaster committees, community leaders and members in how to assist people with disabilities after a disaster.
- Educate community members in how to help people with disabilities in disasters and refer to other services, so that they know where people with disabilities are and how to support them after emergencies.
- Ensure community members with disabilities are involved in drills and simulations, and that resulting lessons regarding disability inclusion inform plans.
- Allocate budget to support disability inclusion in community disaster strategies.
- Monitor disability inclusion processes and outcomes, and involve people with disabilities and/or DPOs in monitoring efforts.

### **Ensure information is disability inclusive**

- Assume that mass communication strategies, including early warning systems, will not reach everyone. Meet the communication needs of particular groups, for example use sign language interpreters to convey information to deaf people, captions on television advertisements, and provide verbal information for people with low vision.
- Provide disaster and evacuation information in plain language or pictorial form, in vernacular where possible.
- Use communications as an opportunity to promote positive attitudes towards disability. Depict people with disabilities as participants in their households and communities, and use positive, non-discriminatory language.

<sup>2</sup> The Washington Group Short Set is recommended for use to identify disability status and enable disaggregation by disability.



## Ensure evacuation centres are accessible and inclusive

- Create evacuation centres that welcome people with disabilities and their support personnel.
- Use accessible design principles to ensure new or renovated buildings to be used as evacuation centres are accessible to all (See DFAT, 2013). This will benefit older people and parents of small children as well as people with disabilities.
- Review and address the accessibility of pathways and entryways to evacuation centres.
- Ensure the space inside evacuation centres is safe and accessible, including washrooms, kitchens and other facilities.
- Ensure people with disabilities and their support personnel have access to handwashing facilities, including soap and hand sanitiser.

## Support disability-specific requirements

- Map government and civil society disability support services and referral networks, including for services that provide assistive devices. Provide advice and training to these to assist them to be involved in disaster preparedness activities, and develop a referral guide that can be provided to people with disabilities.
- Work with people with disabilities and DPOs to develop and disseminate specific messages for people with disabilities, for example information regarding disability support services including DPO contact details.
- Support the pre-positioning of assistive devices so that people with disabilities have rapid access to replacement devices that might be lost during a disaster.
- With DPOs, support people with disabilities and their support personnel to put a plan in place in case of disaster. For example, outline who they will call, where they will evacuate, and how they will get there, and to ensure phones have credit.

## Psychosocial Health and Wellbeing

- Ensure rights-based psychosocial services reach and include people with disabilities and their support personnel.
- Increase services that respond to the needs and preferences of people with psychosocial disabilities, including call-in and online psychological and peer support options as alternatives to conventional mental health services.

## Include women with disabilities in disaster preparedness

- Ensure the perspectives and requirements of women with disabilities are voiced and incorporated in disaster preparedness planning, by involving women at all stages.
- Strengthen gender-based violence programs so that the inclusion requirements of women with disabilities are identified and met.

## Further information

- DFAT (2013) Accessibility Design Guide: Universal design principles for Australia’s aid program:  
<https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/accessibility-design-guide.pdf>
- Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (2017) Disability inclusion in disaster risk management: Promising practices and opportunities for enhanced engagement:  
[http://www.didrrn.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GFDRR-World-Bank\\_Disability-inclusion-in-DRM-Report.pdf](http://www.didrrn.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GFDRR-World-Bank_Disability-inclusion-in-DRM-Report.pdf)
- IASC Task Team on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2019) Guidelines: Inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action:  
<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-task-team-inclusion-persons-disabilities-humanitarian-action/documents/iasc-guidelines>
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2015) All under one roof:  
[https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/Shelter/All-under-one-roof\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/Shelter/All-under-one-roof_EN.pdf)