

The issue of disability inclusive disaster response

With the world facing an ever-increasing severity of natural disasters, such as the devastating Turkey-Syria earthquakes early last year, and the unprecedented, 'apocalyptic' floods that struck Dubai in April, our global approach to dealing with these disasters needs to be re-assessed. Disasters do not affect all people equally, and people with disabilities and other at-risk groups are often forgotten in disaster preparedness, seemingly invisible when it comes to community risk mapping or evacuation planning. Once evacuated, people within these groups have a harder time accessing shelters and safe spaces as a result of the multi-faceted barriers posed to them. In general, people with a disability are more likely to receive insufficient or inappropriate assistance and support in times of crisis.

Despite efforts to promote disability inclusion in disaster response, significant challenges persist. Many countries lack comprehensive policies and strategies to address the specific needs of persons with disabilities during emergencies. Inadequate infrastructure, limited resources and a lack of awareness among emergent responders further compound these challenges. According to the World Health Organisation, an estimated 15% of the world's population, or more than one billion people, live with some form of disability, and these individuals are consistently facing neglect in humanitarian assistance efforts. Some of the barriers faced by people include physical barriers like debris and water pumps situated on higher levels to bypass floods, which pose increased challenge to those with mobility issues. Or informational materials that aren't produced in a way that takes account for those with communication and information processing issues.

The international community have recognised the importance of inclusion through disaster response, for example, in the aftermath of the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes, the New Zealand Office for Disability Issues, Civil Defence and CBM organised a symposium on persons with disabilities and emergency preparedness, bringing together persons with disabilities, their families, local service providers, and international guests. As a result, the New Zealand CDEM department developed partnerships with persons with disabilities, and this move established a collaborative framework with people directly effected by the issue, sparking other nations to implement similar measures in their countries.

As well as collaborating with individuals who are discriminately disadvantaged by disaster management, nations need to provide training for emergency

responders, healthcare professionals and volunteers on disability awareness and inclusive practices to improve their ability to serve persons with disabilities effectively. Data should also be collected on disability prevalence and the needs to persons with disabilities in disaster affected areas facilitating evidence-based disaster response.

Points to consider:

- What measures can member states use to promote inclusivity in disaster preparedness?
- How can inclusive considerations be implemented in areas where resources are limited?
- Are there policies already existing that protects the rights of disabled persons in crisis, and is there anything that can be added to strengthen them?

Useful Links:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction-and-emergency-situations>

<https://www.edf-feph.org/content/uploads/2021/12/DiDRR-Review-Europe-and-Central-Asia.pdf>

https://www.cbm.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Disability_Inclusive_Disaster_Risk_Management.pdf

<https://preparecenter.org/topic/disability-inclusive-disaster-preparedness/>

