**Inclusion Europe’s submission to the call for inputs on Rebuilding Inclusive Societies in Post-Conflict Situations – the active involvement of Persons with Disabilities**

Inclusion Europe welcomes the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities’ initiative to actively involve people with disabilities on Rebuilding Inclusive Societies in Post-Conflict Situations.

Inclusion Europe is the European movement of people with intellectual disabilities and their families fighting for equal rights and full inclusion, representing 20 million people.

Inclusion Europe carries out advocacy at European and the European Union level, and amongst its members, there is the VGO Coalition representing people with intellectual disabilities in Ukraine.

Inclusion Europe also has experience on the active involvement of persons with intellectual disabilities, especially through the European platform of self-advocates (EPSA), its own constituency with board members being people with intellectual disabilities, and through its way of functioning with its members.

Post-conflict situations are not Inclusion Europe’s area of expertise, but Inclusion Europe worked a lot with the VGO Coalition to help them during the war and prepare the rebuilding of Ukraine. Indeed, people with intellectual disabilities and their families were hit hard by the Russian war on Ukraine and were left out from many aspects at the beginning of the war, such as evacuation.

1. **Involving people with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs**

Inclusion Europe wants to stress the importance of including people with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs in rebuilding inclusive societies in post-conflict situations.

Inclusion of people with disabilities in all facets of society is important, but research[[1]](#footnote-2);[[2]](#footnote-3) shows that it is specifically important to include people with disabilities in peacebuilding processes. Disability rights can be a unifying topic between opposing groups in the conflict[[3]](#footnote-4). Because disability touches most families, a focus on disability can often bring together people who would otherwise not collaborate.

However, when people with disabilities are included in peacebuilding processes, they often represent people who became disabled during the conflict.[[4]](#footnote-5) People with disabilities prior to the start of the conflict are often left out. There are all kinds of different groups of people with disabilities, and one group should not be prioritised above others.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Additionally, Inclusion Europe wants to highlight the importance of including people with intellectual disabilities in the peacebuilding and reconstruction processes as they tend to be more excluded[[6]](#footnote-7).

To include people with intellectual disabilities, meetings and consultation processes have to be accessible, especially for people with complex support needs.

To empower people with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs, which will enable them to participate actively, peacebuilding actors should[[7]](#footnote-8):

* Provide individual support and tailor-made services for people with complex support needs that can respond to their specific situation and support them in decision-making.
* Invest in self-advocacy and ensure people with complex support needs have their right to make decisions recognised.
* Actively involve people with complex support needs in the planning of new social support services after the conflict.
* Guarantee accessibility regarding the built environment, transport, technical aids, information and communication by considering the accessibility needs of persons with complex support needs.

To organise accessible meetings for people with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs[[8]](#footnote-9):

* information should be provided in easy-to-read and easy to understand language.
* speakers should speak slowly and clearly.
* there should be enough breaks.
* people with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs should be authorised to bring support person.

1. **Rebuilding inclusive societies**

Deinstitutionalisation and community-living are crucial to end segregation and ensure an inclusive society is a way of rebuilding inclusive societies.

Post-conflict situations allow more drastic changes.

Inclusion Europe wants to stress that institutionalisation of people with disabilities must be avoided during the reconciliation and rebuilding processes, and that deinstitutionalisation should be a priority in the inclusive rebuilding plans.

Inclusion Europe and its member, the VGO Coalition, have been fighting to achieve deinstitutionalisation before the war, to avoid it during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and hope to rebuild Ukraine as a country with support services in the community[[9]](#footnote-10).

Inclusion Europe advocates that there are no new institutions being build. The goal being that existing institutions get replaced with housing options in the community. It is important that these replacements are actually located in neighbourhoods so that people with intellectual disabilities can take equal part in society. Deinstitutionalisation and community-living are crucial to end segregation and ensure an inclusive society. [[10]](#footnote-11)

Inclusion Europe wants to highlight that extra support needs to be available for people with intellectual disabilities after the conflict. People with disabilities can also be part of other disadvantaged groups, for instance: women with a disability. These intersections can mean that people with disabilities are disproportionally affected by the conflict and its aftermaths. Peacebuilding actors need to be aware of this and make sure that people with disabilities get adequate support and attention after the war.

In many cases, disasters and emergencies lead to vast sums of money going into the affected area for re-building. More often than not, this money is both out of reach for organisations of people with disabilities, and distributed in a way that favours large international organisations specialising in this kind of activities. More needs to be done to ensure people with disabilities have a say in how such money is spend, how they can directly benefit from it (not least via their representative organisations), and local experience and organisations are respected and supported in development (instead of being replaced by international organisations).

Specifically, all such funding should specifically provide for support of self-advocacy organisations and activities, regardless of the legal status of self-advocacy groups (who in many countries are not able to set-up formally because of legal capacity limitations).

1. Conciliation Resources Report (2021): “Untapped peacebuilders: including persons with disabilities in building peace”. Available at: <https://www.c-r.org/learning-hub/untapped-peacebuilders-including-persons-disabilities-building-peace> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. United States Institute of Peace Special Report (2021): “Disability-inclusive peacebuilding: state of the field and the way forward. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/10/disability-inclusive-peacebuilding-state-field-and-way-forward> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Conciliation Resources Report (2021): “Untapped peacebuilders: including persons with disabilities in building peace”. Available at: <https://www.c-r.org/learning-hub/untapped-peacebuilders-including-persons-disabilities-building-peace> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. United States Institute of Peace Special Report (2021): “Disability-inclusive peacebuilding: state of the field and the way forward”. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/10/disability-inclusive-peacebuilding-state-field-and-way-forward> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Inclusion Europe Report (2018): “Empowerment of people with complex support needs”. Available at: <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Empowerment-of-people-with-complex-support-needs.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Inclusion Europe: “Recommendations for organisers of meetings and conferences”. Available at: <http://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Recommendations-accessible-events.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Inclusion Europe’s work on Ukraine can be found at: <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/ukraine/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. [If you are being overlooked in normal times, it is unlikely that anyone will take you into account during a crisis - Inclusion Europe (inclusion-europe.eu)](https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/if-you-are-being-overlooked-in-normal-times-it-is-unlikely-that-anyone-will-take-you-into-account-during-a-crisis/) and [One month of the Russian war on Ukraine in the words of families of people with intellectual disabilities - Inclusion Europe (inclusion-europe.eu)](https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/ukraine-war-in-words-of-families-people-with-disabilities/) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)