**UNICEF’s input to the SR Disabilities’ report on Rebuilding Inclusive Societies in Post-Conflict Situations – the active involvement of Persons with Disabilities**

UNICEF Disability Section inputs

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# Introduction

• There are about 240 million children with disabilities around the world[[1]](#footnote-1). While usually surveys and censuses provide estimates of children living in households, they do not consider children who do not live in a household, who may represent a significant proportion in countries experiencing armed conflict[[2]](#footnote-2).

• The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that conditions of peace and security based on full respect for the purposes and principles contained in the UN Charter and observance of applicable human rights instruments are indispensable for the full protection of persons with disabilities[[3]](#footnote-3). Article 3 of the CRPD, enshrining the principles on which the Convention is based, expressly mentions the right to full and effective participation and inclusion in society, which also bear consequences in the case of peacebuilding efforts, implying that persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, have a right to be included in the design of inclusive societies during rebuilding efforts.

# What to consider when rebuilding inclusive societies in post-conflict situations

• In a 2018 resolution, the Security Council recognized the importance of providing «*reintegration and rehabilitation assistance to children affected by armed conflict, while ensuring that the specific needs of girls and boys as well as children with disabilities are addressed, including access to health care, psychosocial support, and education programmes that contribute to the well-being of children and to sustainable peace and security*»[[4]](#footnote-4).

• In 2019, the Security Council adopted a resolution that makes specific reference to children, underlines the benefit of providing sustainable, timely, appropriate, inclusive and accessible assistance to civilians with disabilities affected by armed conflict, including reintegration, rehabilitation and psychosocial support, to ensure that their specific needs are effectively addressed, in particular those of women and children with disabilities[[5]](#footnote-5).

• During armed conflict, the lives of children with disabilities are affected by deteriorating services, inflation may decrease the value of financial assistance for persons with disabilities, and rising costs, combined with deteriorating transport, further reduce access to services[[6]](#footnote-6), all of which have to be taken into account when rebuilding in post-conflict situations. Barriers are further intensified when infrastructure is destroyed, and services and systems are compromised. This often results in a loss of access to schooling, health and psychosocial support[[7]](#footnote-7), which need be the object of interventions when rebuilding inclusive societies.

• During armed conflict, the destruction of infrastructure can create physical barriers that reduce access to education[[8]](#footnote-8). A 2018 survey of Syrian refugees living in Jordan and Lebanon found that refugee children with disabilities were more likely have never been enrolled in school[[9]](#footnote-9). A 2013 study in Iraq found that only 16 per cent of displaced children with disabilities living in camps and 10 per cent living in urban areas were attending schools[[10]](#footnote-10). Rebuilding in an inclusive manner after conflict will therefore need to include ensuring that children with disabilities have access to education.

• In the aftermath of a disaster, children with disabilities may become separated from their care providers or family and be vulnerable to violence, exploitation and sexual abuse[[11]](#footnote-11).

• Global estimates in 2022 indicate that children with disabilities are more than twice as likely as their peers without disabilities to experience violence, and they have a higher likelihood of all forms of violence.[[12]](#footnote-12) Globally, girls with disabilities are up to three times more at risk of rape than girls without disabilities and are twice as likely to experience other forms of gender based violence (GBV).[[13]](#footnote-13) In emergencies, risks of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect are even further heightened, due to a number of factors, including separation from care providers or family[[14]](#footnote-14); disruption of support services; closure of schools; as well as loss of protective peer and social support networks.

• Children with disabilities who are living in institutions face particular risk of human rights abuses in emergencies and are often left out of humanitarian interventions. Globally, it is estimated that one in three children in institutions is a child with disabilities.[[15]](#footnote-15) Evidence shows that institutions are often characterized by living arrangements that are inherently harmful to children; and the mortality rate for children with disabilities in institutional care is 100 times higher than for other children.[[16]](#footnote-16) In emergencies, children with disabilities who are living in institutions are at even more extreme risk of abuse and neglect as staff may flee and regular mechanisms that can serve as monitoring (such as external visitors) may be disrupted. In recent situations of armed conflict, there have been examples of children living in institutions being moved within or across borders without adequate identification, documentation and coordination with national child protection authorities, hindering their prospect for family reunification in the future and putting them at heightened risk of trafficking and other forms of abuse.

• Armed conflict and war affect children in direct and indirect ways: directly in the form of physical injuries from attack, artillery fire and landmine explosions or in the form of psychological conditions derived from these injuries or from witnessing traumatic events; indirectly through the breakdown of health services, which leaves many illnesses untreated, and food insecurity, which leads to malnutrition[[17]](#footnote-17). All of these have to be taken into account when designing services in post-conflict inclusive societies.

# Involvement of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding

• People with disabilities, including children with disabilities, are scarcely involved in peacebuilding efforts, and when they are, they usually are conflated with other marginalized groups. This means that their perspectives on peace and conflict have not been taken into account in a systematic way, or just superficially[[18]](#footnote-18).

• Though specific information on children with disabilities on the subject seems not to be available, it is important to point out that there has been registered a differential treatment of people who acquired a disability through war as opposed to people who acquired a disability another way or were born with it, with the former usually prioritized in peace efforts[[19]](#footnote-19). In addition, when they are included, physical and sensory disabilities tend to be overrepresented[[20]](#footnote-20).

• It has been pointed out that the women, peace and security agenda does not usually include women and girls with disabilities[[21]](#footnote-21).

• Scarcity of data has been flagged as one of the issues that affects inclusion of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding efforts[[22]](#footnote-22). This applies to children with disabilities as well, and child-sensitive data is needed to address the issue of participation of children with disabilities in assessment of their rights for peacebuilding purposes.

• Many barriers hinder the effective participation of persons with disabilities in peacebuilding efforts[[23]](#footnote-23). The main issues highlighted include accessibility and funding[[24]](#footnote-24). Though these issues are not child-specific, they are likely to apply to the situation of children with disabilities as well.

• Despite all of the above, many opportunities for inclusion of persons with disabilities within the peacebuilding agenda have been found[[25]](#footnote-25), and recommendations made have covered budgeting, the promotion of participation of organizations of persons with disabilities at all levels in the peacebuilding process, particularly adopting an intersectional approach so as to represent diversity within disability and other lived experiences of discrimination, as well as strengthening accessibility and promoting disaggregation of data by disability[[26]](#footnote-26). In addition, a specific child-rights approach should be adopted so as to ensure that the particular needs of children with disabilities are taken account when rebuilding inclusive societies.

• The CRPD Committee, in its General Comment no. 7, on participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, has highlighted that States parties should give priority to the views of organizations of persons with disabilities when addressing disability-related issues, and develop frameworks to request civil society organizations and other stakeholders to consult and involve organizations of persons with disabilities in their work related to the rights enshrined in the Convention, with a specific reference to the right to peace. This implies the need to ensure that the views of children with disabilities are taken into account in peacebuilding efforts and when rebuilding inclusive societies.

1. UNICEF, *Seen, Counted, Included. Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*, 2021, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UNICEF, *Seen, Counted, Included. Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*, 2021, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. CRPD, Preamble, para. (u). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. United Nations Security Council resolution 2427 (2018), S/RES/2427 (2018), Preamble. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. United Nations Security Council resolution 2475 (2019), S/RES/2475 (2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. UNICEF, *Children with Disabilities in Situations of Armed Conflict. Discussion paper*, 2018, p. 8; Women’s Refugee Commission, *Disability among Refugees and Conflict-Affected Populations*, 2013; Amnesty International, *Agonizing choices: Syrian refugees in need of health care in Lebanon*, London, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/HRC/49/58), 4 January 2022, para. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. UNICEF, *Children with Disabilities in Situations of Armed Conflict. Discussion paper*, 2018, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Humanity & Inclusion and Information Management and Mine Action Programme (iMMAP), *Removing Barriers: The Path Towards Inclusive Access. Disability Assessment among Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon*, Amman, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. UNICEF and Humanity & Inclusion, *Rapid Needs Assessment: Situation of children, youth and adults with disabilities, within and around Domiz, Northern Iraq*, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. UNICEF, *Children and young people with disabilities. Factsheet*, May 2013, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Cited in UNICEF, *Seen, Counted, Included. Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*, 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. United Nations Secretary-General, ‘Report of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women on the activities of the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women – Note by the Secretary-General’ (A/HRC/44/3-E/CN.6/2020/8), United Nations, New York, 2019, accessed 23 June 2022; paragraph 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. UNICEF, *Children and young people with disabilities. Factsheet*, May 2013, p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ‘Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty: Note by the secretary-general’ (A/74/136). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ‘Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Report of the secretary-general’ (A/74/231) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children. Children with disabilities*, 2013, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. E. Murray, *Disability-inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward*, in Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, no. 502, October 2021, pp. 3-4 and 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. E. Murray, *Disability-inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward*, in Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, no. 502, October 2021, pp. 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. E. Murray, *Disability-inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward*, in Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, no. 502, October 2021, pp. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. E. Murray, *Disability-inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward*, in Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, no. 502, October 2021, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. E. Murray, *Disability-inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward*, in Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, no. 502, October 2021, pp. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Counciliation Resources – UK Aid, *Untapped Peacebuilders: Including Persons with Disabilities in Building Peace*, March 2021, pp. 11-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/07/role-accessibility-and-funding-disability-inclusive-peacebuilding> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. E. Murray, *Disability-inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward*, in Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, no. 502, October 2021, pp. 12-13; Counciliation Resources – UK Aid, *Untapped Peacebuilders: Including Persons with Disabilities in Building Peace*, March 2021, pp. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. E. Murray, *Disability-inclusive Peacebuilding: State of the Field and the Way Forward*, in Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, no. 502, October 2021, pp. 14-16; Counciliation Resources – UK Aid, *Untapped Peacebuilders: Including Persons with Disabilities in Building Peace*, March 2021, pp. 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)