



Position Paper

Ensuring the Protection and Inclusion of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Emergency Response in Lebanon

Context:

Women and girls with disabilities face a unique and often overlooked form of marginalization due to the intersection of disability and gender, further compounded by other forms of discrimination like ageism, racism, socioeconomic disparities, and displacement. This intersectionality significantly increases their risk of gender-based violence (GBV), both at home and in the community as recognized by the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). During emergencies, this vulnerability is exacerbated, leading to heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and neglect due to barriers in accessing essential services, protection mechanisms, and reporting avenues. These barriers are often related to accessibility, communication, inclusion in decision-making, problem-solving, and independent living.

The escalation of violence in September 2024, which forced persons with disabilities to choose between essential assistive devices and evacuation, underscores their vulnerability and the urgent need for inclusive emergency response planning. This situation demands a focus on improving access to reporting mechanisms, enhancing protection from GBV and exploitation, developing inclusive policies and practices, and promoting empowerment and participation for women and girls with disabilities.

LUPD's goal is to ensure that women with disabilities have equal access to protection services, resources, and opportunities to report violence and discrimination. The focus of this position paper is on:

- 1- Access to Reporting Mechanisms:
- 2- Protection from GBV and Exploitation:
- 3- Inclusive Policies and Practices:
- 4- Empowerment and Participation for women and girls with disabilities:



Barriers and Challenges to access reporting mechanism:

LUPD conducted extensive community consultations with 84 IDPs (women and girls with disabilities in shelters or displaced, including survivors with disabilities) and shelter coordinators through 4 FGDs, 45 interviews and 7 KIIs. We identified that women and girls with disabilities in Lebanon face significant challenges in reporting gender-based violence (GBV) due to a complex interplay of factors, including:

1- Limited Awareness and Access: Many women and girls with disabilities reported they are unaware of the existence of GBV reporting mechanisms and the services available to them during emergencies. Communication barriers, such as speech or hearing impairments, and physical barriers, like inaccessible buildings and a lack of assistive technology were identified to limit their access to support.

2- Societal Stigma and Discrimination: Women and girls with disabilities faced discrimination and negative attitudes from multiple sources:

a. Other IDPs exhibited discriminatory behavior due to disability and gender reflecting the intersectional nature of their marginalization.

b. service providers often proved unwilling to provide necessary support to persons with disabilities as they consider that the requested support is a luxury rather than priorities, and claiming they lacked the time or that such support fell outside their mission.

c. law enforcement displayed unacceptable and discriminatory behavior, denying persons with disabilities access to shelters due to their need for care-giving support and even preventing them from reporting cases of GBV. In some instances, individuals were forcibly removed from shelters to avoid the perceived "inconvenience" of accommodating their needs.

3- Fear of Retaliation and Mistrust: Survivors expressed their fear of retaliation or revenge from perpetrators or community members, particularly in conservative or patriarchal societies. A lack of trust in law enforcement and the judicial system further discourages reporting.

4- Lack of Specialized Support Services: There is a significant shortage of specialized services tailored to the needs of women and girls with disabilities. This includes accessible shelters, counseling services, and legal support. Additionally, many service providers lack the necessary training and understanding to effectively support survivors with disabilities. This was demonstrated by their use of LUPD as a trusted reporting channel within their communities, where they disclosed their situations.



Recommendations:

To address the challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities and ensure their protection and inclusion during emergencies, the following short-term recommendations are proposed:

For the Ministry of Social Affairs:

- DRRs should include representatives from OPDs to ensure that future emergency response plans are inclusive to persons with disabilities. Moreover, ERPs should encourage partnerships between emergency service providers (NGOs, ministry staff, ISF, municipal police etc.).
- Identify and dedicate at least 1 shelter per governorate that are accessible and safe shelters for women with disabilities during crises.
- MoSA should lobby with donors to ensure adequate funding to equip shelters with the needed accessibility infrastructure.
- Actively lobby donors to secure financial resources for housing and supporting persons with disabilities during crises.
- Ensure access to information in shelters catered to the needs of all including persons with disabilities in the form of flyer, hotlines.
- Regularly update and disseminate service provider mappings to ensure IDPs and shelter staff are aware of available services.
- Provide training to shelter staff, law enforcement, and relevant stakeholders for providing appropriate support to women and girls with disabilities. This training should cover disability etiquette, accessible communication, reasonable accommodation, and the specific needs of women with different types of disabilities. Where internal resources are insufficient, partnerships with OPDs should be prioritized to deliver this vital service.
- Awareness raising on disability inclusion and gender sensitive practices.
- Establish comprehensive protection and reporting systems, including hotlines, focal points, accessible services, as well as a unified reporting mechanism that effectively involve the ISF. This includes establishing accessible communication channels (e.g., text message hotlines, video relay services for sign language users), training staff on disability awareness and inclusive communication, and ensuring that



information about available services is disseminated in accessible formats. Advocacy should focus on ensuring that these systems are widely publicized, easily accessible, culturally sensitive and ensure anonymity to protect survivors.

- Develop future ERPs based on consultations with women and girls with disabilities as well as OPDs in order to ensure that the plans are inclusive prior to the emergency situation.
- Ultimately, national level efforts should be taken to reduce discrimination against persons with disabilities and ensure that all shelters are accessible and welcoming to them. However, until such a time, a temporary solution would be to dedicate specific shelters for persons with disabilities.

For donors:

- Prioritize funding for programs targeting OPDs and building their capacities to have a solid emergency response plan.
- Donors should prioritize funding programs that target persons with disabilities and specifically women and girls with disabilities in order to provide accessible life-saving services to accommodate their needs.

For Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs):

- Develop emergency response and preparedness programs to be able to respond during emergencies.
- Collaborate with MoSA and other stakeholders to develop inclusive strategies and structures for emergency service provision. Publicize a list of specialized OPDs to facilitate communication and coordination.
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Conclusion:

LUPD advocates for the fundamental and indivisible right to inclusive shelters and services, recognizing the necessity of a transitional phase in Lebanon to improve the protection, participation, and security of persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, during emergencies and crises. A key component of this effort is strengthening existing organizations of women with disabilities and supporting the creation of new ones.

By promoting inclusive, accessible, and responsive operations, advocacy contributes to violence prevention, ensures access to justice, and protects the dignity of women and girls with disabilities.



LUPD and other OPDs stand ready to support the government and stakeholders in developing and implementing strategies that ensure access to emergency services for all persons with disabilities. The recurring message from consultations was the need for prior access to information about rights, legal support, community participation, reporting mechanisms, GBV awareness, and reproductive health knowledge to enhance resilience during emergencies. Sharing positive experiences from responsive shelters and encouraging shelters lacking expertise to seek support from specialized OPDs are also crucial steps.