

Inclusive Humanitarian Action Issue Paper

Executive summary

At Light for the World, we have experienced a rise in humanitarian crises in the countries where we work. People with disabilities are disproportionately affected. As the climate crisis, extreme weather events and conflicts are likely to further increase the prevalence of disability in the future, inclusive humanitarian action is a key area of our work.

Inclusive humanitarian action means that people with disabilities are included in the design, planning and implementation of all humanitarian programmes.

In this issue paper, we outline our unique inclusive humanitarian approach and provide concrete examples how we work with local and international partners. As part of our Strategy 2030, we share five priority areas and five targets we have set to ensure we deliver impact, at scale, sustainably.

Why inclusive humanitarian action is key

At Light for the World, we believe in a world where people with disabilities and eye conditions can fully exercise their rights – including their right to protection in emergencies.

Inclusive humanitarian action means that people with disabilities are included in the design, planning and implementation of all humanitarian programmes.

Around 16 % of the world’s population are people with disabilities.¹ In humanitarian contexts, the number of people with disabilities is often higher than the global average. For example, in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, we found in 2024 that people with disabilities made up over 30 % of people affected.² Comprehensive data on the prevalence of people with disabilities in emergency situations is rare, yet from our work we know they are among the most marginalised people in crises.³ For example, children, and in particular girls with disabilities, are at higher risk of abuse and neglect.⁴

In our focus countries, humanitarian crises have increased in number and severity. The climate crisis, extreme weather events and conflicts are likely to further increase the prevalence of disability in the future. These events also increase vulnerability, forcing people to leave their homes and disrupting support networks. Inclusive humanitarian action will therefore be an increasing area of focus in our work.

Our unique approach to prepare and respond in crises

Light for the World’s work on humanitarian action is based on evidence that people with a disability are often underserved and subject to discrimination in crises. Our work on disability inclusion in humanitarian contexts applies a rights-based approach. All action we support adheres to and aligns with internationally recognised standards and guidelines, especially the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 11, as well as the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.⁵

To ensure that people with disabilities have access to humanitarian support we follow the IASC Must-Do-Actions (MDAs) and the twin-track approach. We do this through improved data collection, sharing and use. This requires that improved data collection tools for disability-inclusive humanitarian action are developed and shared, while data is made available on disability prevalence and the barriers and enablers people with disabilities face during emergencies. We work with disability inclusion experts with experience in humanitarian action. Our approach focuses on the meaningful participation of people with disabilities in humanitarian response and context-specific approaches to support and collaborate with humanitarian actors on all levels.

In all our work, we apply an intersectional approach, ensuring that girls and women with disabilities, who face multiple forms of discrimination, are not left behind during emergencies.

1 Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

2 This figure included persons with psychosocial disabilities. OCHA (December 2024) Mozambique: humanitarian needs and response plan 2025. p.33 See: (<https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/mozambique-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-december-2024>) [accessed 09.12.2025]

3 United Nations General Assembly (2016) One Humanity: Shared Responsibility - Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit (A/70/709) p. 22; paragraph 79

4 UNICEF (2017), Including children with disabilities in humanitarian action – General Guidance. p. 13

5 IASC Task Team on inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (July 2019) Guidelines, inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action

Our support includes:

- ▶ Technical advice to mainstream humanitarian actors to respond to conflict and emergencies in a disability inclusive way.
- ▶ Advocacy for the inclusion of people with disabilities. We support the collection and use of disaggregated data on disability and gender in humanitarian crises, advocate towards donors for disability inclusive programmes and budgeting, and amplify the voice of OPDs in country-level humanitarian coordination mechanisms.
- ▶ Direct emergency support with food and non-food item distribution to affected people with disabilities.

Our priorities

Working together with our local and international partners, our value add is built around five priority areas:

1. Disability inclusive protection, food security and education in emergencies

- ▶ **Protection:** Prevention and protection against gender-based violence (GBV), provision of psychosocial support services, promotion of an intersectional approach to the provision of humanitarian services.
- ▶ **Food security:** Resilience building and empowering people with disabilities to achieve independence from food aid.
- ▶ **Education in emergencies:** Access to both formal and informal education opportunities by addressing barriers such as stereotypes, infrastructure, and skills and knowledge of teachers. We aim to achieve learning outcomes and work through psychosocial interventions.

2. Knowledge and capacity strengthening on disability inclusive humanitarian action

- ▶ We train and support both humanitarian actors and the disability movement to improve their understanding of a disability inclusive humanitarian response and put the principles into action.
- ▶ We offer technical support together with our Disability Inclusion Advisors (DIAs) and Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs).
- ▶ We embed data collection and research and innovation into learnings and our existing and future programmes.

3. Disability inclusive data collection methods

- ▶ We improve data collection methods in the sector and contribute to a more relevant collection of data on disability prevalence, access barriers and enablers, as well as intersectionality, while strengthening OPDs as actors in data collection and supporting evidence-based advocacy and humanitarian programming.

4. Empowerment of people with disabilities and OPDs to take active roles in the humanitarian response

- ▶ We help ensure voices of people with disabilities are heard within the humanitarian coordination system by supporting their advocacy and participation in the sector. For example, through our DIF approach we engage in the Disability Working Group under the protection cluster. We encourage people with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, to take leadership positions within local coordination mechanisms in disaster risk management and the humanitarian response.

5. National humanitarian response plans consider the inclusion of people with disabilities

- ▶ We ensure national plans in humanitarian contexts include people with disabilities, with special attention to intersectionality.

We aim to influence the humanitarian system to become more disability inclusive and intersectional.

Our targets

We have identified the following targets as part of our Strategy 2030:

1. All humanitarian response plans in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Sudan and Uganda have intentionally included people with disabilities by 2030. DIFs and members of OPDs take an active role in the protection cluster meetings in all our areas of implementation for humanitarian projects.
2. Light for the World has trained 50 humanitarian actors (10 in each country) and five OPDs on topics focused on disability inclusion in humanitarian action by 2030.
3. We have launched and implemented the Survey for Inclusive Rapid Assessment (SIRA)⁶ and other relevant data tools geared towards disability inclusive data in emergencies in all our countries with a humanitarian focus by 2030.
4. We have shared tools, data and evidence on disability prevalence, access and barriers with humanitarian actors to support advocacy and humanitarian programming.
5. We have implemented an intersectional approach (disability and gender) to disaster risk management in Mozambique, Uganda and South Sudan and published six learning documents by 2030.

Inclusive humanitarian responses in Burkina Faso

IMPACT-BF, led by Light for the World in consortium with the Burkinabe Red Cross and ADEP funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) as part of International Partnerships Austria, is a project implemented in the Centre East Region of Burkina Faso. We provide expertise and support to the humanitarian response in Burkina Faso to become more disability inclusive. We apply the twin-track approach and the IASC Must-Do-Actions, while working closely with OPDs on advocacy, training of humanitarian actors and experience sharing. We support humanitarian actors on regional and national level to deliver disability inclusive responses while also promoting an intersectional approach.

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6 Light for the World (2022) How to Build an Inclusive Data Ecosystem During Emergencies. See: (<https://www.light-for-the-world.org/publications/how-to-build-an-inclusive-data-ecosystem-during-emergencies/>) [accessed 11.12.2025]

