

EDSA statement on protection and safety of persons with Down Syndrome in Ukraine

Open letter to the Head of the European Institutions, European, Russian and Ukrainian Heads of State and NATO

26 February 2022

The European Down Syndrome Association (EDSA) calls for all parties to ensure the protection and safety of persons with Down Syndrome and other disabilities in Ukraine, by respecting:

- their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular Article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies
- the UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019) on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict
- International Humanitarian Law and the Humanitarian Principles.

In any situation of crisis or conflict, persons with Down Syndrome and other disabilities face disproportionate risk of abandonment, violence, death, and a lack of access to safety, relief, and recovery support. Women with disabilities are at increased risk of sexual violence and children with disabilities are more exposed to abuse and neglect. Crucial information on safety and evacuation is often inaccessible, and evacuation centres themselves are also rarely accessible, meaning that persons with Down Syndrome and other disabilities are too often left behind.

There are 2.7 million persons with disabilities registered in Ukraine. Our contacts in the country have confirmed that the situation for persons with disabilities is appalling. For example, shelters in Kiev are inaccessible, so people with disabilities are forced to stay at home, not knowing where they can go to be safe.

Persons with Down Syndrome and other disabilities living in institutions, are already cut off from their communities, risk being abandoned and forgotten.

We call on the political leadership and all humanitarian actors dealing with this crisis to ensure that persons with Down Syndrome and other disabilities:

- Have full access to all humanitarian aid
- Are protected from violence, abuse and ill treatment
- Are provided with accessible information about safety and assistance protocols, evacuation procedures and support

- Have full access to basic services including water and sanitation, social support, education, healthcare, transport and information
- Are accounted for and not abandoned: it is also essential that measures are in place which fully include people living in institutions or orphanages; and relocation and evacuation measures should not force more persons with disabilities to live in such institutions
- Are meaningfully involved in all humanitarian action, through their representative organisations

Along with persons with Down Syndrome particular attention must be paid to those who are most at risk – including women, children, blind and deafblind persons, persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, and persons with high support needs.

Today we witness full scale conflict on European soil. With the escalation of the situation in Ukraine, the European Down Syndrome Association urgently reminds states of their responsibilities to ensure the protection and safety of all.

EDSA continues to monitor the situation, by remaining in contact with our members in the effected regions.

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