

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, March 23

Evidence digest focus issue: Ageing and Disability Inclusion

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Guest blog: promoting the inclusion of older people and people with disabilities

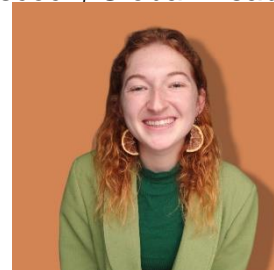
To introduce this evidence digest, we spoke to Alison Marshall, CEO of Age International, Kayla Arnold, Policy Advisor at Age International, and Diana Hiscock, Global Disability Advisor at HelpAge.



**Alison Marshall, CEO
of Age International**



**Diana Hiscock,
Global Disability
Advisor at HelpAge**



**Kayla Arnold, Policy
Advisor at Age
International**

What have you found to be the main issues affecting older people with disabilities?

Alison: it is important to recognise that the world's population is ageing. The **proportion of people over the age of 60 years is expected to increase from 12 per cent in 2015 to 21 per cent by 2050**. This change is not happening uniformly; population ageing in low-income countries is occurring at a much faster pace than in medium- to high-income countries. Also, women tend to live longer than men and are therefore overrepresented in the older population in general and especially among those aged 80 years or above. While increased life spans is to be celebrated, we want to increase the number of years in good health, as currently, living longer is associated with an increased prevalence of chronic diseases and physical and cognitive impairments, which, in interaction with various barriers in societies, may result in disabilities. As a result, more than **46 per cent of older persons worldwide have an impairment** (250 million experience moderate to severe impairments), and older persons represent the majority of the overall population of persons with disabilities.

Kayla: While many older people are remarkably resilient and act as the lynchpins of their families and communities, they face challenges accessing services. Older people with disabilities face additional barriers to a range of key services, including water, sanitation and

hygiene (WASH) and health services. In sub-Saharan Africa, **10% of older people need to travel over six hours, often by foot, to reach a health facility**. Health facilities can also be unwelcoming to older people with long queues, and a lack of privacy, toilets, or ramps for accessibility. Older people with disabilities are also at increased risk during emergency situations, including climate-related hazards, due to lack of inclusive shelters, inability to evacuate, and lack of appropriate assistance. In emergency situations, older people can lose access to their assistive products, including walking sticks, glasses, and hearing aids, which can make them more at-risk of danger. For example, older people were left behind when the extreme monsoon flooding in Pakistan last August and September. Belongings, including vital medications for chronic health conditions, were washed away and **many older people developed respiratory problems** after being forced to stand in water for long durations of time. Assistive products, such as wheelchairs, walking sticks, and commodes, were crucial during HelpAge International's response to the Pakistan floods.

How well integrated is work on ageing and disability?

Diana: HelpAge works through a global network of organisations supporting the voice and agency of older people and promoting the right of *all* older people, including older people with disabilities, to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives by promoting wellbeing and inclusion and reducing poverty and discrimination in later life. Often, when organisations consider ageing, the intersections with disability are missed. However, the dialogue is changing and there is a growing recognition that older people are not a homogenous group. Engagement with the **ILO** on Long term Care and **ILO/UNICEF exchanges** on ageing, disability, and effective social protection, showcase this growing engagement.

Alison: Nevertheless there is more the disability rights community could do to reflect the agency and challenges of older persons, and the older persons' movement could do more to understand and apply the human rights-based approach to disability. Older persons with disabilities can **fall through the cracks**. But there are examples of good practice, such as the creation of designated spaces for older people in health facilities that are also accessible to those with disabilities, which can improve health outcomes.

What key message would you like readers of the evidence digest to take away?

Diana: Older persons with disabilities encounter significant barriers to the exercise of their rights owing to the intersection between ableism and ageism. Such barriers include stigma and stereotypes; discriminatory laws and practices; denial of autonomy and legal capacity; institutionalisation and lack of community support; violence and abuse; and lack of adequate social protection.

Kayla: For a rights-based approach at the intersection between older age and disability to be effective, it needs to be accompanied by a paradigm shift in society's perception of ageing and a willingness to see the opportunities to improve life for all across the life course. Many interventions, such as investing in inclusive primary healthcare and community-based care, stand to significantly benefit both older people and people with disabilities who often face common challenges.

Alison: The UN CRPD made such a difference, please join the campaign for a new UN Convention on the rights of older people.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion and ageing

Research mapping and evidence gaps

In 2020, the Elrha Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) commissioned a problem-led and evidence-based Gap Analysis on the inclusion of people with disabilities and older people in humanitarian response. This was to respond to the concern that while people with disabilities and older people are disproportionately impacted by humanitarian crises, this area of work remains under-prioritised and only emerging as an area of study. The work was led by the Nossal Institute for Global Health at the University of Melbourne and supported by Arbeiter-Samariter-Bun's Office for Indonesia and the Philippines (ASB) and was completed in two parts. The first mapped articles against the nine Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities (HIS) developed by the **Age and Disability Capacity Programme (ADCAP)** in 2018, and seven humanitarian sectors (e.g. WASH, Shelter and so on) and looked at both the spread and quality of articles. The second part of the work included consultations, interviews and case studies.

The **literature review** brings into sharp focus a number of critical findings. These include a notable lack of research on the topic, where the voices of people with disabilities and older people are almost absent in what little is available; evidence that humanitarian actors have a false notion that 'elders' with whom they may engage on a project are representative of, or connected to, all older people, and that because status is assigned to these particular elders who may be community leaders, that all older people have similar experiences to them thereby making others invisible; limited understanding on the diversity of experience of people over 60 year old; a persistent framing of disability through a medical model lens rather than a social or human rights model perspective; poor intersectional analysis to explore how disability or older age interact with other identity markers such as race, ethnicity or class, though there is some understanding on gender; and generally a lack of 'how to' knowledge on what works and how much it costs to include people with disabilities and older people in humanitarian response, both as recipients of aid and as partners with vital knowledge and networks.

In December 2022, Elrha published an **Innovation Catalogue**. The case studies presented are innovations that have aimed to directly respond to the gaps identified by the Humanitarian Innovation Fund's (HIF) Gap Analysis, under the following themes: meaningful participation and localisation; inclusive preparedness; data-driven inclusion; improving accessibility; water, sanitation and Hygiene (WASH); and gender-based violence. Case studies presented in the catalogue include for example 'filmmakers amplifying the voices of older aged people and people with disabilities affected natural disasters, to affordable wheelchairs designed with emergency settings in mind, and dignified and adaptable WASH facilities for menstrual health management.'

In 2018, HelpAge International and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine published **Missing millions: how older people with disabilities are excluded from**

humanitarian response. The study found that people who are both older and have disabilities risk having their rights to safe and dignified assistance and protection denied. The study drew upon a comprehensive literature review, data analysis, and interviews with older people affected by crises in **Tanzania** and Ukraine. It reveals how older people with disabilities fared worse than those without disabilities, and how this is related to various physical and institutional barriers, as well as hostile attitudes. Data analysis revealed that between 7.8 and 13.7 million older people with disabilities are currently affected by humanitarian crises. It showed that these people, compared to older people without disabilities, are more likely to have been out of work, have a serious health problem, spend more than a quarter of their income on healthcare, be unable to participate in community life, and rate their quality of life as poor.

Age and disability data

The **Titchfield City Group on Ageing (TCGA)** was established in March 2018 with the endorsement of the United Nations Statistical Commission to drive better data to support evidence-based policy responses to population ageing. Much like other city groups, the Titchfield City Group is an informal panel of experts. It has recognised three initial requirements: first, that age-related data needs to be cross-cutting in the sense that age interacts dynamically with a number of spheres of life differently; second, that there needs to be deeper understanding around the timing of transitions in life and how these impact later on; and third, ageing data should look at the enabling contexts people have lived in when they were younger to understand how these may have affected their trajectory. See here for the **TCGA's programme of work for 2018 to 2023**. Much like the Washington Group questions that have allowed granularity in understanding how different people with different functional disabilities engage with and are disabled by their particular contexts, the Titchfield Group guidance will provide a more nuanced understanding of whom we mean when considering older people and how ageing as a process interacts with other aspects of people's lives in a setting. In bringing these two measures together, it will be possible to understand how specific disabilities are linked to age (or not), and provide some trajectory for both prevention of age-related acquired disability and long term conditions. The separate measure will also however prevent age and disability data being conflated where in fact there may be very distinct dynamics for each.

In May 2021, the **Washington Group** created a workgroup on age-adjustment in the context of reporting disability data in Washington Group publications. The group had its first meeting in September 2021 where it was decided that they would produce a **guidance note** on this subject. An initial outline of this was circulated amongst members for input and a draft report was anticipated in 2022.

Global dialogue on ageing and disability

On 13 March 2023, the Human Rights Council held its **annual debate on the rights of persons with disabilities**, which focused on support systems to ensure community inclusion of persons with disabilities. Nada Al-Nashif, the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human

Rights said that COVID-19 had highlighted how current care systems are ineffective and are based on a system of values that deny agency, choice and control over the care that people with disabilities receive. She called for an urgent transformation of services and a stronger human-rights based regulatory framework, amongst other demands. The debate highlighted the need to promote the full inclusion and participation of older adults with disabilities in all aspects of community life.

Between 3 and 6 April 2023, the **Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing** will be holding its 13th Session at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to discuss the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons and to identify gaps and possible measures to address these. The report from the 12th Session in 2022 can be found [here](#). Speakers at the event reported that older people face intersecting discriminations, including older people with disabilities.

Guidance, tools and training

The **Humanitarian inclusion standards for older people and people with disabilities** cover nine standards plus best practice across seven sectors especially pertinent to older persons and people with disabilities. The standards were developed in 2018 by the Age and Disability Capacity Programme (ADCAP) and are available in six languages. HelpAge produced a **short video** with captions to introduce the standards.

A **good practice guide: embedding inclusion of older people and people with disabilities in policy and practice**, published in 2018, shares lessons learnt from the ADCAP programme. ADCAP have also developed **three courses** which are available DisasterReady.org in English and Arabic: Basic principles of disability inclusion in humanitarian response, Comprehensive accessible humanitarian assistance for older people and people with disabilities, and Understanding older people and their needs in a humanitarian context. In addition, HelpAge's manual on **health interventions for older people in emergencies** includes as annex 3 a list of assistive products for older people with disabilities, including mobility, hearing and visual aids. The manual is also available in **French**.

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) produced a useful **Humanitarian Guidance Note on Ageing and Disability** for its staff. The note presents some basic facts around disability and some guiding principles, including: 1) That inclusive, rights-based programming respects the needs and capacities of all persons, including older persons and people with disabilities; 2) That consultative and universal design (which makes all aspects of programme design and the implementation environment accessible to all) is essential; 3) That programming should actively engage older people and people with disabilities in decision making around issues that affect them in all phases of a crisis; 4) That humanitarian responses recognise that older persons and people with disabilities have the skills and capacities to benefit themselves and those around them; and 5) That appropriate solutions can only be found and responded to if those affected are consulted with and engaged. The note also includes some sector specific guidance, as well as practical steps to be taken throughout the programme cycle to ensure that principles are upheld.

In March 2023, RedR ran two courses on inclusive humanitarian response specific to Ukraine – one in Ukrainian, and another in Polish and English. The focus was on how to identify at-risk people, engage them and respond inclusively. In October 2023, RedR will be hosting a 15 day training on **Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in Humanitarian Programming**. A core compulsory module on Power, privilege and intersectionality must be taken alongside one out of four other optional modules. Module 2 – Working with standards and guides to foster equality and inclusion – covers the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards on older people and people with disabilities plus the Inter-Agency Standards Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook. The other three modules address Gender Based Violence (GBV), Decolonisation, and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI).

Case Study: Cyclone Freddy

Between February and March 2023, Cyclone Freddy – an exceptionally powerful and the longest lasting storm ever recorded worldwide - has affected Madagascar, Mozambique and Malawi. According to the **OCHA Flash Update** for Malawi on 25 March 2023, 511 people have lost their lives, 1,724 have been injured, 533 are missing, and 563,771 have been internally displaced and are either residing in host communities or in one of the 577 displacement sites that have sprung up. 286,000 people in 13 Traditional Areas (TAs) are unable to be reached apart from by air, and in a further 11 TAs, there are people in inaccessible areas though their numbers are not known. Those affected are facing a cholera outbreak, currently the largest in Africa, and pre-existing food insecurity has been catalysed by hundreds of thousands of hectares of land that has been damaged, submerged or washed away. Amongst those most affected are older people and those with disabilities who - if they have survived - have no choice but to move to displacement sites - if they are able and have been identified. There, according to **HelpAge**, they are completely reliant on the government and aid agencies, in inaccessible environments, potentially without their assistive devices, possibly without any resources or indeed family to support them, and with food that may be difficult for them to cook, digest or masticate. The latest OCHA Flash report does not contain any data that is sex, age or disability disaggregated. It does not comment specifically on older people and people with disabilities who may be harder to reach not least because of geographic remoteness, in spite of their heightened vulnerability. No protection risks are mentioned for any group in the report apart from gender-based violence and sexual exploitation being a higher risk for women in Nsanje district.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion: Other topics

Climate resilience

On 9 January 2023, Harvard Law School Project on Disability posted a blog article on what **researchers can do to close the disability climate change equity gap**. The article describes how people with disabilities are often excluded from climate adaptation discussions,

despite being some of the most adversely affected. In 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) discovered that only 1% of 1,682 papers on climate adaptation responses considered people with disabilities.

Humanitarian

The Disability Inclusion Task Team, Inter-Agency Coordination Türkiye, produced **sectoral technical guidance on disability inclusion in emergencies** in February 2023 in response to the earthquake in Turkey. It includes guidance on inclusive data collection and accessible and inclusive programming across a range of sectors, including, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), shelter and household items, temporary settlement support, and health. The guidance is available in English and Turkish.

Human Rights Watch published the report **“We Must Provide a Family, Not Rebuild Orphanages”: The Consequences of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine for Children in Ukrainian Residential Institutions** in March 2023. According to government figures, Ukraine had more than 105,000 children in residential institutions before Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022, nearly half of whom were children with disabilities. The report finds that children have been forcibly transferred to Russia and separated from their families, and have suffered traumatic experiences of war and displacement.

Education

UNICEF published the report **Included, Every Step of the Way: Upholding the rights of migrant and displaced children with disabilities** in February 2023. The report found that whilst there is limited evidence on the lives of migrant and displaced children with disabilities, their human rights are commonly violated and they face high barriers to participating in society. UNICEF found that the needs of children with disabilities are often excluded in policymaking and planning across migration and displacement settings, whether humanitarian or high income, which has introduced serious risks and vulnerabilities to their lives.

Political participation and protest

In this feature article on Disability Debrief, Andrea Burga explores ableism in the political protest space during crises and breaks stereotypes while discussing **Disabled People in Peru’s Political Protests** (21 March 2023). Though anti-racism and anti-colonialism is commonly understood by those that protest, anti-ableism is not. She explores how protest is not always accessible to people with disabilities if for example, either due to peer protesters’ attitudes, or due to physical barriers, for example for a person with visual impairment or a physical disability if there is a sudden escalation of violence and an urgent need to flee, or for those who find the protest environment over-stimulating. She describes how individuals who choose not to physically attend participate through other means, including by using social media, where content is made accessible. Screen reader compatible content, subtitles on videos, warnings about whether loud sounds are contained (for autistic people for example) are some suggestions offered to enable people with disabilities to engage with political content online and reduce their reliance on state TV (currently the only accessible channel in Peru).

Safeguarding

The Resource and Support Hub Eastern Europe held a webinar on **Sheltering from harm: Assessing the safeguarding needs of persons with disabilities in Poland, Romania and Moldova** in February 2023. The webinar presents findings of the 2022 safeguarding assessments of refugees with disabilities conducted in Poland, Moldova and Romania.

The International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) published their **Inclusive Safeguarding Statement** in January 2023. The statement outlines why disability-inclusive safeguarding is important, how safeguarding principles can be made relevant for people with disabilities, and supports advocacy efforts to demand change.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

In January 2023, the Inclusive Futures programme hosted a **webinar on disability inclusive sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR)**, which is now available online. Speakers from the Inclusive Futures' consortium partners BBC Media Action, Humanity & Inclusion, Network of Disabled Women – Nigeria, Sightsavers, and Social Development Direct, shared their experience, evidence and stories about disability inclusion and SRHR. Daryl Lloyd, statistics advisor and lead for the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office's (FCDO) flagship disability-focussed programmes, was a special guest. Sign language interpretation was provided.

Humanity and Inclusion published **Beyond visibility: A learning Brief on Vulnerability Focal Point Approach** in January 2023. Drawing on lessons learnt from Inclusive Futures programming in Nepal, the brief presents the main lessons learned and the factors that helped and hindered the use of the intervention called the Vulnerability Focal Point (VFP) approach to improve access to and use of SRH services by people with disabilities. The programme found that VFPs and their extension services increased access and helped change the communities' perception and behaviour towards persons with disabilities

Disability inclusion policy news

In February 2023, UNICEF published its **Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy (DIPAS) 2022 – 2030** which envisages a world in 2030 that enables all children to live barrier free in inclusive communities. It sets out six strategic priorities: prevention of stigma and discrimination; improvement of disability-inclusive services, programmes and workplaces; access to comprehensive community care and support services; access to assistive technology, disability-inclusive action in humanitarian, emergency and fragile contexts; and full and meaningful participation of all persons with disabilities. UNICEF describes DIPAS as a roadmap for greater cross-sectoral coordination so that disability is mainstreamed across the organisation and that the world's 240 million children with disabilities can be seen and have their needs met. The organisation has set itself ambitious targets for both 2025 and 2030, ranging from requirements on budget allocations in programming, to training and staffing, to media and communications.

In March 2023, FCDO launched its **International Women and Girls Strategy 2023-2030**, which sets out how FCDO will work to tackle gender inequality through its work. The strategy includes a continued focus on girls' education, empowering women and girls, championing health and rights and ending gender-based violence. There are a handful of references to disability in the strategy. This includes references to disaggregated data and increased vulnerability (to exclusion from school, or risk of SGBV), but do not come with clear policy propositions for disability inclusion. For example, the education section commits to improving quality, but does not mention inclusive education, though it notes that through the Girl' Education Challenge, more than a million girls who were most at risk of dropping out are staying in school, of which 150,000 are girls with disabilities. Women's rights organisations (WROs) are mentioned as key stakeholders, including those working on disability and minority rights, however, organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) are not highlighted.

About the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk:

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides research and technical assistance on disability inclusion to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office as part of the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. All our published reports are available on [our website](#). Contact us via: enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk