



## **BACKGROUND**

In 2013, EASPD joined the taskforce of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of EUROPA, UN ISDR, and the Council of Europe's (CoE) on the inclusion of People with Disabilities (PwD) in Disaster Preparedness and Response. During its meeting in October 2013, the taskforce adopted a set of recommendations for the Committee of Ministers to distribute to all Member States of the CoE, and decided to organise an international conference on the topic in 2014/2015.

Art. 11 of the UNCRPD states that "*States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities (PwD) in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.*" In this context, the term "disaster" stands for: "*a major destructive event that involves a large number of people and causes widespread damage and probably significant physical injury, possibly with a number, more or less large, of fatalities*".

People with disabilities constitute a very large minority that consists of between one sixth and one fifth of the general population of most countries. When major incidents and disasters occur, people with disabilities face hardships that are potentially greater than those of the majority of the population. Moreover, they can suffer additional forms of discrimination or neglect. Whereas measures for the general population are usually created for groups, a certain number of PwD require individual assistance, which may involve a fundamental reorientation in the way that civil protection services are planned and delivered. It is in this context that specialised service providers have a crucial role to play, as they quite often provide the individual support these people need. Despite the efforts of countries to improve their emergency preparedness, little has been done yet in order to include the issue of disability into civil protection's programmes of action. Preparing for disaster with and on behalf of PwD requires political commitment, national and local co-ordination, strategic planning, networking, knowledge management, optimisation of resources, as well as good communication strategies.

In order to get a better understanding of the involvement and knowledge of service providers on this topic, EASPD consulted its members and asked them to provide their inputs through an online survey. The brief questionnaire first examined the experience of service providers across Europe in disaster situations and their capability to act in terms of methodology and protocols, trainings and models of good practice (MOGP). Next, it investigated service providers' awareness of national, regional, local and municipal plans for disaster preparedness and response, specifically dedicated to people with disabilities, as well as the service providers' involvement in




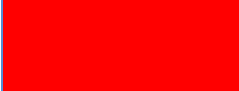

















the development and implementation of these plans. Finally, the last part of the survey focused on assessing service providers' level of involvement in ensuring the security of PwD in such emergencies and their opinions on their role in this field.

A total of 27 organisations from 19 different European countries filled in the questionnaire provided by EASPD. The participating organisations are Single agencies, working directly with persons with disabilities, and Umbrella structures which represent the views and realities of service providers from across their countries. The research therefore provides a good knowledge-base on the topic from across Europe; EASPD will use this to bring this in the service providers' perspective in the discussions on disaster preparedness and response for persons with disabilities.



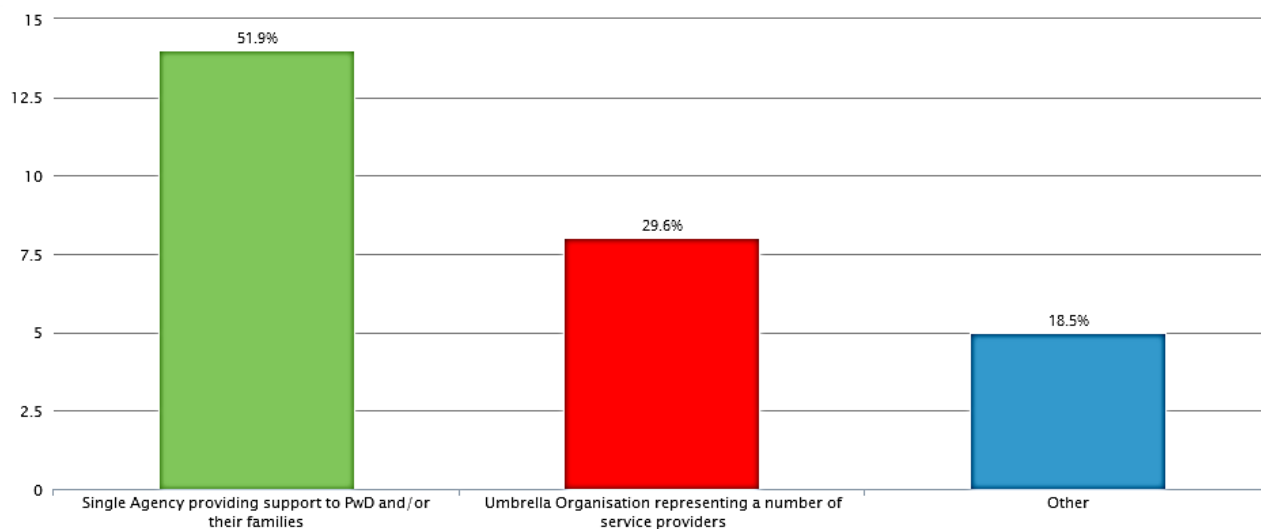
## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

### Country

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Austria		7.4%	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina		3.7%	1
Denmark		3.7%	1
Finland		3.7%	1
France		7.4%	2
Germany		3.7%	1
Greece		3.7%	1
Hungary		3.7%	1
Ireland		7.4%	2
Italy		7.4%	2
Latvia		3.7%	1
Macedonia		3.7%	1
Moldova		3.7%	1
Netherlands		7.4%	2
Portugal		3.7%	1
Romania		11.1%	3
Switzerland		3.7%	1
Turkey		3.7%	1
United Kingdom		7.4%	2
<b>Total Responses</b>			<b>27</b>



## Type of organisation



**Does your organisation have experience in living a natural disaster and its consequences? If yes, please briefly describe how the organisation responded to the situation.**

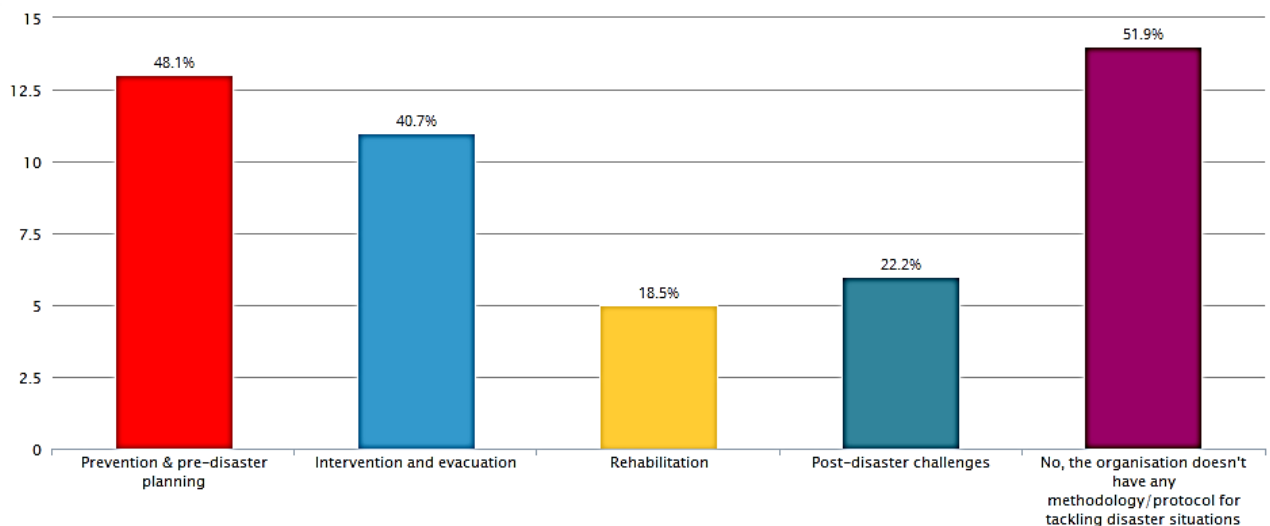
Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes:		19.2%	5
No		80.8%	21
<b>Total Responses</b>			<b>26</b>

Of all the 27 agencies and organisations that took part in the survey, 5 (19,2%) have experienced a disaster situation, ranging from the heat and cold waves that crossed Europe in 2012, to the most recent floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia in May 2014. In three cases, the emergency response followed previously settled procedures or was provided through cooperation with partners. In one case, lack of preparation for the emergency caused the structure to close down.



EASPD members reported that during the recent floods in the Balkans, no prevention or response plans were in place. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia has been extremely severe, with numerous casualties and people evacuated, as well as urgent need of support and supplies. For these reasons ad-hoc activities, fundraising, and psychotherapy for clients have been organised by Umbrella structures and spontaneously developed networks of NGOs.

**Does your organisation have a methodology or protocol for tackling disaster situations for the following phases? If yes, please briefly describe each of it.**



48,1% of survey participants declared they followed a methodology or a protocol to respond to disaster situations. From them, 48,1% affirm having a methodology or protocol on prevention and pre-disaster planning, 40,7% on intervention and evacuation, 22,2 % on post-disaster challenges and 18,5% on rehabilitation. The majority of the participants (51,9%), however, admit to not having such a methodology or protocol in place.



#### **Prevention and Pre-disaster planning**

Service providers for PwD generally possess pre-disaster plans in case of fires, earthquakes, and to a lesser extent, floods. In most cases, these plans are compulsory and are applied through specific training to services' staff.

In France, for example, each service has to possess its own plan, following national requirements. There is a plan specifically dedicated to the medical sector, the so called 'White Plan', and another one to the medico-social sector, called the 'Blue Plan'. A representative from France explained the functioning of the Blue Plan in their organisation as a methodology that can be used to respond to various disasters (heatwave, cold wave, or erratic electric supply). For natural disasters, the plan establishes a prevention component in order to ensure an early response and also to prevent local hospitals being overcrowded in such situations. In addition, a pre-disaster component has been envisioned (water stocks, equipment maintenance, and intensive care for the most vulnerable users).

In the UK, these phases are managed through 'Business Continuity Plans', which enable services to continue to be delivered, as well as through a planned risk management strategy. In Turkey, all relevant general instructions are provided by the National Agency for Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD).

The responses do not provide information on whether the mentioned disaster plans include specific instructions for supporting persons with disabilities.

#### **Intervention and Evacuation**

Service providers for PwD organise their actions according to evacuation plans in Austria, Finland, Italy, Portugal, and the Netherlands. In these cases, responsibilities, behaviour, meeting points and evacuations arrangements are pre-arranged. In the case of France, the Blue Plan includes a protocol of intervention that takes into account the level of severity of the crisis. In Turkey, intervention and evacuation responses follow the AFAD's instructions, together with guidelines provided by the Local Fire Department. In Italy, these plans are activated following a specific warning notice.

#### **Rehabilitation**

Only 1 out of the 5 organisations who responded to this question could provide specific measures for rehabilitation. After the most recent floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this phase





will be based on psychotherapy, post-traumatic therapy and workshops for clients affected by the disaster, as well as support for their families. This support is mainly organised by NGOs and volunteer organisations.



## Post-disaster Challenges

Post-disaster challenges generally concern psychological support for victims of disasters and in some cases, fundraising throughout the civil society.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, service providers, DPOs and disability rights organisations are currently focused on providing services for evacuated people with disabilities, such as post-traumatic therapy, fundraising for those users who have lost their houses and their families, and technical support for charities and people with disabilities' organisations.

Service providers point out that the post-disaster challenges will be to mainstream disability during the reconstruction phase, while at a later stage, stakeholders including service providers, DPOs and government services will need to be trained on "emergency and disability" (setting up of accessible collective centres, psychological support of evacuated PWDs, training on continuing services during the evacuation of people with disabilities). In the Netherlands, trauma teams for post-trauma sufferers and employees are put into place. A different situation is that of France, where, in case of extreme crisis, the Blue Plan foresees a crisis management cell which also takes care of post-disaster challenges.

**Does your organisation provide training to staff on how to act in cases of natural disasters? If yes, please briefly describe what the training includes.**

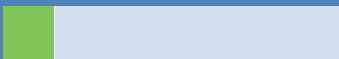

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes:		42.3%	11
No		57.7%	15
Total Responses			26



Only 42,3 % of the agencies and organisations that took part in the survey provide their staff with specific training on emergency response preparedness, whilst the 57,7 % don't.

In the first cases, training is provided on topics such as how to act in case of fire, trauma, accident and evacuation; on safety of buildings and necessary equipment; on cooperation with local fire departments and technical welfare organisations; on safety of people and first aid. In most countries, all the staff are trained to respond to emergency situations, and take part in recurring simulations. In France, for instance, the Blue Plans on Emergency Response are sent to all of the employees, meetings on this topic are organised once a year, and simulated evacuations and training on how to use extinguishers are provided three times a year. In the UK, the emergency response is led through business continuity plans, i.e. procedures and systems to mitigate the impact on the social service sector in case of a natural disaster, on which staff and teams are briefed and updated every two years.

## Can you provide models of good practice (MOGP) from your organisation or other service providers in regard to disaster preparedness and response?

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes		15.4%	4
No		84.6%	22
Total Responses			26

Only 15, 4% of the organisations could provide MOGP with regard to disaster preparedness and response, while the majority of service providers, 84, 6% , could not share such examples.





**Do you have knowledge on how the disaster preparedness and response concerning persons with disabilities is implemented in your country? If yes, please add a brief description and explain which entities are responsible for the implementation:**

## **National level**

At national level, organisations for PwD provided examples of disaster preparedness and response plans implemented by national governmental agencies.

Provided examples: Ireland - Emergency Planning Agency, Italy - Ministry of Environmental Affairs; Hungary - National Directorate General for Disaster Management of the Ministry of the Interior (NDGDM); Portugal - Protecção Civil; France - Health Ministry and other authorities, according to the severity of the crisis and the level of the alarm. For example, the Ministries of Health and of Internal Affairs are the referring authorities for the highest levels of alarm. With the exception of Turkey however, where the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD)(which directly depends on the Prime Ministry Cabinet) is responsible for developing policies about the disaster preparedness of persons with disabilities, these plans do not specifically take into account persons with disabilities.

## **Regional Level**

At regional level, organisations of persons with disabilities provided examples of disaster preparedness and response plans implemented by different governmental agencies: Italy - regional agencies of the ministry of environmental affairs, Turkey – AFAD’s regional offices, France – regional health agency and departmental councils are in charge of activating service providers’ response for levels 2 alarms (heat wave plan); the Netherlands- regional governments and the Security Regios (GGD Veiligheidsregio’s); Romania, however, NGOs have a role to play at the county level, together with Social Assistance and Protection of the Children DGs and users’ centres. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, activities of such type mainly depend on the different projects and on donations that NGOs receive.



## **Local and Municipal Level**

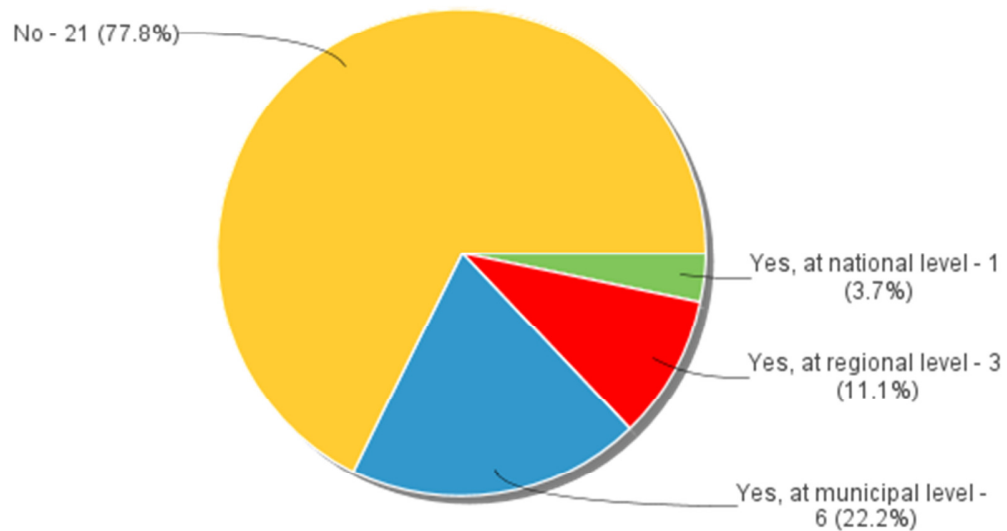
At local and municipal levels, organisations work with the civil society in many different ways. In France, organisations collaborate locally with individuals with disabilities, with institutions and different NGOs. Moreover, prefectures are the referring authorities for level 3 and 4 of the heatwave plan. In the UK, this activity in all services is part of the public tendering process. In Turkey, AFAD has offices located in all the 81 provinces and works together with various NGOs and local municipalities, in order to try to provide trainings on the disaster preparedness for persons with disabilities. In Portugal, each municipality has a branch of Protecção Civil (civil protection), working closely with fire brigades, which are prepared to deal with issues of disaster and response. Their guidelines state that children, people with disabilities and the elderly should be supported in the first place. At the same time, this agency sends information on how to support clients in situations such as pandemics or heatwaves. In the Netherlands, local governments and public agencies such as the police or fire brigades are the responsible authorities; in some cases, organisations for PwD are themselves responsible. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, initiatives are taken mostly at the individual level.

## **I don't know**

- In general, organisations often underline that they are not aware of disaster preparedness and response plans or that PwD are often not specifically targeted in such plans. The situation varies from country to country. The Netherlands, for example, have not ratified the UNCRPD and therefore are not obliged to respect what is provided by Art. 11. In Moldova, disaster preparedness and response concerning PwD is at an initial stage of development. There, the rescue workers do receive “some” training on how to provide specific assistance to persons with disabilities. In Finland, social care providers all have rather strict requirements that need to be followed.



**Is your organisation involved in disaster preparedness and response planning at the following levels?**



The agencies and organisations interviewed in the present survey were asked if they are involved in disaster preparedness and response planning. 77,8% answered negatively. The majority of organisations which gave a positive answer affirmed taking part in such planning at the municipal level (22,2%), at the regional level (11,1%) or at the national level (3,7%).

**Are specialised service providers in your country involved in ensuring the safety of persons with disabilities in cases of disasters? If yes, please briefly explain how.**



Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes:		36.0%	9
No		64.0%	16
Total Responses			25



The majority of the organisations (64%) affirmed that they were not involved in the security of person with disabilities in case of disasters. Only 36% of them confirmed that they would be involved in ensuring the safety of PwD in such emergency situations.

Within this last group, a number of measures are taken in order to ensure the security of PwD in case of a disaster. In Latvia for example, each social service has its own plan of action for such situations. In the UK, it is the organisation that provides the security of its own users. In Turkey, organisations act according to the National Agency for Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD)'s guidelines through continuously training their staff and within public institutions such as schools or municipalities. Similarly in Finland, all staff members are required to ensure the safety of these persons and follow a specific protocol. In France, specialised service providers are involved in national and regional health conferences, the latter dealing more specifically with the rights of persons with disabilities. In the Netherlands, the security of PwD and its importance is discussed regularly, and seems therefore to have achieved service providers' recognition.

**In your opinion, should specialised service providers in your country be involved in ensuring the safety of persons with disabilities in cases of natural disasters? If yes, please briefly explain why and how.**

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
Yes:		88.5%	23
No		11.5%	3
Total Responses			26



According to the total answers received, 88,5% of agencies and organisations interviewed claim that service providers should be more involved in ensuring the safety of persons with disabilities in cases of disaster emergencies. Only 11, 5% deem this activity as not relevant to their work.

There is an agreement on the fact that vulnerable groups such as disabled persons are particularly vulnerable in case of disaster situations. It is also claimed that disabled people's organisations and the sector of service providers for PwD have specific needs that have to be taken into consideration during the planning of the emergency response. The majority of the organisations therefore suggest that service providers should be involved in the development and evaluation of emergency response protocols. They should also contribute to the targeted training of staff at national, regional and local levels. Moreover, they should always be informed of existing emergency response mechanisms as well as of the functioning of information dissemination ones. In Ireland, for instance, it is suggested that the emergency preparedness agency already in place takes a lead in order to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are mainstreamed into their planning process, and also that all specific elements of accessibility be taken into high consideration.

Service providers highlight that disaster plans often exclude persons with disabilities, putting them in greater danger (i.e. fire doors functioning). For this reason, all the specific elements of accessibility must be taken into consideration during the planning of an emergency response. Interestingly, organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina point out that the recent floods and the ensuing emergency situation confirmed the fact that service providers in this country are not yet prepared to face natural disasters of this kind and to provide for the safety of persons with disabilities. The same organisations therefore affirm that more information, knowledge, applied case studies, and practical training are strongly needed.



### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

- ✓ Disaster preparedness and response plans should include specific guidelines on supporting persons with disabilities, based on their involvement.
- ✓ Support for people with disabilities has to be provided in close cooperation with those who have the specific knowledge of their needs and the know-how to meet them.
- ✓ Civil protection services should mainstream disabilities into their disaster preparedness and response plans.
- ✓ Social awareness on the topic needs to be raised. More information needs to be provided by the national governments and local entities in case of disasters.
- ✓ Organisations need more cooperation, training and knowledge on disaster preparedness and response, focusing on supporting persons with disabilities.

Disaster preparedness and response is an area in which society can prove to be truly inclusive and fully respect the human rights of all its citizens. A disability perspective in this field is of utmost importance. Efficient and effective plans should include the knowledge and know-how available amongst support providers. They are the actors in the society who are often not only better equipped to provide support in a correct way but also, in many cases, they have very close and intense relationships with the people.