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Open Letter: Appeal for Action



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Childhood Disability

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association

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The war in Ukraine due to the invasion by the Russian Army is having a devastating impact on the country's children with disabilities. Families are terrified, in shock, and desperate for safety. In conflict, children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable. They often require specialized treatment and services. Without access to services, schools and assistive products like wheelchairs, many children with disabilities face a very real risk of exclusion, neglect and stigmatization as the war continues.

As of 20 March 2022, The World Health Organisation (WHO) has verified 52 attacks on health care in 25 days. This is, of course, unacceptable and health care must always be protected. The attacks on medical and education facilities have decimated the Ukraine's health and education systems. It is estimated that more than 4 million people have been forced to leave the country, including thousands of children. This has hit children with disabilities the hardest, leaving many without access to specialized care and accessible education facilities they need.

The implications cannot be underestimated. Lack of access to proper medical and psychological care will prolong or worsen injuries and disabling conditions among children. The risk of being exposed to violence and facing difficulties to access basic services including health and education are exponentially higher for children with disabilities. The risk of violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect for children with disabilities is even further heightened by the death of or separation from caregivers. On top of this, families of children with disabilities in a conflict often lack the means or ability to provide their children with the assistive equipment they need, while neighbouring countries are hosting an unprecedented number of refugees from Ukraine. The refugee flow is adding a huge strain on service provision, challenging Ukrainian and host communities' access to the required services and care to families who have children with disabilities.

Therefore, on behalf of children with disabilities affected by the conflict in Ukraine, the European Academy of Childhood Disability (EACD) and partners are asking those involved in the war, those who have influence over them, all neighbouring countries and the international community for the following actions for children with disabilities inside Ukraine and refugee-host countries:

- 1) Invest in providing lifesaving support and long-term rehabilitation services, including psychosocial support and mental health care for children with disabilities.**
- 2) Provide children with disabilities early passage across borders and ensure safeguarding of the human rights of children with disabilities and their access to basic services including health and nutrition, education, child protection and shelter.**
- 3) Increase financial assistance to families with children with disabilities to help provide access to assistive products like wheelchairs, canes and prosthetics.**
- 4) Produce and provide a resource containing information on relevant local rehabilitation resources, care facilities, family support resources and any other information that may help the children with disabilities to access care readily.**
- 5) Provide flexible, unrestricted, multi-year funding to meet the needs of children, including those with disabilities and their families to increase their access to specialized services.**
- 6) Support reconstruction and recovery efforts by prioritising the needs of children, including children with disabilities.**
- 7) End all restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid to children and their families within Ukraine.**