

# THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE ON THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND AUTISM

Richard Baker MP



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## Foreword

I worked in the disability sector for a decade before my election to Parliament as the Member of Glenrothes and Mid Fife. In my role at Enable, Scotland's biggest disability charity, I had the privilege of working with Inclusion Europe as we hosted their Europe in Action Conference in Glasgow last year, bringing together organisations supporting 20 million people with learning disabilities and their families from 29 countries across Europe.

At this brilliant event, we were joined by people with learning disabilities from Ukraine and their supporters, so we could hear from them about how they had been affected by Russia's invasion of their country. The conference heard powerful testimony from Raisa Kravchenko, who leads the All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, and from her son Oleksiy who has a learning disability. They spoke of how the invasion has particularly affected people with learning disabilities and autism. Vasyl Myryavchyk and Osanka Shtefanyuk, self-advocates from Ukraine, talked about how they keep fighting for rights of people with learning disabilities despite the war. They push for progress in challenging times and help to deliver humanitarian aid too.<sup>1</sup>

When Russia brutally invaded Ukraine in February 2022, millions of people were forced to flee. But to leave their homes has not been an option for more than 260,000 Ukrainian people with learning and psychosocial disabilities. Dependent on their families, carers, and professional support from carers and in care homes, they had to stay.

The learning disability community across Europe came together to support their Ukrainian colleagues in their hour of need. It was clear, as the international aid community mobilised in response to the invasion, that not all aid was reaching disabled people, including those with learning disabilities. Inclusion Europe started a special fundraising campaign in March 2022 raising around 650,000 euros for families in

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusion Europe. (2025, June 23). *Europe in Action 2024 Report*. <https://www.inclusion.eu/europe-in-action-2024-report>

need supported by the NGO Coalition of charities in Ukraine, an organisation founded by Raisa Kravchenko. Inclusion Europe has continued to support the work of organisations for people with learning disabilities in Ukraine, as year after year, they have suffered from the results of Russia's aggression.

In April of this year my colleague Johanna Baxter MP published her report "*Returning the Stolen Children of Ukraine.*" This report highlighted the appalling practice by Russia of the abduction and forced adoptions of Ukrainian children, and that because children living in institutional care were targeted for this appalling practice by Russian forces, disabled children were disproportionately affected. We have shared here Joanna's account of the kidnap of two disabled children, Mykola and Anastasiya, as it is a harrowing example of how people with learning disabilities have been deeply impacted by the invasion.

Johanna's report has been vital in focusing minds and efforts in the UK on the plight of Ukraine's kidnapped children. I believe in the same way it is important, as one of Ukraine's closest and most consistent allies, that we recognise the acute need for greater support for disabled people in Ukraine who have suffered particular difficulties during the invasion.

I have raised these issues with Stephen Doughty, the Minister for Europe, North America and the UK Overseas Territories, and was pleased to learn from him that the project 'SPIRIT', a collaboration between the Government of Ukraine, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the UK is donating £25 million of funding to support an inclusive, sustainable and barrier-free social recovery in Ukraine. This will include specific activities to support children with disabilities by building the capacity of civil society and local community actors to provide high-quality social services, including daycare for children with disabilities, temporary respite care for parents of these children, support in inclusive education and early intervention. This will work alongside the Foreign Secretary's new global initiative to reform the childcare system aimed at ensuring that every child has the right to a safe and loving family environment, phasing out institutionalisation, and ensuring that no child is left behind.

This is welcome, and the focus on phasing out institutionalised care chimes entirely with the aims of the All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition. However, it is clear much more needs to be done to realise inclusion for disabled people in Ukraine both now in the face of the Russian onslaught and when peace is finally achieved.

One example of this is in the work of the All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition to secure the phasing out of institutionalised care for people with learning disabilities in Ukraine, a mission shared by so many learning disability organisations in their own countries across Europe. The impact of the invasion has been that, despite their work and the shared ambition of the Ukrainian government to move away from institutional care, there has actually been an increase in the number of people with learning disabilities receiving care in institutions rather than their own communities. It is also vital to understand the scale of traumas faced by disabled people now in Ukraine and the extent of the support which will be required when we finally move to the work of reconstruction in Ukrainian society.

In the past year there have been two reports which have shone a powerful light on the traumas faced by people with learning disabilities in Ukraine. The first is “Impact of the War on Ukrainians with Intellectual Disability” by the All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, with support from Lev / Inclusion Denmark (which will be hereto referred to as the All-Ukrainian NGO report). The second is by Inclusion Europe, “People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine.”

This report is very largely drawn from the research and findings of these two publications which we seek to highlight here. We also draw attention to reports and research by international institutions and organisations on issues affecting all disabled people in Ukraine. However, our primary focus is on learning disabilities and autism given the specialist expertise of the organisations we have worked with to produce this report.

The findings of these reports document, in detail, the impact of the war on people with intellectual disabilities and their families. They show:

- How community support networks have collapsed, leaving families isolated.
- How displacement and housing destruction have driven thousands back into institutions.
- How the healthcare and rehabilitation system has crumbled, cutting off access to medicines and therapies.
- How rights reforms have stalled, with guardianship entrenched and futures uncertain.

Most importantly, this report places these realities alongside the human voices of those living through them. People like Vitaliy Zegelev, who had

not left his Kyiv apartment in three years, terrified by air raid sirens and wholly dependent on his mother; Raisa and Yuliia, who embody the daily courage of caregiving under bombardment; and Mykola and Anastasiya Volodin, disabled children abducted from a Kherson institution and taken to Crimea, their identities rewritten under occupation.

Their stories remind us that inclusion, dignity, and the right to live in the community are not luxuries to be postponed until after the war. They are obligations—under international law, under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and above all under the shared principles of humanity.

As Ukraine and its partners look toward recovery, the choices we make now will determine whether we entrench institutions and exclusion, or whether we build a society where people with learning disabilities are recognised as full citizens. I hope this report makes one thing clear: that over 250,000 people with learning disabilities in Ukraine cannot wait for peace to have their rights respected. Their rights are part of the fight for peace itself.

**Richard Baker MP**

Member of Parliament for Glenrothes and Mid Fife

## Personal stories

### Case Study 1: Vitaliy Zegelev – Living Through War Without Leaving Home

#### Inclusion Europe Case Study

Vitaliy Zegelev tragically lost his life in August 2025. His mother remembers his episodes of severe distress during air attacks, so, it could be considered that the negative effects of the war had accelerated his death.

For most Ukrainians, the wail of an air raid siren is a signal to run — into cellars, shelters, or subway stations. For 38-year-old Vitaliy Zegelev, it was a signal to freeze. Loud noises overwhelmed him, feeding into his epilepsy and profound developmental disability. In three years, he had not stepped outside the Kyiv apartment he shared with his mother. While his neighbours hurried to basements when missiles threaten the city, Vitaliy remained upstairs, paralysed by fear, more exposed than protected.

Vitaliy did not speak. His world was small and structured, anchored by the bicycle handlebar he held onto since he was a toddler. Everything in his life — from eating and washing to handling money or paperwork — was managed by his mother. She was his caregiver, interpreter, and advocate. Every day she lifted the weight of two lives, and every night she lay awake wondering what will happen when she can no longer do so.

Vitaliy could not access health care because most doctors refused to make home visits. Procedures that require specialist settings — such as dental work under anaesthesia — had been out of reach since childhood. Even the medicines he needed for epilepsy arrived only sporadically, depending on his mother's persistence and luck in navigating Ukraine's fractured systems. The official healthcare network has little room for someone who cannot sit in a waiting room or explain his own symptoms.

Before Russia's full-scale invasion, Djerela, a Ukrainian disability organisation, offered a lifeline. Its activities gave Vitaliy some social contact and his mother some respite. Those days are gone. Before his passing, he participated only indirectly, when his mother joined online self-advocacy calls. These sessions, when the internet holds, taught her how to press city hotlines for heating repairs or help with supplies. But

they cannot replace the face-to-face networks of care and friendship that once broke their isolation.

Vitaliy's life story is not an outlier. It exposes how people with severe learning and multiple disabilities are too often invisible in policy and emergency planning. In practice, their survival depends almost entirely on ageing parents — overwhelmingly mothers — who shoulder the burden alone. Without state support, without accessible services, and without inclusive emergency measures, confinement becomes their only reality.

His case underlines the urgent need for change. Community-based services must be backed by genuine resources, not just strategies on paper. Mobile healthcare teams should reach those who cannot travel. Emergency shelters must be designed with accessibility in mind, not as an afterthought. Without such measures, the war does not just trap people like Vitaliy in their homes; it locks them out of society itself.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Inclusion Europe. (2025, February). *People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine*. <https://www.inclusion.eu/people-with-intellectual-disabilities-and-their-families-in-ukraine.-report-on-their-situation-and-impact-of-war>

## Case Study 2: Raisa Kravchenko – No Recovery Through Institutions: Why International Aid Must Support Independent Living

### All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition Case Study

For families of people with learning disabilities in Ukraine, Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 shattered fragile but hard-won systems of care overnight. Programmes that had taken decades to build disappeared in a single morning under the weight of bombardment and displacement. What remained were parents and relatives — exhausted, isolated, and yet still resisting the pull of institutions.

Raisa Kravchenko knows this story intimately. She is the mother of a 38-year-old son with behavioural difficulties, and for years she has been a leading advocate for deinstitutionalisation. As Chair of the All-Ukrainian Coalition of Organisations of People with Intellectual Disabilities, she represents 73 NGOs which advocate for about 9000 families. Before the war this number was higher – 118 NGOs representing around 14,000 Ukrainians, but sustainable financial support has diminished, and displacement and illness has broken down many of these organisations. Before the war, these groups provided day-care, therapy, and respite to families across the country — community-based services that kept people at home and out of closed institutions.

The invasion dismantled this network almost instantly. In Mariupol — a city devastated by relentless Russian bombardment — the NGO *Believe in Yourself*, serving 210 families, was reduced to silence. Only 45 families could be contacted; four people with disabilities had died; and many others were forcibly taken to Russian-controlled territory or psychiatric hospitals. The buildings that once hosted community services were reduced to rubble. “Ninety per cent of Mariupol is destroyed,” Raisa says. “There is nowhere to return.”

Her own life was turned upside down. On 24 February, she woke to explosions at 5:30 a.m. Within hours, she was told to bring her son home: his group home, like every service in Kyiv, was shutting down because of the war. Soon after, she and her family spent 25 days sheltering in a basement, without food, electricity, or gas. “Imagine everything you built for your child's support destroyed in one second,” she recalls.

The collapse of services has left parents tethered full-time to care. Day-care centres are closed, leaving adults with learning disabilities isolated and confused, sometimes responding with aggression. “My son does not

understand what is happening,” Raisa explains. “I must harmonise his feelings and behaviour every moment.” Other mothers tell her they cannot leave their child even for an hour — not to buy food, not to collect medicine. Without personal assistants or respite, burnout is inevitable.

The wider network faces the same pressures. Russia’s war has shattered Ukraine’s economy and made public funding impossible to sustain. International aid is now the only lifeline. With help from Inclusion Europe and partners in Denmark, small cash transfers have reached 250 families, but this remains a fraction of the need.

The consequences are stark. Institutionalisation, already a persistent feature of Ukraine’s disability system, is once again on the rise — not because of government policy, but because Russia’s invasion has forced families into desperation. In the absence of support, people are being channelled into crowded facilities with too few staff and inadequate food. “Families are tired and burned out,” Raisa warns. “The risk of new institutionalisation is huge.”

Ukraine has developed an ambitious post-war recovery plan, but unless international partners listen to the voices of families, there is a danger that reconstruction funding will be diverted into rebuilding institutions destroyed by war. For Raisa and the families she represents, this would entrench the very system they have fought for decades to dismantle.

Her appeal is both urgent and clear: “Do not use recovery money for institutions. Use it for support to independent living.” For her, this is not an abstract demand but a matter of survival — for her son, and thousands of others, and for the families who continue to carry the weight of care alone.

Raisa’s resilience, like that of so many Ukrainian parents, is remarkable. Yet it is also finite. Without sustained international investment in community-based services, the future will not be one of inclusion but of abandonment. In a country where even funerals have taken place in back gardens because of shelling, dignity and independence are not luxuries. They are rights that Russia’s war has placed at risk — and which international solidarity must now protect.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Kottosová, I., & Kesaieva, Y. (2023, March 28). *Impossible choices: Life was a struggle for families of Ukrainians with disabilities before the war. It’s even harder now.* CNN.

<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2023/03/world/ukraine-disabilities-cnnphotos-intl-cmd/>

## Case Study 3: Mykola and Anastasiya – The Stolen Children

### Returning the Stolen Children of Ukraine Case Study – Johanna Baxter MP

Among the darkest chapters of the war in Ukraine is the forced deportation of children from occupied territories. Hidden within this crime are some of the most vulnerable: children with learning and developmental disabilities, uprooted from their homes and stripped of their identities. The story of Mykola and Anastasiya Volodin captures both the human tragedy and the deliberate targeting of Ukrainian children under occupation.

In April 2022, Russian forces seized the Kherson Children’s Home, a state-run institution housing children with disabilities. The facility, already ill-equipped for sustained war, became the site of a mass abduction. Forty-six children, including Mykola and Anastasiya — both living with autism and cerebral palsy — were taken by soldiers and transported over 180 miles away to Simferopol, Crimea. Their parents, Roman and Valentyna Volodin, were not informed. For months they lived in anguish, uncertain whether their children were alive. Only after a New York Times investigation six months later did they learn the truth: their children were alive but under occupation control, hundreds of miles from home.

In Crimea, authorities sought to erase every trace of the children’s Ukrainian identity. Russian birth certificates were issued, names were altered, and new social security numbers were assigned. Mykola became “Nikolay,” a small change on paper that signified something larger: the preparation for forced adoption under Russian law. A presidential decree signed by Vladimir Putin in December 2022 authorised guardians in occupied territories to renounce Ukrainian citizenship on behalf of children, removing one of the final barriers to their permanent absorption into Russian families. By September 2023, both children appeared on a federal adoption registry as “orphans” from Crimea — despite having living parents.

The Volodin family’s ordeal shows how disabled children, already marginalised in peacetime, are doubly endangered in war: first by abandonment in under-resourced institutions, then by deliberate abduction and assimilation policies. For Mykola and Anastasiya, displacement was not only geographic but existential — their identities rewritten, their family ties ignored, their futures put up for auction.

Against these odds, the children's mother managed to recover them in early 2024. With support from Ukrainian authorities and Qatari mediators, she travelled to Moscow and brought them back into Ukrainian care. It was an extraordinary act of persistence in a system designed to erase parental rights. Yet the family's relief was short-lived. Anastasiya died shortly after her sixth birthday, the victim of an epileptic seizure. Her brother Mykola survived but now lives under Ukrainian guardianship while courts decide his future. His parents remain entangled in legal disputes over custody, another reminder of how fragile the return of abducted children can be.

This is not an isolated incident. Reports from institutions such as Kupyansk Special School show that many more disabled children have been subjected to forced relocation, deportation, and attempted adoption. For children with disabilities, the risk is especially high: living in institutional care makes them easier to target, and their limited ability to advocate for themselves renders them more vulnerable to exploitation.

The abduction of children with learning and developmental disabilities underscores the intersection of two injustices: the systemic neglect of disabled people in Ukraine, and the weaponisation of children in war. It exposes the danger of institutionalisation, where children become visible not as individuals with families but as wards of the state — and therefore easier to steal. It also raises urgent questions for international law. Existing frameworks for the protection of civilians and children in armed conflict often overlook the specific risks faced by disabled children, leaving them unprotected against crimes of forced assimilation.

For Mykola, survival means not just staying alive but reclaiming his name, his family, and his identity. For Anastasiya, the tragedy is that her return came too late. Their story is a warning: without strong international safeguards, disabled children will continue to be among the first to be lost — and the last to be found.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Baxter, J. *et al.* (2025, April). *Returning the Stolen Children of Ukraine*. <https://friendsofukraine.uk/%23returnthetolenchildren>

# Key Impacts of the War on People with Learning Disabilities in Ukraine

## 1. Loss of Community and Support Networks

Even before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as in many countries across Europe, people with learning disabilities too often lived largely outside the mainstream of community life. In many communities, access to education, social services, employment, and cultural participation was fragmented and under-resourced. As the All-Ukrainian NGO report stresses, the war has stripped away even these fragile supports:

“The predominant majority [of] leaders of NGOs whose purpose is to help people with intellectual disabilities recognise that these people were only partially able to adapt to wartime conditions... The community still lacks a municipal center for providing social services... Assistance is not provided systematically, not regularly.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Collapse of Day Services and Local Programmes**

Following the invasion, day-care centres and social service providers that once offered routine and stability to adults with learning disabilities have been destroyed, closed, repurposed, or left without staff. As one organisation told researchers:

“The psychological condition of children and parents has significantly deteriorated. The material condition of families has also significantly deteriorated. Some families have been left completely homeless. In some families, their homes have been damaged. Many parents have been left without work.”<sup>6</sup>

For those who have spent years building close relationships and support networks within their communities, the breakdown of community structures has had a double effect: people with learning disabilities lose access to education, therapy, and friendships, while their caregivers lose the little respite they once had.

Studies have also highlighted the widespread fear among disabled individuals and their carers regarding their quality of life after the conflict,

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<sup>5</sup>All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, Lev – Inclusion Denmark, Disabled People’s Organisations Denmark (2025, August), *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, pp.6-7

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.7

particularly if essential facilities such as early intervention centres, destroyed during hostilities, lack the financial resources and personnel needed for reconstruction.<sup>7</sup>

## **Dependence on Families and the Role of Mothers**

The All-Ukrainian NGO report underscores that caregiving responsibility falls overwhelmingly on families, and within families, primarily mothers:

“Typically, when a person with an intellectual disability lives in the community until adulthood, the lion's share of caregiving responsibilities are borne by the family, mostly the mother, with minimal assistance from state social protection and under the condition of complete mutual dependence of the adult son/daughter with an intellectual disability on the mother and vice versa.”<sup>8</sup>

During wartime, this mutual dependence becomes a source of vulnerability. If mothers are injured, displaced, or forced to seek work, their adult children are left without protection. No substitute service or community mechanism steps in.

Lacking additional support services, often-inexperienced caregivers have been forced to cope with their own deteriorating mental and physical health while still providing essential care, leaving both themselves and their dependent at greater vulnerability. Research has suggested that this has meant family members, especially mothers, are more likely to experience frequent panic attacks, sleep problems, and other stress-related complaints as a result of these additional responsibilities.<sup>9</sup>

## **Social Isolation**

The NGO survey conducted for the report revealed stark findings on social isolation:

- **69.3% of respondents** indicated that people with learning disabilities became more isolated and withdrawn during the war.

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<sup>7</sup> Vromans, L. *et al.* (2023) ‘The experiences of people with intellectual disabilities living in Ukraine during the first months of the Russian invasion: A lack of fulfilment of basic necessities and support and uncertainty towards reforms’, *Disability & Society*, 39(11), p.2931

<sup>8</sup> All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.2

<sup>9</sup> Vromans, L. *et al.*, ‘The experiences of people with intellectual disabilities living in Ukraine during the first months of the Russian invasion: A lack of fulfilment of basic necessities and support and uncertainty towards reforms’, p.2927

- Only **17.7%** reported no increase in isolation.<sup>10</sup>

One respondent explained:

“This is especially noticeable in children with autism, intellectual disabilities, or speech disorders. Some of them stopped taking the initiative in communication, avoided interaction, even in a familiar environment. This requires long-term recovery – through play, support, and a gradual return to a safe space.”<sup>11</sup> Research by Inclusion Europe found that the constant danger posed by the war has further negative impacts on community participation and independence<sup>12</sup>. Fear of missile attacks, air-raid alarms, and war-related noises has led to many to remain indoors, often in isolation, and increasingly reliant on their families. As a result, health has deteriorated in many cases, accompanied by rising levels of loneliness.

Yet this experience is uneven. Whilst respondents told researchers there had been efforts to maintain peer support in cities, this was more of a challenge in rural areas.<sup>13</sup>

Where the local security situation has allowed, every-day activities such as “visiting shops, dog-walking, and social gatherings” have still been possible<sup>14</sup>, helping to ease the constraints on independent living despite the war.

This reflects how geography is determining outcomes: families in large cities may retain some service access and have been able to remain active members of their communities, while those in frontline or rural regions face near-total exclusion.

**Table 1. Reported social isolation of people with learning disabilities during the war**

<b>Response</b>	<b>% of NGOs</b>
Increased isolation	69.3%
No increase	17.7%
Undecided	12.9%

<sup>10</sup> All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.8

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>12</sup> Inclusion Europe. *People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine*, p.32-33

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.13

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.32

Source: All-Ukrainian NGO/ Lev Report, 2025.<sup>15</sup>

## **Peer-to-Peer Support**

Despite systemic collapse, the destruction of meeting spaces, and a lack of funding; families have created informal support networks, often through online communication. One NGO described how parents and beneficiaries maintained a Viber group:

“At the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russian troops, some of our beneficiaries left for other countries due to uncertainty about their own safety. Through our Viber group, we all stayed in touch... Later, many returned. We believe that it was this kind of constant communication... that really helped everyone adapt, no matter where they were.”<sup>16</sup>

However, learning disability organisations in Ukraine have emphasised that these fragile digital communities cannot replace day centres or supported housing.

## **Economic Strain on Community NGOs**

The financial crisis of war has further undermined NGO networks. The All-Ukrainian NGO report documents how funding streams have dried up:

“Charitable foundations, donors, benefactors, and local programs have stopped allocating funds to NGOs that provide services to people with disabilities. All resources are directed to the military, their family members, and IDPs. Therefore, parents have to pay for services.”<sup>17</sup>

For NGOs that once served as community hubs, this financial starvation has meant staff layoffs, reduced services, and reliance on volunteers. This situation means that their survival depends on unpredictable foreign grants.

## **Conclusion: Communities Fractured**

The war has not only displaced individuals but dismantled entire support ecosystems. The All-Ukrainian NGO report concludes:

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<sup>15</sup> All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.8

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.9

“Families have moved to other places where social services are inadequate... Both before and during the war, there is no access to social services for people with intellectual disabilities in the community, except for the provision of services by NGOs through project activities.”<sup>18</sup>

In short, communities have fractured. The resilience of parents and local NGOs provides a thin lifeline, but without sustained investment in community-based services, the risk is that isolation and institutionalisation will become the default reality for thousands of people with learning disabilities in Ukraine.

## 2. Housing, Displacement, and Institutionalisation

The war in Ukraine has uprooted millions of people, destroying homes, fracturing families, and overwhelming local services. For people with learning disabilities and their caregivers, housing insecurity is compounded by the near-collapse of community support, leaving many with only one bleak alternative: institutionalisation.

### **Displacement and Inaccessible Housing**

Families caring for children and adults with learning disabilities have been among the hardest hit by displacement. Bombardments and missile strikes have destroyed homes in frontline regions such as Kherson, Donetsk, and Kharkiv, forcing families to flee. Yet most air-raid shelters and temporary housing facilities are not accessible for people with cognitive, behavioural, or mobility needs.

NGOs assisting in the evacuation of people with disabilities from frontline areas report that transit centres too often lack accessible facilities and specialised staff capable of providing the necessary support<sup>19</sup>.

As the All-Ukrainian NGO report makes clear:

“Families have moved to other places where social services are inadequate. Priority is given to people with disabilities as a result of hostilities, IDPs, families of military personnel, fallen soldiers, and

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<sup>18</sup> All Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.11

<sup>19</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2025, June). *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025*, p.22.

<https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/Report-on-the-Human-Rights-Situation-in-Ukraine-1-December-2024-31-May-2025>

missing persons. Not all caregivers find the strength and courage to apply for financial/humanitarian assistance. Many have been denied.”<sup>20</sup>

Families who relocated to safer areas often discovered that the services they once relied on did not exist in their new communities. As one NGO explained:

“There are no social services in the community. Only now, for the second half of 2025, the opening of a social services center in the city has been announced (training and recruitment are still ongoing).”<sup>21</sup>

This absence forces families into cycles of isolation and dependence on overstretched NGOs or informal networks.

### **Rise in Institutionalisation**

Without community housing or respite options, many families face a devastating choice; keep caring for their relatives entirely on their own or place them in institutions. Wartime pressures have tipped thousands into institutionalisation.

The All-Ukrainian NGO report documents this trend in stark detail:

“Due to the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, the number of people enrolled in residential institutions is consistently increasing. Thus, in 2020, 3,130 people were placed in residential institutions, in 2021 - 4,533, in 2022 - 5,200, in 2023 - 5,507 people.”<sup>22</sup>

**Table 2. New admissions to residential institutions in Ukraine, 2020–2023**

<b>Year</b>	<b>New Admissions</b>	<b>% Change from Previous Year</b>
2020	3,130	–
2021	4,533	+45%
2022	5,200	+15%
2023	5,507	+6%

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<sup>20</sup> All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.11

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p.9

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.3

Source: All-Ukrainian NGO/ Lev Report, 2025.<sup>23</sup>

The increase of nearly 2,400 admissions between 2020 and 2023 represents not just numbers, but thousands of individual stories of families unable to cope.

One NGO leader summarised the issue bluntly:

“Measures to prevent further admission of new people with intellectual disabilities to care institutions could include guaranteed provision of supported living services, a personal assistant, support during employment and at the workplace, or social and labour adaptation. But currently such provision looks like a lottery.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Institutions Under Strain**

The burden on institutions themselves has become overwhelming. Ukraine’s 153 psychoneurological residential institutions now house around 23,665 people with learning and psychosocial disabilities, making up more than 60% of all residents.<sup>25</sup>

With staff shortages, disrupted supply chains, and frequent power outages, conditions have deteriorated sharply. The All-Ukrainian NGO report cites evidence of regression among residents:

“Those who left their native places, where hostilities have approached, really miss their friends... They show signs that fear outweighs other emotions during anxiety. Legal representatives report psychological problems related to being in a city under shelling.”<sup>26</sup>

NGOs reported that some institutions in occupied territories were effectively abandoned. As of June 2024, 20 care institutions remained under Russian control in Zaporizhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kherson, housing around 3,000 people. The fate of many of these residents is unknown.

### **Stalled Deinstitutionalisation Reforms**

In 2017, Ukraine committed to overhaul its care system, shifting away from the Soviet model of institutions to community-based housing and

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<sup>23</sup> All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.3

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.6

support<sup>27</sup>. This included a national deinstitutionalisation strategy and the introduction of supported living arrangements.

The war has frozen these reforms. The Ukrainian NGO report highlights the approval of a new strategy in December 2024, but without funding to make this a reality, deinstitutionalisation only remains an ambition. With no dedicated funding with an economy devoted to resisting the Russian invasion, families are left with only the institution system as a default.

## Human Consequences

The Inclusion Europe testimonies bring this reality to life. Families describe being forced into repeated moves, or into unsafe conditions. Liya, a young woman from Kharkiv, recalled: *“At the beginning of the war, a rocket hit our house, so my mother and I moved to another apartment... I was scared, I didn’t understand what was happening. I wanted to hide with my mother in a safe place.”*<sup>28</sup>

For families without resources or relatives abroad, institutions become the last resort. But as respondents stressed, they are not safe places:

“In the first year of the war, the services were reduced, then services restored. Now, it seems to be decreasing again due to the financial crisis. It’s all related to funding. Both before and during the war, there is no access to social services for people with intellectual disabilities in the community, except for the provision of services by NGOs through project activities.”<sup>29</sup>

## Institutionalisation as a Rights Violation

From a rights perspective, this return to institutions is deeply troubling. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) requires states to ensure independent living and inclusion in the community (Article 19).<sup>30</sup> Russia’s invasion means that for too many people with learning disabilities in Ukraine, this human right is not being fulfilled.

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<sup>27</sup> World Health Organisation. (21 June 2024). *Health financing in Ukraine: reform, resilience and recovery - Synthesis report*. <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/health-financing-in-ukraine--reform--resilience-and-recovery---synthesis-report>

<sup>28</sup>Inclusion Europe. *People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine*, p.39

<sup>29</sup>All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.12

<sup>30</sup> United Nations. (2007). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

As one NGO leader put it:

“War has an extremely devastating impact on all children, and children with disabilities and their families are particularly vulnerable. They face a dual challenge: on the one hand, the needs associated with disability, and on the other, the stress and danger associated with war. Despite the challenges, these families are demonstrating remarkable resilience. Our task is to continue to support them by creating an environment where children can thrive, even with the sirens sounding.”<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion: Institutions as Default**

The combination of displacement, lack of accessible housing, collapse of social services, and frozen reforms has created a dangerous pattern: institutionalisation as the default solution. This represents not protection but segregation, with residents often cut off from families, communities, and even basic safety.

The All-Ukrainian NGO report’s conclusion is unambiguous:

“Due to the sharp increase in the number of people with intellectual disabilities admitted to residential institutions during the war in Ukraine, there is an urgent need to remove barriers to implement the measures to prevent new people with intellectual disabilities from entering institutional care.”<sup>32</sup>

Because of Russia’s continued aggression, thousands more people with learning disabilities risk being pushed into unsuitable and unsafe institutions – their rights deferred until peace is restored and reconstruction can prioritise community-based alternatives.

### 3. Rights, Representation, and Long-Term Futures

Russia’s full-scale invasion has not only deepened the daily hardships of people with learning disabilities in Ukraine, but it has also frozen, and in some cases reversed, fragile progress towards their legal recognition and inclusion in society. Reforms that Ukraine had already committed to have been obstructed by war, whilst international attention and resources are urgently needed to prevent lasting setbacks.

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<sup>31</sup>All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability* p.7

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.12

## International Human Rights Obligations

Ukraine ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010, committing to:

- Ensure equal recognition before the law (Article 12).
- Guarantee access to justice (Article 13).
- Protect persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including armed conflict (Article 11).
- Secure independent living and community inclusion (Article 19).<sup>33</sup>

The All-Ukrainian NGO report makes clear that Russia's full-scale invasion has made it impossible to fully realise these obligations in practice. Although the UN's Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated its appreciation for "the State's efforts to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities during the war"<sup>34</sup>, ongoing bombardment, mass displacement and occupation have prevented access to justice, healthcare and community living for thousands.

The international community therefore have a critical role in ensuring these rights are protected, both during the conflict and in the rebuilding that follows.

## Legal Capacity and Guardianship

Like much of Europe, Ukraine's system of guardianship continues to impact tens of thousands of people with learning disabilities of their legal capacity. Official figures from January 2021 reported 40,327 people registered as legally incapable; by July 2024 this had fallen to 35,000.<sup>35</sup>

Yet as the All-Ukrainian NGO authors note, this decrease may not reflect reform but rather data gaps and occupation-related displacement:

"Such a sharp decrease in the number of legally incapable Ukrainians over the three years of the war requires a separate study. One of the

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<sup>33</sup> United Nations in Ukraine. (2021). *UN Policy Options | Disability*. [https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/UN%20Policy%20Paper%20on%20Disability\\_ENG\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/UN%20Policy%20Paper%20on%20Disability_ENG_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2024, August 28). Experts of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Appreciate Ukraine's Efforts to Uphold the Rights of Persons with Disabilities during the War, Raise Questions on Children Forcibly Transported to Russian Controlled Areas and the Construction of New Institutions. <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2024/08/examen-de-lukraine-au-crpd-bien-que-le-comite-soit-conscient-et>

<sup>35</sup>All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.2

assumptions is the probable stay of some of them in residential institutions in the temporarily occupied territories.”<sup>36</sup>

The war has entrenched reliance on guardianship, making progress towards supported decision-making extraordinarily difficult. With many people displaced or living under occupation, advancing CRPD-aligned reform is impossible without peace and stability. International and financial support will be essential to help Ukraine revive guardianship reform once conditions allow.

## Social and Economic Futures

The economic impact of war has driven families into poverty. According to the All-Ukrainian NGO survey:

- **84% of NGOs** reported a decline in living standards for people with learning disabilities and their families.
- Only **8%** believed living standards had not worsened.

**Table 5. Change in living standards for families with learning disabilities during war**

Reported Change	% of NGOs
Decline in living standards	84%
No change	8%
Undecided	8%

Source: *All-Ukrainian NGO Report, 2025.*<sup>37</sup>

Families often rely solely on modest disability benefits to cover utilities and food, leaving nothing for therapies, respite or education.

“The parents have to quit their jobs and live on social assistance for people with disabilities paid to their adult child.”<sup>38</sup>

Without international investment in accessible employment and community programmes, the cycle of poverty and dependency will deepen.

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<sup>36</sup>All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.4

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.9

<sup>38</sup> All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.9

## Education Interrupted

As the OHCHR have identified, children with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by the hostilities<sup>39</sup>. The war has closed schools, destroyed infrastructure, and forced children with learning disabilities into online or home learning that often excludes them.

Due to wartime pressures, newly created facilities for internally displaced persons have limited ability or capacity to offer accessible and inclusive services for those with learning disabilities. According to the European Disability Forum, “host communities often have limited technical and methodological resources and opportunities to ensure quality education for children with learning support needs”.<sup>40</sup>

For displaced children, integration into new schools and access to support for their specific learning needs remains inconsistent, relying largely on the goodwill and initiative of individual teachers.

Parents told Inclusion Europe that after displacement, some teachers struggled to support their children at first; adaptation improved over time with NGO help, but many children still missed their old classmates.<sup>41</sup>

Where support is available, computer-based educational aids and effective digital learning methods introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic are often undermined by frequent disruptions from power outages and damaged infrastructure.<sup>42</sup>

For children living in institutions, the situation is often even more dire. The war has led to severe overcrowding and further deterioration of conditions, leaving many without access to inclusive basic education.<sup>43</sup> For children with complex support needs, who were regularly completely

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<sup>39</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2025, April). *The Impact of the Armed Conflict and Occupation on Children’s Rights in Ukraine: 24 February 2022 — 31 December 2024*, p.10. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/impact-armed-conflict-and-occupation-childrens-rights-ukraine-24-february>

<sup>40</sup> European Disability Forum. (2023). *Rights of persons with disabilities during the war in Ukraine - Summary of monitoring report*, p.11. <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-during-the-war-in-ukraine-summary-of-monitoring-report/>

<sup>41</sup> Inclusion Europe. *People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine*, p.33

<sup>42</sup> Inclusion Europe. *People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine*, p.44-45 and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *The Impact of the Armed Conflict and Occupation on Children’s Rights in Ukraine: 24 February 2022 — 31 December 2024*, p.10.

<sup>43</sup> Inclusion Europe. *People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine*, p.45

excluded from education even before the war<sup>44</sup>, the situation has likely worsened.

## **The Future at Risk**

Looking ahead, the long-term futures of people with learning disabilities in Ukraine remain deeply uncertain. If community-based care and support is not revived and funded, thousands risk lifelong confinement. If inclusive education is not rebuilt, children will be excluded from learning. If supported employment is not prioritised, adults will remain dependent and impoverished.

One NGO leader summed up the dilemma:

“Yes, the beneficiaries of the NGO ‘Family for People with Disabilities’, despite the complexity of wartime conditions, were able to partially adapt to the new reality. This process was uneven, required constant support and guidance, but it also became a source of development of new forms of interaction, skills and mutual support. Some members of the organization went abroad, some of them returned.”<sup>45</sup>

Such resilience is remarkable, but it is not enough. Without systemic reform and genuine investment, resilience will harden into resignation.

## **Conclusion: A Crossroads for Rights**

The All-Ukrainian NGO report closes with a clear warning:

“There is an urgent need to remove barriers to implement the measures to prevent new people with intellectual disabilities from entering institutional care... [and to] initiate a separate state program of psychological support for persons with intellectual disabilities and their families.”<sup>46</sup>

In line with this call, the Ukrainian Government has committed to reforming psychoneurological and other residential institutions and

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<sup>44</sup> Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2022, February 1). Human rights situation of persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities in Ukraine. In *UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine*. <https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/177892-human-rights-situation-persons-intellectual-and-psychosocial-disabilities-ukraine-EN>

<sup>45</sup> All Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.8

<sup>46</sup> All-Ukrainian NGO Coalition for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Impact of the war on Ukrainians with intellectual disability*, p.13

advancing the deinstitutionalisation of care for persons with disabilities, older people and children.<sup>47</sup>

These commitments, enshrined in the “*Strategy for the Reform of Psychoneurological and Other Residential Institutions and Deinstitutionalisation of Care for Adults with Disabilities and the Elderly until 2034*”<sup>48</sup>, include:

- Providing barrier-free access to essential services (education, culture, social, legal, medical and psychological assistance).
- Developing the market for social, rehabilitation and assisted-living services.
- Improving access to information so families can make informed decisions on care and support.
- Strengthening standards, procedures and quality control for long-term care and social services.

Similarly, the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers has also adopted the “*Strategy for Ensuring the Right of Every Child to Grow Up in a Family Environment 2024-2028*”<sup>49</sup>. The strategy seeks to:

- Develop social services to support families so that children, people with disabilities and older persons can live independently in the community and avoid institutionalisation.
- Expand assisted-living services for people with disabilities and older persons who require additional support.
- Promote family-based forms of upbringing for children left without parental care (foster care, guardianship and adoption).

To this end, the UK Government’s launch of the SPIRIT programme (Social Protection for Inclusion, Resilience, Innovation and Transformation) in February of this year marks a welcome and

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<sup>47</sup> Council of the European Union (2025, March 17). Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2025/657 of 17 March 2025 establishing the satisfactory fulfilment of the conditions for the payment of the third instalment of the non-repayable financial support and of the loan support under the Ukraine Plan of the Ukraine Facility. In *Official Journal of the European Union*. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec\\_impl/2025/657/oj](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec_impl/2025/657/oj)

<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine. (n.d.) De-institutionalisation. <https://www.msp.gov.ua/en/about/klyuchovi-napryamy/deinstytualizatsiya>

<sup>49</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. (2024, November 26). *On the approval of the Strategy for Ensuring the Right of Every Child in Ukraine to Grow in the Family Environment for 2024-2028 and the Approval of the Operational Action Plan for 2024-2026 for its Implementation*. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1201-2024-%D1%80#Text>

significant commitment to Ukraine's recovery and reform<sup>50</sup>. With a £25 million investment, SPIRIT aims to strengthen Ukraine's social protection systems and expand community and family-based services, directly benefiting at least 10,000 families across 10 regions. Delivered in partnership with UNICEF and the World Bank, the programme will support inclusive reforms, build institutional capacity, and promote barrier-free access to services for vulnerable groups including people with disabilities, older persons, veterans, and children.

Reconstruction provides Ukraine with a unique opportunity to build a more inclusive society, and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine should be praised for these important first steps. Positive reform strategies are in motion and the foundations for community-based, rights-respecting care are being laid, based on the modern principles of deinstitutionalisation standard in almost all European countries. With the Ukrainian Government charting a new course for the care of those with disabilities based on equal rights, barrier-free environments and non-discrimination, these efforts must be matched by sustained financial, technical and political support from international partners.

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<sup>50</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. (2025, February 7). 'The UK launches flagship SPIRIT programme to drive social recovery in Ukraine'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-uk-launches-flagship-spirit-programme-to-drive-social-recovery-in-ukraine>.

## Key Findings of International Bodies

Numerous respected international bodies have documented how Russia's full-scale invasion has sharply intensified the risks and rights violations faced by individuals with disabilities in Ukraine.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), through its Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU), has reported extensively that the conflict has disproportionately affected people with learning and psychosocial disabilities.

Children with disabilities have seen their education and rehabilitation services severely disrupted: parents told OHCHR that power cuts, air-raid alerts and noisy generators regularly interrupted inclusive lessons and aggravated sensory sensitivities<sup>51</sup>, while children with low mobility missed therapy sessions because parents could not move them downstairs during blackouts<sup>52</sup>. In the first year of the war, OHCHR verified that around 200 children, from institutions and many with disabilities, were forcibly transferred within occupied territory or deported to Russia<sup>53</sup>.

Older persons and persons with disabilities also face severe barriers evacuating from dangerous areas; field visits confirmed that they make up a large proportion of those remaining in frontline communities and of those killed and injured there<sup>54</sup>. Damage to energy infrastructure, either from indiscriminate shelling or targeted attacks, has serious implications for civilian health and well-being, but particularly for the disabled, and particularly during the winter months<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *The Impact of the Armed Conflict and Occupation on Children's Rights in Ukraine: 24 February 2022 — 31 December 2024*, p.10.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.14

<sup>54</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025*, p.2.

<sup>55</sup> Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2024, December). Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 September to 30 November 2024, p.9. <https://ukraine.un.org/en/286768-periodic-report-human-rights-situation-ukraine-1-september-30-november-2024>

NGOs assisting evacuations reported that transit centres rarely have accessible facilities or specialised staff<sup>56</sup>; in some regions there is only one accessible private transit centre available<sup>57</sup>, funded mainly by NGOs. OHCHR also suggest that around 70% of collective centres across Ukraine lack accessible facilities such as bomb shelters, bathrooms and toilets<sup>58</sup>, while private housing in safer regions remains unaffordable for low-income households<sup>59</sup>.

Before the invasion, OHCHR had highlighted the vulnerability created by Ukraine's legacy of large-scale institutional care for persons with learning and psychosocial disabilities<sup>60</sup>. That vulnerability has been magnified by the war. People who were previously living independently have been institutionalised as a direct result of hostilities<sup>61</sup>, and plans for supported living arrangements and community-based services have been halted or delayed due to the war and related budget shortfalls<sup>62</sup>.

The OHCHR urge the international community to 'provide support to NGOs s that conduct and facilitate the evacuation of persons with disabilities...provide support, technical assistance and capacity building to help Ukraine speed up deinstitutionalisation and implement long-term accommodation solutions that fully consider the needs of...persons with disabilities.'<sup>63</sup>

European institutions have also been key in highlighting the heightened vulnerabilities that people with learning disabilities face amid the war in Ukraine. Together with the European Disability Forum (EDF), an independent umbrella organisation of national councils and European NGOs representing the interests of over 100 million disabled people in

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<sup>56</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 December 2024 – 31 May 2025, p.20

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. *Human rights situation of persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities in Ukraine*.

<sup>61</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2023, October). *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February 2023 – 31 July 2023*, p.24.

<https://ukraine.ohchr.org/en/36-periodic-report-EN#:~:text=This%20thirty-sixth%20report%20by%20the%20Office%20of%20the,Nations%20Human%20Rights%20Monitoring%20Mission%20in%20Ukraine%20%28HRMMU%2>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p.23

Europe, the European Commission has sought to mobilise a ‘a disability-inclusive humanitarian response’<sup>64</sup>.

Monitoring reports by the EDF have accordingly highlighted a number of significant challenges in ensuring the safety and well-being of people with disabilities in Ukraine. These include issues around evacuation, access to inclusive education, and the impact of attacks on medical facilities<sup>65</sup>.

The EDF calls for the principles of accessibility to be included in plans for reconstructing Ukraine and overcoming the consequences of war, as well as meaningful consultation with disabled people and organisations that work with them.<sup>66</sup> They also call for rebuilding efforts to consolidate Ukraine’s efforts to deinstitutionalise and create social services at community level.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, Inclusion Europe, representing people with learning disabilities and their families across 39 European countries, has taken a leading role in highlighting the collapse of day services in Ukraine and the growing threat of re-institutionalisation. Since the full-scale invasion, the organisation have documented a systemic breakdown in everyday support: day centres have been shut down or repurposed, community networks have disintegrated, and families have been left to shoulder unsustainable caregiving responsibilities alone<sup>68</sup>. As a result, many individuals are being pushed back into institutional settings when their relatives can no longer cope.

Work by Inclusion Europe also highlights that international aid often overlooks this group and their representative NGOs; money announced “for the most vulnerable” rarely names or targets people with learning disabilities<sup>69</sup>, leaving organisations without the core funding needed to keep people out of institutions and in the community

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<sup>64</sup> Lecerf, M., Del Monte, M. (2022, November). *Russia’s war on Ukraine: People with disabilities*. European Parliamentary Research Service, p.2.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/739198/EPRS\\_ATAG\(2022\)739198\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/739198/EPRS_ATAG(2022)739198_EN.pdf)

<sup>65</sup> European Disability Forum. *Rights of persons with disabilities during the war in Ukraine - Summary of monitoring report*.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p.13

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>68</sup> Inclusion Europe. *People with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ukraine*.

<sup>69</sup> Inclusion Europe. (2024, December). *Report on funding for people with intellectual disabilities in Ukraine*. <https://str.inclusion.eu/8e3d483bde63779991d09961f.pdf>

In the European Parliament's Resolution of 1 March 2022, they called on the Commission, EU Member States and UN agencies to offer humanitarian assistance to the civilian population. Parliament stressed the needs of 'vulnerable groups, minorities, and women and children, since they are particularly affected in conflict situations and need special protection and support, in particular children in institutional care, unaccompanied children, and children with disabilities and other serious illnesses' and highlighted the need to 'ensure that they continue to receive the necessary care and life-saving treatment and are immediately evacuated to safety.'<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> European Parliament. (2022, March 1). *European Parliament resolution of 1 March 2022 on the Russian aggression against Ukraine*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0052\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0052_EN.html)

## Recommendations

1. International Charities and NGOs should continue to work with Inclusion Europe to support people with learning disabilities in Ukraine
2. Ensure any financial penalties levied at Russia provide a contribution to funding community support for people with learning disabilities.
3. The Council of Europe's Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine must specifically address harms caused to people with learning disabilities and hold those responsible accountable
4. Urge the UK government to ensure continued support for Ukraine includes funding for disability-inclusive services and works with the Ukrainian government towards compliance with CRPD.
5. Seek to prioritise funding to counter the rise in institutionalisation of people with learning disabilities.
6. While the invasion continues, provide accessible sheltering kits to aid people with learning disabilities who find air-raids particularly triggering.
7. The UK Government should work with international partners to ensure the provision of disability inclusion funding. Ideally this will provide multi-year core funding to Ukrainian NGOs, including support for proven respite models (eg. Bohuslav)
8. Both the Parliamentary Council of Europe and UK Parliament should debate the issue of the impact of the war on people with learning disabilities in Ukraine.
9. As Human Rights First have called for, Donors should properly resource the work of HRDs evacuating civilians with disabilities from the front lines and Russian-occupied territories.

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