



Inclusive Needs Assessment

Situation of the Conflict-affected
Persons with and without
Disabilities in the Gaza Strip

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Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (ASDC):

Atfaluna is a local Non-governmental organization, established in 1992 in Gaza City, in order to enable persons with hearing disability in the Gaza Strip to have their chance in life through education, rehabilitation, and job training and employment opportunities. From its establishment as a small school for persons with hearing disability serving 27 students, Atfaluna now serves more than 40,000 persons annually through a multitude of services and training programs implemented within an inclusive approach. These interventions aim at providing equal opportunities for persons with hearing disability in the society.

ASDC's provides inclusive emergency responses that is in line with the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD)**, under article 11 to take the necessary measures to protect the persons with disabilities and involve them inclusively in all interventions. ASDC promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency response and work within inclusive disaster risk reduction plans and programs.

Challenges Faced by People with Disabilities During Emergency Situations:

People with disabilities suffer from complicated challenges and negative effects on their life and movement during times of crisis and emergencies in which they become more susceptible to danger and discrimination. Here are several challenges that PwDs are exposed to during emergency and crisis:

- **Difficulty to receive help:** people with disability face difficulties getting the needed help due to the high level of distraction and chaos during times of crisis.
- **Difficulty in movement:** the difficulty of movement is increased among people with disabilities during times of crisis where some roads are closed which lead to facing barriers in movement inside the country or receiving the basic needs.
- **Deteriorating of their health conditions:** people with disabilities are more susceptible to diseases and injuries during crisis due to the lack of help, enough medical services and shortage of medical supplies and assistive devices.
- **Marginalization and exclusion:** people with disabilities suffer from marginalization and exclusion during times of crisis, as society ignores them and doesn't give them enough attention which leads to exacerbating their situation.
- **Lack of resources:** the available resources for people with disabilities are limited during times of crisis such as sheltering, food and medicine which doubles their suffering.
- **Exposure to violence and abuse:** people with disabilities may face violence and abuse during times of crisis as they become more vulnerable to neglect and abuse.

Needs Assessment Objective:

The needs assessment aims to present and assess the needs of conflict-affected persons with and without disabilities during the 2023-2024 escalation. The report focuses the situation of protection, access to rehabilitation interventions, health services, and food security.

This assessment is part of ASDC's MEAL tools to identify the most urgent community needs with high focus on persons with disabilities (PwDs) and their families as they are the most vulnerable group during the current situation due to the difficulties, they are facing in accessing services and emergency interventions.

The report raises the impact of the current conflict on the lives of families of PwDs and those without disabilities, highlighting their priorities to achieve efficient interventions that can alleviate their suffering during these difficult times.

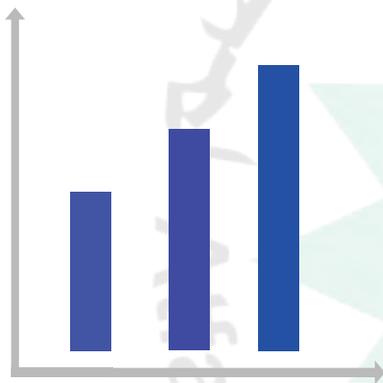


Methodology & Sampling:

ASDC used multiple data collection tools including focus group discussions, surveys, medical tests (hearing screening) with a sample of **743** from people with and without disabilities.

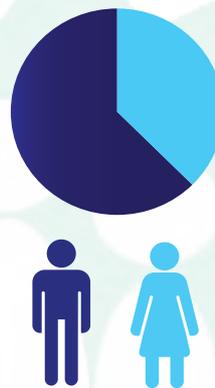
The survey was implemented from the period of **10th**, January to **25th**, February.

Displacement locations



32% Middle Area
3% Khanyounis
65% Rafah

Males & Females



51% males
49% females

People with Disability



58% PwDs

Background:

On the 8th of October **2023** Gaza Strip subjected to a catastrophic humanitarian situation in the lives of the people living in Gaza, the official reports show that more than **30,000** Palestinians were killed in Gaza, more than **70%** of them are women and children, more than **71,000** were injured, including children and women, many of them were serious injuries and might have a long term disability that needs further intervention to be familiar with the new cases, an UNICIF report(1) showed, Up to **75 %** of the total population (**1.7** million out of **2.3** million people) are estimated to be displaced, some multiple times. Most are located in the Rafah governorate in the south of the Gaza Strip and middle area where they have had to leave their homes in Gaza due to the ongoing air strikes targeting their homes which were completely, partially damaged or their houses at risky areas with a potential to be targeted by bombardment Where thousands of housing units were totally destroyed or severely damaged, and The displaced Palestinians sought shelters in public schools, mosques or at other places. Water and sanitation facilities and infrastructure were also damaged due to the shutdown of Gaza s sole power plant as the result of the lack of fuel duplicated the negative consequences for the provision of vital services. Besides the current conflict against the people living in Gaza, the humanitarian situation is already deteriorated due to restrictions and the Gaza imposed siege The recent escalation doubles the people's suffering. The people in the Gaza Strip now make up **80 %** of all people facing famine or catastrophic hunger worldwide, marking an unparalleled humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip amid continued bombardment and siege, according to UN human rights experts. "Currently every single person in Gaza is hungry, a quarter of the population are starving and struggling to find food and drinkable water, and famine is imminent. Pregnant women are not receiving adequate nutrition and healthcare, putting their lives at risk. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) released a report on the social and economic deterioration in Gaza since the beginning of the military operation after **7 October 2023**.

UNCTAD's assessment⁽²⁾ underscores that restoring pre-conflict socioeconomic conditions in Gaza will take decades and requires substantial foreign aid. As of mid-**2023**, two million Gazans faced challenges ranging from inadequate access to water and electricity to high unemployment. The ongoing military operation has displaced **85%** of Gaza's population, halting economic activities and further worsening poverty and unemployment. As of December **2023**, unemployment had surged to **79.3%**. Meanwhile, **37,379** buildings—equivalent to **18%** of the Gaza strip's total structures—have been damaged or destroyed by the military operation. The Gaza Strip, half of whose population are children, is now rendered almost uninhabitable with people lacking adequate sources of income, access to water, sanitation, health or education. The Report highlights the pressing need to break the cycle of economic destruction that has rendered **80%** of the population dependent on international aid. According to **official reports** ⁽³⁾ here are approximately **71,000** injured persons, out of them **5,000** persons acquired disabilities.

A previous needs assessment titled “**Access of PwDs to Emergency Responses**” August, **2023**, conducted by Atfaluna targeting the CSOs, DPOs, and male and female youth with and without disabilities (**74 %** of them with disabilities), the results show; **74.1%** of the persons with disabilities reported that the emergency guidance and instruction issues by the official emergency teams are not inclusive and difficult to be applied by persons with disabilities, **82.5 %** of the survey respondents reported that not all the instructions and guidance issued by the emergency team during risks/crisis are interpreted to sign language.

55.6% of the survey respondents reported unaware of the existence of an official, emergency team or governmental entity that issues instructions regarding emergency events, safety measures, and security to avoid potential risks/crises, **63.5%** of the persons with disabilities reported that they are not trained on; emergency plans, safe evacuation, self-protection during the emergency. **74.8%** of the women and persons with disabilities reported that the emergency teams and service providers in the shelters are disqualified or trained on providing services for the women and persons with disabilities. **73.4%** reported that the shelters are not includes assistive devices that meet with the needs of the persons with disabilities during the risks/crises. **53.8%** of the survey respondents reported that the persons with disabilities don't receive inclusive counselling or psychosocial support during the risks/crises. **67.6%** of the survey respondents reported that they are not aware of any inclusive emergency plans that developed to response to the needs of the persons with disabilities during the emergencies. **63%** of the persons with disabilities reported that the national emergency entities don't have sufficient information about the persons with disabilities including their type of disabilities, their addresses, and needs to respond to their requirements during the emergency situations. This gap in the availability of inclusive conflict/crises response plans is due to the limited sensitivity and knowledge of the policymakers and CSOs representatives on the needs and the inclusive response for the requirements of the persons with disabilities during the conflict/crisis's situations.

Findings:

People with Disability Situation:

100% of interviewed PwDs reported that physical infrastructure of displacement shelters are not inclusive.



% 100

96.8% of PwDs stated that their needs are being neglected and are not prioritized.



% 96.8

94.7 % among PWDs reported lack of medical interventions and difficulties in receiving medical needs.



% 94.7

83% among PwDs reported that they lost their assistive devices due to recurrent evacuation/ bombardments.

The percentage among males reached **85%** while among females, **81%**, which will increase their vulnerability to risks.



% 83

78.1% reported that PwDs and their families are exposed to protection issues in displacement centers, The percentage among males reached **77.6%** while among females, **78.3%** , as percentage among PwDs reached **86.2%**.



% 78.1

23% reported that PwDs are witnessed indicators of exploitation in displacement centers, while the result among PwDs is **35.1%** The figure among males reached **24.8%** while among females, **22.1%**



% 23

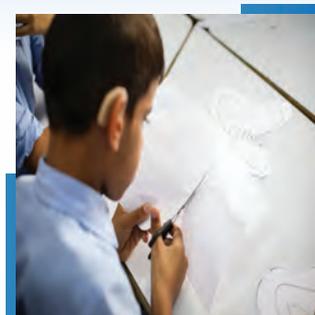
86.2% of PwDs reported that the different types of disability are not considered in emergency relief responses.



%86.2

Findings' Indications:

This lack of accessibility restricted PwDs movement within the shelter and limit their access to essential services, causing them to be socially isolated and excluded from essential interventions. Neglecting the rights and needs of people with disabilities during emergencies will violate their fundamental human rights, including the right to life, safety, health, and non-discrimination. This will cause them feelings of isolation, abandonment, and helplessness that will exacerbate existing mental health conditions or lead to the development of new ones, such as anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Failure to consider these differences can result in emergency relief services that are inaccessible to certain groups of people with disabilities. For example, individuals with physical disability may face barriers in accessing shelters or distribution points that are not wheelchair accessible.



Situation of Women and Girls with and without Disabilities:

98.3% of women and girls reported that females with and without disabilities encounter complex challenges in getting their dignity needs such as hygiene, sanitary pads, etc., while result among women and girls with disabilities reached **98%**. This indicator highlights the challenges faced by women and girls, particularly those with disabilities, in accessing essential hygiene and sanitary products.



57.1% of respondents reported that displacement shelters cause physical and psychological harm for females with or without disabilities while the result among females with disabilities is increased to **63%**.



23.8% of interviewed women and girls reported that they are exposed to different types of exploitation from their surroundings.



83% of females with and without disabilities respondents reported that females with and without disabilities are exposed to protection issues while receiving relief aids.



Findings' Indications:

The above findings indicate a high level of vulnerability among women and girls, particularly in contexts affected by conflict, displacement, or other crises. It can highlight underlying risk factors such as poverty, displacement, lack of social support, and gender inequality, which contribute to increased susceptibility to exploitation. Understanding the specific types of challenges and protection issues faced by women and girls can help identify areas where interventions are needed to prevent harm and provide support to those at risk.



Situation of Children with and Without Disabilities (CwDs):

94.5% of children with and without disabilities reported that they face shortages in medical support. The percentage among males reached **91.2%** while among females, **96.6%**.



% 94.5

96.7% reported that they suffer from continuous crying and panic attacks. The percentage among males reached **93.6%** while among females **98.3%**.



% 96.7

73.7% reported that children are facing difficulties in expressing their feelings, while the result among CwDs is increased to **78.7%**.



% 73.7

57.6% reported that manifestations of violence among children increased during the war the percentage among males reached **66.4%** while among females, **52.25%**, while the result among CwDs showed higher rate and reported to be **79.8%**



% 57.6

37.4% reported that children are suffering from bed wetting the percentage among males reached 40% while among females, **35.7%**, the percentage among children with disabilities showed higher rate and reported to be **59.6%**.



% 37.4

93% of children with and without disabilities reported that they can't use the toilets safely in displacement shelters the percentage among males reached **89.6%** while among females **95.3%**.



% 93

91.4% out of children with & without disabilities reported that seasonal diseases increased among children the percentage among males reached **89.6%** while among females, **92.3%**.



% 91.4

82.3% among children with disabilities reported that diapers are not available for children.



% 82.8

82.5% reported that clothes, blankets & mattresses are not available for children. the result among males reached **86.4%** while among females, **80.4%**.



% 82.5

Findings' Indications:

Children, especially those with disabilities, facing shortages in medical support may experience delayed or inadequate treatment for their health conditions. This can lead to increased suffering, exacerbation of health issues, and potential long-term consequences for their well-being and development. Children experiencing continuous crying and panic attacks, particularly CwDs, may be overwhelmed by fear, stress, or trauma resulting from the conflict or crisis situation. These symptoms can indicate significant emotional distress and may impair their ability to function and cope effectively. Increased manifestations of violence among children, particularly CwDs, can have devastating consequences on their physical and psychological well-being. Children, including CwDs, suffering from bed wetting may experience feelings of embarrassment, shame, and distress, especially in overcrowded displacement shelters where privacy and sanitation facilities may be limited.

This can impact their self-esteem and social interactions. Limited access to healthcare, inadequate hygiene practices, and overcrowded living conditions in displacement shelters can contribute to the spread of infectious diseases, posing a



serious threat to children's health and well-being. Addressing these findings is crucial for safeguarding the rights, health, and well-being of all children, with particular attention to the unique needs and challenges faced by children with disabilities in conflict-affected contexts. Effective interventions should prioritize access to essential services, protection from violence and exploitation, and support for emotional and physical recovery and resilience.

Adults with and without Disabilities:

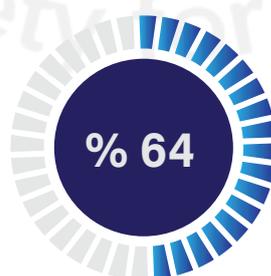
95.6% of the survey respondents ,reported that adults do not have access to suitable health care needed the percentage among males reached **93.6** while among females, **97%** .

30.7% reported that they face difficulties in accessing to important and key information related to the overall context and service delivery related information.

The result among males reached **40%** while among females, **25.2%** .



64% reported that adults are exposed to neglect and psychological abuse the percentage among males reached **63.2%** while among females, **64.7%** , while the result among PwDs showed higher rate and it is reported to be **86.2%**.



Findings' Indications:

Adults, including persons with disabilities (PwDs), facing challenges in accessing suitable healthcare will experience delays in treatment, inadequate medical attention, or barriers to essential services. This can lead to worsened health outcomes, increased suffering, and diminished quality of life for individuals and their families. Encountering difficulties in accessing important information related to the overall context and service delivery will cause barriers to persons with and without disabilities towards understanding their rights, accessing support services, or making informed decisions. Adults, both with and without disabilities, exposed to neglect and psychological abuse will suffer from emotional trauma, diminished self-worth, and deteriorating mental health. This can erode their confidence, disrupt their relationships, and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, leading to increased stress and hardship in their daily lives. Addressing these indicators is essential for promoting the well-being, dignity, and rights of adults, with a particular focus on the unique needs and challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. Interventions should prioritize accessible healthcare services, inclusive communication channels, and comprehensive support mechanisms to ensure that all adults can access the information, care, and protection they need to thrive and participate fully in their communities. Additionally, efforts to prevent neglect and abuse should be strengthened through awareness-raising, capacity-building, and targeted interventions aimed at promoting respectful and inclusive environments for all adults, regardless of their disability status.

The Situation in Displacement Centers:

97.2 % among people with and without disabilities reported that the displacement shelters are not appropriate and lack the privacy needs for families.



% 97.2

100 % PwDs reported that the displacement shelters are not accessible for PwDs.



% 100

97% among people with and without disabilities reported that the displacement shelters are not safe.



% 97

94.5% among people with and without disabilities reported that they do not have access to clean water in displacement shelters.



% 94.5

92% of survey respondents reported that toilets in displacement shelters do not meet privacy standards.



% 92

97.2% (among people with and without disabilities) reported that there is no electricity for lighting and charging in displacement shelters.



% 97.2

72.6% reported that there are no safe places for children to play in displacement shelters, while the percentage among PwDs is increased to reach **88.3%**.



% 72.6

Findings' Indications:

Conflict-affected persons, including those with disabilities (PwDs), experiencing shelters that are not appropriate and lack privacy may feel exposed, vulnerable, and unable to maintain their dignity. This will contribute to feelings of insecurity, discomfort, and distress, undermining their sense of safety and well-being. PwDs encountering shelters that are not accessible will face barriers to mobility, independence, and participation in daily activities. Conflict-affected persons, particularly PwDs, residing in shelters that are not safe may be at risk of injury, exploitation, or harm. PwDs, along with other conflict-affected individuals, facing challenges in accessing clean water will be exposed to health risks, sanitation-related illnesses, and dehydration. PwDs experiencing toilets in displacement shelters that do not meet privacy standards may feel exposed, embarrassed, or reluctant to use these facilities. This can lead to discomfort, reluctance to maintain hygiene practices, and increased vulnerability to health issues and social stigma. PwDs, like other conflict-affected individuals, encountering a lack of electricity for lighting and charging in displacement shelters may face difficulties in accessing essential services, communicating with loved ones, and navigating their surroundings safely.

This can impede their ability to stay connected, informed, and engaged, further isolating them from support networks and opportunities for assistance.



PwDs, as well as other conflict-affected individuals, residing in shelters without safe places for children to play face challenges in providing care, supervision, and recreational opportunities for their families. This will affect children's well-being, development, and resilience, depriving them of essential outlets for expression, socialization, and coping during times of crisis. Addressing these findings requires urgent and concerted efforts to improve the safety, accessibility, and dignity of displacement shelters for all conflict-affected persons, with particular attention to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of individuals with disabilities. Interventions should prioritize inclusive design principles, accessibility standards, and participatory approaches to ensure that shelters meet the diverse needs and preferences of all residents, fostering a sense of security, belonging, and empowerment in times of adversity. Additionally, efforts to enhance access to clean water, electricity, and safe play areas can promote the health, well-being, and resilience of conflict-affected persons and their families, supporting their recovery and long-term recovery.

The Availability of Basic Needs for Conflict-affected Persons with and without Disabilities:

96.1% among people with and without disabilities reported that families households are unable to meet the basic & nutrition needs for their family members.



99.2% among people with and without disabilities reported that food and basic needs are not available in affordable prices in the market.



31.3 % reported that they didn't receive any kind of relief aid, while the result among PwDs showed higher rate to reach **54.3%**.



95.6% among people with and without disabilities reported that aids are not distributed in fair and transparent measures.



Findings' Indications:

PwDs, comprising a significant percentage, reported that their families are unable to meet their basic needs. This situation indicates a lack of resources, support, or opportunities for livelihoods, leaving PwDs and their families vulnerable to deprivation, insecurity, and hardship. A substantial percentage of PwDs reported that food and basic necessities are not available at affordable prices in the market. This barrier to access may result from economic constraints, market disruptions, or inadequate social protection measures, exacerbating food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty among PwDs and their families. A significant portion of PwDs expressed dissatisfaction with the distribution of aid, citing concerns about fairness and transparency.

This perception suggests disparities, biases, or inefficiencies in aid delivery systems, undermining trust, social cohesion, and accountability in humanitarian responses.



Addressing these findings requires comprehensive and inclusive approaches to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to essential resources, services, and support during emergencies and crises. Efforts should prioritize the rights, dignity, and well-being of PwDs, incorporating their perspectives, needs, and capacities into relief efforts and decision-making processes. Additionally, interventions should address systemic barriers, discrimination, and inequalities that hinder the inclusion and participation of PwDs in humanitarian responses, promoting equity, justice, and resilience for all.

Need of Audiological and Speech Therapy Interventions:

- Out of the screening results it turned out that **5%** of the screened population are referred for further diagnostic evaluation, in addition to **13.4%** showed medical problems that need medical intervention such as (wax removal or medical management of middle ear dysfunction). Those number represent twice the numbers of referred people in previous screenings which raises a red flag for the huge numbers of people manifesting hearing problems and ear medical conditions.
- **10%** of the screened people in the shelters showed middle ear infections and compacted wax in the outer ear. Those conditions when not treated would result in permanent hearing loss in at least **6%** of the total number of the people with those medical conditions.
- In the ongoing conflict in the Gaza Strip with the serious dangers and continuous bombing and destructions. Children live the most fearing situations that would result in serious psychological conditions which might lead to around **12%** of children to suffer stuttering and other communication problems such as chosen silence.



Findings' Indications:

In the current situation in the Gaza Strip, numbers are expected to be higher due to the crowded places they are living at. It is clearly noticed that children in the shelters have excessive wax in their outer ear canals due to hygienic reasons. It would be more efficient to have an ENT doctor with the screening team to remove the wax and perform irrigation when needed to reduce the effect of compacted wax on hearing and speech/language acquisition. Permanent and temporary hearing loss would have a direct effect on the learning capacities of the children as it would prevent them from receiving the communication messages clearly. Those findings highlight the importance of provision audiological and speech interventions to children and adult.

Recommendations:

- Provision of rehabilitation services for PwDs and assistive devices, there is an increased need of assistive devices as **83%** reported that they missed their assistive devices during the current circumstances, and they can't find any substitute.
- Provision of psychosocial interventions for children and women with and without disabilities as they are living in a difficult humanitarian situation and such interventions will strengthen their coping mechanisms.
- Enhancing the level of access to health care services and medical support specially for PwDs as they are facing difficulties in accessing those services because clinics are only open for urgent cases.
- Improving the accessibility measures in displacement shelters for persons with disabilities.
- Improving the food security interventions through provision of food assistance, clean water and basic needs as head of families are facing difficulties in meeting the basic needs of their families at affordable prices and more than **29%** reported that they depend on cans and saved food which considered unhealthy.
- Provision of hygiene kits, as it is important for health-related reasons.
- Providing basic needs for children such as diapers, milk and other requirements, as families are facing difficulties in meeting such urgent needs for their children.
- Provision of dignity kits and health care requirements for women with and without disabilities.
- Provision of clothes, blankets and mattresses for children and people with and without disabilities.

Important Guidelines for Disability Inclusive Emergency Responses:

To design inclusive emergency and preparedness responses, it is inevitable to abide by the human rights-based approach concerning persons with disabilities. It is of necessity not to leave them behind. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UCRPD), which was ratified by the state of Palestine signed in 2014, and the Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both call for engaging people with disabilities at the heart of the event and dealing with them on human rights basis.

People with disability (PwDs) share the same basic needs as any other person without disability including protection, health, medicine, basic services, sheltering and income.

The Intervention must be Provided with Inclusive Manners during Times of Emergencies:

People with disabilities are considered of the most groups that need special attention during emergencies as their abilities to move and evacuate can be significantly affected. Here are some tips to improve their situation during emergencies:

- Ensuring that people with disabilities are getting the same opportunities for warning, evacuation, and relief as other community members.
- Applying nondiscrimination principle and human rights fundamentals in all crisis management aspects that should respond to all types of disabilities.
- Providing adapted and accessible buildings and public places.
- Providing buildings with audio and visual alarms for people with disabilities.
- Training the relief teams on how to support people with disabilities during emergencies.
- Providing people with disabilities with contacts that they can communicate with during emergencies.
- Providing inclusive means of transportation for people with disabilities such as buses equipped by wheelchairs lifts.
- Train people with disabilities on how to act during emergencies and ensure the availability of inclusive response plans during emergencies.
- Providing information regarding the crises and taking actions in easy and clear manners for people with disabilities by using sign language or providing information through pictures.
- Updating the crises management plans to ensure concerted efforts from governmental and non-governmental organizations to improve the situations of people with disabilities.
- Providing psycho-social support sessions for people with disabilities and their families during emergencies.
- Providing spaces and services that fit with the needs of persons with disabilities in temporary shelters.

References:

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2. <https://unctad.org/publication/preliminary-assessment-economic-impact-destruction-gaza-and-prospects-economic-recovery>
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