



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

July 25, 2022

Shaylin Sluzalis & Germán Parodi
Co-Executive Directors
The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies
112 N. 8th Street, Suite 600
Philadelphia PA 19107

Dear Ms. Sluzalis and Mr. Parodi:

The Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights Uzra Zeya and Deputy Assistant Secretary Kara McDonald asked me to respond to the letter you sent to us regarding the critical issue of persons with disabilities. We share your deep concerns facing persons with disabilities and older persons who have been affected by Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine. As a unified voice, we assure you that the United States response efforts are focused on engaging local and international stakeholders to address the needs of affected populations more effectively, including persons with disabilities.

The recommendations you have provided will be considered carefully as we build our assistance and support options for Ukraine's most vulnerable. The Department of State is working around the clock to address the many challenges facing refugees fleeing Ukraine to include those mentioned in your recommendations. Specifically:

- Our assistance provides emergency shelter, food, non-food items such as bedding, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services, health care, cash assistance, logistics, and humanitarian coordination. Our protection efforts include persons with disabilities, child protection, gender-based violence prevention and response, and mental health and psychosocial support. Our funding also helps humanitarian organizations maintain contact between family members who have been separated due to the conflict, in order to promote reunification.
- We commend Ukraine's neighbors for keeping their borders open to those seeking international protection, including persons who may experience communication barriers with border agents or humanitarian assistance providers

due to disability or other factors. We emphasize the importance of responding to the needs of persons seeking protection in a way that is consistent with the principle of non-refoulement and each state's respective obligations under international law.

- As you know, we hold a biweekly NGO meeting with organizations of persons with disabilities focused on persons with disabilities and we are using that information to inform our policies and programs moving forward. We also communicate this information derived from the meetings to our partners. These meetings have been invaluable to educating my new team on the issues; the upcoming trip to Europe focused on persons with disabilities in Ukraine, those seeking refuge, and our policy development for how best to engage on this issue.
- One project we would like to highlight illustrates our commitment to Ukrainians with disabilities, who are experiencing barriers to inclusion during emergency situations including foreign intervention, as well as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees with disabilities. Our partner has designed this project in consultation with Ukrainian DPOs and youth-led civil society groups and identified activities to address gaps, meet their advocacy priorities, and provide tools to influence government policies and approaches to prioritize rights of persons with disabilities.
- The people of Ukraine in all their diversity deserve to live in safety, security, and dignity. As such, we are committed to the protection and empowerment of persons with disabilities and to that end the continued improvement of our response. We will continue communicating with persons with disabilities, their representative organizations and coordinating with international partners to identify urgent needs and barriers regarding access to services and means to evacuate.

In closing, thank you for your partnership and advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities and older persons of Ukraine. We value persons with disabilities as an important community and support your work with us at the Department of State, and with international partners to support persons with disabilities during this uncertain time. We not only seek to address your needs, but during this crisis, we strive to integrate your voices more thoroughly into our response. Looking forward, we hope to help rebuild a more inclusive and equitable Ukraine, with access for all. I encourage you to begin a reimagining of Ukraine and how reconstruction can be more inclusive, and I look forward to working with you when this time comes, hopefully, soon.



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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Minkara', written in a cursive style.

Sara S. Minkara
U.S. Special Advisor on International
Disability Rights

