

# Impact of war on people with intellectual disability in Ukraine

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In war situations, such as in Ukraine, no one is spared. But what is the impact of war on people with (intellectual) disabilities and their loved ones? New research paints a worrisome picture. People with intellectual disabilities in Ukraine suffer even more than other residents from lack of access to basic needs such as food, water and medicine. Moreover, many shelters are not optimally accessible and escape is often not

possible. Finally, there are concerns among this group for their future after the war, for example, fear of returning to large-scale mental institutions.

The small-scale research was conducted by the Academic Collaborative Center on Living with Intellectual Disabilities (in Dutch: AWVB) of Tilburg University's Tranzo Department. At the moment the war broke out, the AWVB immediately took action to gain insight into the situation of the vulnerable group of people with intellectual [disabilities](#) in Ukraine. The focus of the research was on the situation in which these people found themselves during the first months of the Russian invasion. The findings of the study were published this week in *Disability & Society*.

## **Greater lack of basic needs**

Interviews with both Ukrainian and Dutch representatives of care organizations and [humanitarian organizations](#) show that the physical and mental well-being of people with intellectual disabilities from Ukraine is strongly threatened by a (in comparison to people without intellectual disabilities even greater) lack of access to [basic needs](#) such as food, water, hygiene products and medicine. In addition, fleeing for people with intellectual disabilities and their loved ones is often only possible with the help and support of family and aid organizations.

Unfortunately, there are many people with intellectual disabilities who have no contact with their families. Those who cannot flee have problems finding safety in shelters, as they are often inaccessible or cause additional stress to someone with intellectual disabilities.

To still maintain communication and help for people with intellectual disabilities and their loved ones, all kinds of initiatives have emerged from families among themselves. For example, using Whatsapp groups

to keep each other informed of possible escape routes or ways to get food and water. Finally, there is great concern about the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities after the war, and fear of a return to large-scale institutions.

## Inclusive disaster preparedness

"The [human suffering](#) and consequences of the war in Ukraine are enormous. In war situations, but also during other disasters, people with intellectual disabilities are often a forgotten group. With this research, we want to draw attention to the consequences of the war in Ukraine, specifically for people with [intellectual disabilities](#)," says AWVB Professor Petri Embregts.

"By doing so, we hope to bring their situation during the war more into the—scientific—limelight. Our findings highlight the urgent need for inclusive disaster preparedness and ongoing support for this vulnerable group of people during large-scale crises of all kinds."

**More information:** Laura Vromans 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, *Disability & Society* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2023.2229502](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2229502)

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