



**GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR CIVIL PROTECTION**

## **Emergency Response and Vulnerable Groups**

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# UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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- A response to an overlooked development challenge: approximately 10% of the world's population are persons with disabilities (over 650 million persons).
- The purpose: to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.
- The convention was adopted on 13.12.2006, opened for signature and ratification on 30.03.2007 and came into force on 3.05.2008.

*([www.un.org](http://www.un.org))*

# UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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- According to the Convention, disability is an evolving concept and results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders full and effective participation in society on unequal basis with others.
- That means, *the more obstacles there are the more disabled a person becomes.*

# The fact

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- Persons with disabilities are the most at risk in case of disasters.

# UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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- **Article 11. Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies**
- “States parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, **all necessary measures to ensure protection and safety of persons with disabilities** in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.”

## EU Strategy on disability

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- was established by the EC to ensure a coherent follow-up policy to the European Year of People with Disabilities in the enlarged Europe.
- was based on three pillars: (1) anti-discrimination legislation and measures, which provide access to individual rights, (2) eliminating barriers in the environment that prevent disabled people from exercising their abilities, and (3) mainstreaming disability issues in the broad range of community policies which facilitate the active inclusion of people with disabilities.

## The EU Strategy on disability

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- The Disability Action Plan (DAP) provides a dynamic framework to develop the EU disability strategy.
- The DAP (2003-2010) is based on three objectives:
  1. Full implementation of the Employment Equality Directive,
  2. Successful mainstreaming of disability issues in relevant community policies, and
  3. Improving accessibility for all.

## EU legislation on Civil Protection

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- At European level there is legislation on Civil Protection concerning strengthening cooperation, mutual assistance etc. in case of major emergencies
- But there is no specific reference to persons with disabilities.
- Prevention and other preparedness actions are promoted within the framework of the Financial Instrument for CP (Council Decision 2007/162/EC, Euratom) as it foresees the support of specific actions for vulnerable groups.
- Nevertheless no reference to persons with disabilities is made again.



## EU legislation on Civil Protection

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- The Parliament “...stresses the need to take special care of the specific needs of persons with disabilities in case of natural disasters in all actions undertaken using the civil protection mechanisms” (Article 19 of the European Parliament resolution of 4.09.2007, on the 2007 summer’s natural disasters).
- The Council invites Member States to “Promote awareness raising among vulnerable groups including children and youth by means of targeted civil protection programmes (e.g. competitions in the context of school education).” (Conclusions of May 2009 on civil protection awareness raising par.14f ).

## EU legislation on Civil Protection

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- There is room for improvement in the context of European legislation concerning persons with disabilities.
- It is up to the individual Member State to introduce legislation on this subject (principle of subsidiarity)
- But do Member States have certain provisions for disabled in their national legislation? At what extent?
- Should there be any European regulations or directives on the subject, so that the MS should take appropriate and/or further action, especially in major emergencies?

# Manuals and Guidelines

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- Manuals and Guidelines have been produced worldwide that provide important practical guidance for those working in disaster/emergency situations.
- Although documents are not legally binding, they are drawn from binding international law.

## Manuals and Guidelines: Examples

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- *Manual on International Law and Standards Applicable in Natural Disaster Situations* (International Development Law Organization, 2008).
- *Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters* (IASC, 2006), which were designed to assist national and international actors in implementing a human rights-based approach to humanitarian action in disaster settings.
- *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response* (Sphere Project, 2004), an important source of reference for protecting the rights of persons affected by natural disasters.

## Manuals and Guidelines: Examples

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- *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (1998), which identify rights and guarantees relevant to the protection of individuals during displacement and return, resettlement and reintegration.
- *Supporting People with Disabilities During Emergencies*, Texas State Guard, Texas Medical Rangers, August 2008
- *Handbook on Disability and Special Needs*, West Virginia University

# Personal Communications Technology for Emergencies

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- **The ability to send and receive information** is a *crucial component* of any personal preparedness plan. The ability to receive critical information about an emergency, how to respond to an emergency, and where to go to receive assistance can mean the difference between life or death.
- Communications also includes the ability of an individual to give vital information about oneself, one's location, immediate medical needs, and the need for assistance.

## Terms of Accessibility & Usability

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- **What Does it Mean to be "Accessible?"**  
Basically, technology is accessible if it can be used as effectively by people with disabilities as by those without them.
- **Usability** refers to the ability of average users with the "standard" range of equipment or abilities to navigate and use a web site. From the web developer's standpoint, usability means designing a user interface that is effective, efficient, and satisfying.

## Main Issues

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- Issues that have the greatest impact on people with disabilities include: **planning, notification, evacuation, emergency transportation, sheltering, access to medical care and medications, access to their mobility devices or service animals while in transit or at shelters and access to information.**
- People with disabilities should be involved in the process of identifying needs and evaluating effective emergency management practices.
- The existence of a social environment and social networking could be proven very significant for persons with disabilities.



# EU Civil Protection Projects on Vulnerable Groups

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Co-financed by the European Commission-DG Environment- CP Unit:

- *The EU civil protection project “Information to the Public 2002 - 2005”.*
  - Coordinated by the Swedish Rescue Services Agency
  - Project target group: children and youth.
- **“Rescuing Injured Disabled Persons in Case of Disasters - Civil Protection’s Challenge in the Challenge”**
  - Coordinated by ULSS 20 Verona (Local Public Health and Social Authority in the Veneto Region) - Italy
  - The project concludes to recommendations for good practice.

## EU Civil Protection Projects on Vulnerable Groups

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- In November 2007 a conference has been held in the framework of the project “Rescuing Injured Disabled Persons in Case of Disasters - Civil Protection’s Challenge in the Challenge”. In the Consensus Conference the Declaration of the participants has been signed, the so called **“Verona Charter” on the rescue of persons with disabilities in case of disasters.**
- The Verona Charter intends to be a contribution to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to link existing fundamental liberties and civil protection together and render them more visible to citizens and institutions.

# EU Civil Protection Projects on Vulnerable Groups

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- **"PROMYLIFE"** (How to Better Protect my Life in Major Emergencies)
- Coordinated by the Development Enterprise of Achaia Prefecture (NEA) - Greece
- The project aims to improve the preparedness of the public and in particular of the vulnerable groups (elderly, children, disabled and disadvantaged people, etc.) in major and extreme events.
- A task of the project is to prepare guidelines on the facilitation of information provision to the general public and the vulnerable population groups.

## Some facts in Greece – A Social Initiative

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- “Assistance at Home” is an important social care on-going initiative at municipality level. It was introduced as a pilot scheme in March 1988 in two areas of Athens (Gyzi and Sepolia). Now it is extended in many areas in Greece.
- The “Assistance at Home” initiative is addressed to senior citizens who cannot look after themselves fully, as well as individuals with mobility difficulties and other disabilities.
- The aim of the initiative is to improve the quality of life of the target group, assist in ensuring recipients live an independent and dignified life, support their family environment and promote the abilities of qualified, specialized staff.

## “Assistance at Home”

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- “Assistance at Home” provides **counseling and psychological support, nursing care, family assistance and companionship.**
- It is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (75%).
- 1000 units of the “Assistance at Home” operate in Greece.

## Civil Protection Legislation in Greece

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- The aim of the Civil Protection in Greece according to the base Law for Civil Protection (Law 3013/2002) is the protection of citizens life, health and property as well as the protection of material & cultural resources, and infrastructure from natural, technological and other disasters that cause state of emergency during peacetime.
- Nevertheless no specific reference is made to vulnerable groups, as the Law keeps the general tendency to treat all citizens, even persons with disabilities as “all the same” and does not distinguish different categories of the population.

## Civil Protection Awareness Activities

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- The General Secretariat for Civil Protection (National Authority for Civil Protection in Greece) develops specialized information material for children, as a sensitive population target group.
- A website for children was also developed with information and games mainly on natural disasters.
- At present new material for children and youth is prepared, such as videos and interactive games.

## Civil Protection Awareness Activities

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- The Earthquake Planning and Protection Organization (EPPO) is activated in the area of awareness raising and information to the public and children regarding earthquakes.
- In 2008 a handbook addressed to persons with disabilities was published. It contains information on the phenomenon of earthquakes and self-protection measures in case of earthquake disasters.
- Other CP services carry out awareness activities: they mainly address the general public and children.



## Search and Rescue

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- Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality (UN GA Resolution 46/182 since 1991)
- In search and rescue operations and in case of persons with disabilities, specialized personnel can be called to assist (e.g. to solve communication problems - signed language).
- The personnel of the National Emergency Health Care Unit (EKAB) in case of persons with disabilities follows guidelines, which were drawn up for the Olympic Games in 2004.

## Discussion and General Remarks

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- Disaster preparedness and emergency response systems and plans should take into account the specific needs of vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities.
- Training systems for emergency and CP staff should follow the international manuals and guidelines with instructions in order to increase the safety of persons with disabilities in emergencies, although the manuals are not legal binding documents.

## Discussion and General Remarks

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- Civil protection and risk related legislation could incorporate special provisions for the vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities.
- Relevant legislation at European Level may be necessary.
- In addition, new technology tools and capabilities could be used to serve the needs of persons with disabilities in terms of risk and emergency communication, location and assistance provision.



**Thank you for your attention**