



Policy Brief

Civilians with disabilities caused by the armed conflict in Yemen

Evaluating the impact of disability and related
accessibility problems through documented field cases



Mwatana
for Human Rights

February 2022

Policy Brief

Civilians with disabilities caused by the armed conflict in Yemen

Evaluating the impact of disability and related accessibility problems through documented field cases

Prepared by Dr. Hany Al-Mughalis



Mwatana is an independent Yemeni organization established in 2007 and advocates for human rights. Even though the former regime of president Ali Abdullah Saleh declined to provide the organization with the permit to conduct its work, Mwatana was able to implement its activities and participate with other parties in advocacy campaigns against the violations of human rights committed in various parts of Yemen, including those committed against the peaceful Southern Movement sit-ins, during the Saadah wars, and the arrests of activists, opponents and journalists. Furthermore, "Mwatana" cooperated and coordinated with international partners in documenting human rights violations in Yemen.

In February 2021, Mwatana for Human Rights and Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) were nominated for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize.

This policy brief was published with funds from the Atlas Alliance as part of the awareness raising campaign linked to the Global Disability Summit 2022. The campaign aims to raise awareness of the human rights of persons with disabilities and of issues facing persons with disabilities and in situations of humanitarian crisis and conflict.

Introduction

This policy brief discusses the psychological, social and economic impacts that civilians with disabilities resulting from the armed conflict in Yemen. It highlights their suffering, needs and the aggravated obstacles they face, besides the limited support available to them. The paper also discusses their personal agency in adapting to the new normal. Finally, the paper offers practical recommendations and suggestions on the ways in which different actors can support persons with disabilities in a sustainable and sustained manner.

Persons with disabilities resulting from the armed conflict are part of the larger community of the disabled people in Yemen. Despite the fact that this brief focuses primarily on civilians with disabilities resulting from the armed conflict in Yemen, many of the included topics in the brief apply to all people with disabilities. Whether they were disabled since birth, acquired them through diseases or as a result of injuries.

Methodology

This policy brief is based on field cases that Mwatana for Human Rights monitored and documented during the period 2019-2021, covering cases of civilians who suffered physical and visual disabilities due to the conflict. Additional in-depth interviews were conducted regarding 20 verified cases in early January 2022 to complete the information needed to prepare this policy brief. The interviewees were notified of the purpose of the interviews.

All cases involve persons who suffered long-term or permanent disabilities as a direct result of the conflict. They include children, women and men, who suffered different kinds of disability-inducing violations, including the use of landmines, airstrikes, artillery, gunfire or IEDs, across eight Yemeni governorates. These are: Sanaa, Taiz, Al-Hudaida, Abyan, Al-Dali', Al-Bayda, Marib and Lahj, with most cases concentrated in rural areas. The cases also include displaced persons and people who returned home after periods of displacement.

In the context of preparing the policy brief, Mwatana held a discussion at its headquarters on January 11, 2022, with the participation of persons with disabilities' local and international NGOs. The purpose was to share ideas about paper's topic and define the difficulties and obstacles to providing services to civilians with disabilities in Yemen based on participants' experiences. Perceptions of effective roles, as well as how to limit obstacles as the conflict continues, were also discussed.

Main issues

First: Psychological, social and economic impacts of disability

A. Psychological impacts

Persons with disabilities suffer from bad psychological effects, ranging from a feeling of shock when a disability occurs, to falling prey to depression and frustration, and possibly a feeling of helplessness. The psychological effects vary relatively according to the type of disability. Persons who have lost their full mobility or have multiple handicaps are more susceptible to severe psychological effects.

The psychological effects of disability partially vary based on gender. Disabled men, for example, display a reasonable indifference to social stigma. Differently, they experience higher levels of stress over the economic consequences of disability. Here disability means deprivation of economic resource and therefore of status in society. Disabled women bear a greater social cost resulting from the exacerbation of the social stigma that women with disabilities experience.

B. Social impacts

In particular, women with disabilities may be subjected to social disadvantages, which results in the aggravation of the prevailing inequality in society, and may experience forms of abuse. Families of unmarried girls who have a permanent physical disability tend to impose severe restrictions on leaving the home.

Disability as a result of the conflict is a living witness to the suffering of a surrounding community, particularly in rural areas. The disability of an individual becomes an indicator of an impending danger to the surrounding community as a whole. The impact of an IED that explodes and causes a new disabled person near grazing lands or wells, for example, does not end with that individual disability. Rather, the disability-causing incident deprives the village of basic sources of life and livelihood, forcing its residents to seek for alternative living strategies, such as displacement to safer areas.

C. Economic impacts

Disability of the breadwinner results in a complete and tragic change in the normal course of the family's daily life who, along with the injury, may have lost their only source of livelihood. Some women with physical or visual disabilities experience diminished economic role. Other women with disabilities suffer from the feeling that they are permanently dependent on the family and are not economically useful.

Second: Problems in accessing basic services

Persons with disability facing inaccessibility of basic services including life-saving medical services, healthcare services and humanitarian aid.

Some children with disabilities who live in the rural areas reported that it was difficult to continue their education after disability due to the long distance to school, while others had to leave school temporarily due to hospitalization and follow-up care. However, over time, school became a part of their past because of difficulties related to movement and the inaccessibility of schools to persons with disabilities.

Third: Specific needs of persons with disabilities

Most persons with disabilities who were interviewed needed an aid commensurate with the type of disability, especially prosthetic limbs and wheelchairs. Some of those who received prosthetic limbs complained that they did not fit, or that they caused severe pain that forced them to put these prosthetic limbs aside. Most of the persons with disabilities who were interviewed still need additional surgeries, removal of shrapnel or screws from their bodies, orthopedic devices, or specialized medical follow-up services.

The need for specialized psychological rehabilitation is a paramount necessity for persons with disabilities.

Fourth: Community support for persons with disabilities; family support

Persons with varying types of disabilities and of different ages depend on their families to receive assistance to move inside or outside the home, manage their own affairs, install equipment appropriate to their situation to help them lead a better life inside the house. Family represents the main source of psychological support for persons with disabilities. They also play a role in granting children with disabilities the ability to feel safe and protected.

Fifth: Efforts of NGOs working for persons with disabilities

In fact, the efforts of persons with disabilities' organizations in Yemen suffer from multifaceted shortcomings. The armed conflict of itself constitutes one of the most significant obstacles to creating an effective and responsive support and aid network. Many persons with disabilities were unable to obtain any form of free life-saving medical aid provided by persons with disabilities' organizations. The life-saving assistance previously received by persons with disabilities was short-term and limited to the costs of performing surgeries during the first days of the accident, providing immediate medical care after a referral, or paying for one-time treatment.

Psychological support represents the missing link in the efforts undertaken by persons with disabilities' organizations.

On the other hand, long-term interventions made a qualitative difference in the lives of persons with disabilities. Some people received appropriate prosthetic limbs to help them move in record time, while the psychological support received by one girl with a physical disability helped to overcome the serious psychological effects of the disability.

Sixth: Challenging disability – examples of personal initiative

There are remarkable examples of persons challenging their own disability and positively coping with the consequences resulting from their disability, like keep attending schools for children with disabilities or coping with mobility struggles.

The majority of those interviewed have a strong determination not give in to disability. However, the protracted conflict does not offer practical opportunities and possibilities for garnering strong will to really challenge one's disability. Without access to

appropriate physical rehabilitation tools that aid mobility, movement and reintegration, the possibility to talk about personal success stories on challenging disability remains minimal.

Recommendations

● To all parties to the conflict in Yemen

1. Protect persons with disabilities in conflict situations and to ensure they have access to justice, basic services and unimpeded humanitarian assistance.
2. Immediately cease the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and adhere to international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

● To international NGOs working for persons with disabilities

1. Develop work mechanisms during emergency situations that factor in civilians with disabilities during the conflict.
2. Build the capacities of health centers and health staff in rural areas during the conflict.
3. Conduct a dynamic identification of the needs of civilians with disabilities in cooperation with official authorities, local authorities and the Fund for the Care and Rehabilitation of the Disabled.
4. Audit the standards for meeting specific needs, and ensure that people with disabilities have access to suitable and high-quality prosthetic limbs. Train those who are involved in the manufacture and fitting of prosthetic limbs.
5. Organize international advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about the specific nature of the difficulties faced by civilians with disabilities, including civilians injured due to armed conflicts, their need for immediate assistance mechanisms, and international legislation specific to oblige governments to provide them with adequate reparation, and to ensure their right to access to justice for intentional and disabling violations committed against civilians by parties to the conflict.

6. operationalize PWD's centers and organizations that were closed due to the conflict.
7. Assist psychological support centers and funding establishing more specialized psychological support centers across governorate capitals.
8. Focus on empowerment and inclusion of civilians with disabilities in humanitarian response and decision-making processes.
9. Encourage the implementation of extensive field studies on civilians with disabilities who were injured due to the armed conflict in Yemen, to produce extensive empirical knowledge with high reliability. Such knowledge will serve the purposes of mechanisms of intervention and assistance.
10. Implement effective interventions to end discriminatory practices that limit persons with disabilities' access to education, and make special accommodations for people with disabilities in schools and educational facilities. In addition to educating teachers on how to deal with disabled students.

■ To persons with disabilities' local NGOs

1. Coordinate between the various persons with disabilities' local NGOs, to develop meetings and workshops to discuss the situation of these NGOs, and ways to increase the effectiveness of their role while the conflict continues.
2. Simplify and streamline the procedures for obtaining services, and provide citizens with information and communication channels especially in remote and rural areas.
3. Work with the private sector and businesses to convince them to contribute to the integration of persons with disabilities into jobs suitable to their skills and physical conditions.
4. Advocate for amending the Yemeni law on persons with disabilities, to become consistent with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and remove provisions that stand in the way of ending discrimination and inequality.

● To donors and international organizations concerned with humanitarian assistance

1. Step up the funding for humanitarian response in Yemen provided by persons with disabilities' international NGOs. And provide due attention to the needs of civilians with disabilities within the emergency humanitarian relief efforts.

● To the UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council

1. Support the establishment of an international, impartial and independent criminally-focused mechanism to investigate the violations of international law committed in Yemen.



Cover: A kid with artificial limb, his leg was amputated due to mine explosion in Yaf'an area, Al-Bayda Governorate.

Mwatana ©



www.mwatana.org