



Empowering Voices: Exploring the Challenges of Persons with Disabilities in Afghanistan



By the Afghan Landmine Survivors' Organization (ALSO)

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Specifications

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Cover photo	ALSO's social worker interviews a person with disability in Bamiyan province, August 2024.

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The Afghan Landmine Survivors' Organization (ALSO) would like to thank the International Campaign to Ban Landmine-Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC) for its support that enabled ALSO in conducting a assessment to identify challenge faced by Persons with Disabilities and landmine, cluster munitions and other explosive ordnances victims in Afghanistan, in August 2024 in Afghanistan. ALSO extends its warm gratitude to those persons with disabilities who participated in the assessment in Kabul, Herat, Balk, Kandahar and Bamiyan provinces. ALSO, would like to thank all its team members who have worked hard to implement this assessment. Without your effort, it would not be possible to produce this report.

With support from:



Executive Summary

To contribute to a positive development in Afghanistan, this assessment aimed at finding out about the access of persons with disabilities including those that have been disabled due explosions of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive ordnances¹ to humanitarian aids as well as to explore other challenges they face in post- August 2021 in Afghanistan.

120 persons with disabilities participated and shared their situations, views and suggestions in Kabul, Herat, Balk, Kandahar and Bamiyan provinces. 70% of the participants were men with disabilities and 30% of them were women with disabilities. 85% of them acquired physical impairments, and 8% of them with visual disabilities. Of the 120 persons, 22% of the causes of their impairments were reported due to landmine explosions and 25% due to other conflicts related incidents. 35% of the participants were unemployed and 36% of the 120 respondents reported facing extreme poverty.

Regarding access to humanitarian aid, 80% of the participants did not receive any humanitarian aid. Although due to lack of resources we could not study all factors, but the main reasons participants have mentioned was lack of awareness among the district's representatives, district councils, elders and NGOs about the needs of persons with disabilities in the community.

As for annual disability pensions provided by the government, only 5% of the respondents reported having received pensions for three or six-months while 95% of them reported that they did not receive their pension, which indicates a high difference comparing to 58% (69 persons) of the respondents who reported having had received pension from the former government annually around, at amount of \$670USD. 42% (51 persons) of the participants said that they were not eligible to receive pension from the former government. After August 2021, a new criterion has been set for the pension payment to persons with disabilities by Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) among other changes, in principle, it opens provision of pensions to all persons with disabilities, regardless of causes of their impairments, however, it favors members of the IEA who are entitled to receiving the highest pensions comparing to others.

In brief, persons with disabilities face problems in accessing humanitarian aid. The obstacles are due to lack of awareness of the community members and policies and programs of the humanitarian aids organization. Persons with disabilities face economic problems. The majority of the respondents did not receive their pension, and some of

¹ Note: To keep it short, the rest of this report refer to "persons with disabilities", which always include "landmine, cluster munitions and other explosive ordnances survivors".

them received pensions of three or six months, only. Moreover, Covid-19 has had a negative impact on persons with disabilities' livelihood and income – business loss and unemployment. This has expanded the disparities between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are facing psychological problems and they need psychosocial support to enable them to have access to healthcare services in the community.

Finally, persons with disabilities and mine victims have less access to education. Recently, the closure of schools, the impact of Covid-19, limited access of persons with disabilities to education, but the banning of school by Islamic Emirate above grade six is the main problem for girls and women with disabilities now.

Recommendations

- The IEA, UN agencies, and humanitarian aid organizations should integrate the needs of persons with disabilities into their policies and programs, ensuring equity in the distribution of aid.
- The IEA, UN agencies, and NGOs should prioritize the creation of economic opportunities for persons with disabilities and landmine, cluster munitions and other explosive ordnance victims to enhance their livelihoods. A lot of persons with disabilities suffer from extreme poverty.
- The IEA should ensure the timely payment of pensions to all persons with disabilities, including survivors of landmines, cluster munitions, and other explosive ordnance, as these pensions are often their only source of income.
- Given the psychological pressures faced by persons with disabilities, the IEA, UN agencies, and NGOs should provide or facilitate provision of comprehensive psychological services, including peer-to-peer support, for persons with disabilities and survivors of landmines, cluster munitions, and other explosive ordnance.
- The IEA should reopen girls' schools to allow girls with disabilities to continue their education without barriers.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Any political changes in the country have positive or negative impact on the life of every group in the community, especially Afghanistan, a country that has been experiencing more than three decades of war and conflicts. The political changes create new problems and challenges, with the most common problems being unemployment, access to education and healthcare. The vulnerable people are more prone to the challenges, especially persons with disabilities including landmine, cluster munition and other explosive ordnances survivors.

Persons with disabilities are the largest community in the world. 15% of the world population is persons with disabilities and majority of persons with disabilities live in developing countries, according to the World Health Organization. .. Afghanistan is one of the countries where a large number of persons with disabilities are living. Report indicates that over 80 percent of people with disabilities aged over 18 have some form of physical, functional and sensory impairment (24.6% mild, 40.4% moderate and 13.9% severe). Server disabilities are more prevalent among female (14.9 %) than males (12.6%) (MDSA 2019²). Moreover, the rate of severe disability was reported 2.7% by NDSA³ report in 2005, which shows an increase in severe disabilities in comparison with the report of MDSA 2019.

Persons with disabilities have different type of challenges in Afghanistan. They have less access to employment, education, healthcare and other opportunities in the community. Regarding education, before August 2021, as all schools were open all over the country, children with disabilities had less access to education in comparison with children without disabilities according to ALSO's report in 2018. But under IEA after August 2021, the situation is much more different because all girls' schools above grade six are closed, affecting negatively on education of girls, especially girls with disabilities.

The rights of persons with disabilities are not respected at family, community and authority' levels. The main problem is that the level of awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities is low; they have negative perception and charity-based understandings about the rights of persons with disabilities. As a result, the rights, needs, and challenges of persons with disabilities are ignored.

The Afghan Landmine Survivors Organization (ALSO) is one of the local organizations that has been working in disability sector to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Public awareness and advocacy have been two key areas on which ALSO has been focusing since 2007. ALSO conducted several research and assessments on

² By Asia Foundation 2019

³ By Handicap International in 2005

education, violence against women with disabilities and healthcare of persons with disabilities recently in the country. The objective of the research and the assessments were to reflect the challenges and needs of persons with disabilities to attract the attention of authorities and civil society organizations to respond to the needs and challenges of persons disabilities. The findings of the reports could also help to provide updated information about the situation of persons with disabilities for policy and program development by civil society organizations, donors and government.

[The situation of persons with disabilities after August 2021](#)

The collapse of the former government, the takeover of the country by the Taliban and the withdrawal of the international community impacted the social, political and economic situation of the country. Persons with disabilities, being among the most vulnerable groups, have been most affected, with access to opportunities and services being drastically reduced.

One of the challenges persons with disabilities face which is also the most common and the most severe, is lack of resources, such as financial means for basic needs such as food and shelter. They are unemployed, their pension has not been paid, and due to the overall downfall of economic development their caregivers and family members cannot afford to assist them any longer. Moreover, the humanitarian aids provided by national or international organizations are not equally accessible for persons with disabilities in the community because the policy and programs of the organizations are not disability-inclusive, unfortunately. Persons with disabilities are not priority of their program while distributing provisions and foodstuff.

Considering the current situation, ALSO has decided to conduct a brief assessment to understand the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the community, focusing on areas such as aid, education, healthcare, and pensions. However, the primary emphasis of the assessment is on the accessibility of humanitarian aid, especially that provided by non-governmental organizations, to persons with disabilities. The people of Afghanistan are heavily reliant on international humanitarian aid.

The goal of the assessment is to gather up-to-date information about the access of persons with disabilities to humanitarian aid and identify other challenges they face. This information will be shared with non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, and the IEA, urging them to give more attention to the needs and challenges of persons with disabilities in the community. Given that NGOs and the IEA have limited information on the situation of persons with disabilities, this assessment aims to bridge that gap.

While the assessment does not cover all provinces, it includes some of the most populated areas, such as Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Balkh, and Bamiyan. The findings will provide a snapshot of the situation of persons with disabilities, which will be valuable for

NGOs, UN agencies, and the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled (MMD) in shaping their policies and programs on disability inclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Assessment Objectives

ALSO designed and conducted this assessment to find out about the access of persons with disabilities to the humanitarian aids and other challenges of persons with disabilities in the community after the political changes in the country. This is a very small assessment covering a small group of men and women with disabilities in some provinces. The assessment is not a full-fledged one to deeply generalize the situation of persons with disabilities. The main objective of the assessment is to assess the access of persons with disabilities to humanitarian aids and take a look other challenge of persons with disabilities in livelihood and healthcare.

Data Collection Tool

The data was collected by a questionnaire designed by ALSO in consultations with persons with disabilities, landmine survivors and other experts. The questionnaire was shared with persons with disabilities, many of whom lead self help groups or small associations, in provinces by email. Then persons with disabilities filled them out with required data and sent back to ALSO's team. At the same time, ALSO conducted interviews with some of persons with disabilities who did not have access to internet and email. For collecting the data, ALSO got assistance from its volunteers with disabilities in the community to identify persons with disabilities and to conduct interviews.

Coverage Areas

ALSO selected four provinces: Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Bamiyan and Balkh where different groups of people with disabilities are living. It was also easier for ALSO to conduct the assessment in these provinces as ALSO used to implement projects and assisted hundreds of people prior to 2021. ALSO has volunteers with disabilities who would help implement the assessment in these provinces. ALSO did not have enough resources to carry out the assessment in more provinces to have a stronger generalization about the situation of persons with disabilities in the country.

Target Group

The target group of this assessment were persons with disabilities including mine victims with a category of age above 15 years old, both men and women with different type of disability, but the ratio of disability type was not specified. The selection of the individuals

for the interview was more on rolling basis or randomly selected and interviewed; one person could introduce another person for interview. On top of that, ALSO had already available list of persons with disabilities to include in the assessment process directly or with assistance of ALSO's volunteers in the community.

Report Audience

The audience of this assessment report will be the UN agencies, IEA, local councils, donors, governments, national and international organizations that are involved directly or indirectly in humanitarian aids and other services in the community to consider the needs and challenges of persons with disabilities properly in their policy and programs.

Challenges

Lack of resources was the main challenge of the assessment; it was not possible for ALSO to cover more places and persons with disabilities to participate in the assessment. The limitation of resources somehow limits the generalization of the assessment findings as well. However, in the absence of any new data in the country, the findings of the assessment report is a snapshot of the real situation of persons with disabilities going on in the community.

CHAPTER THREE

Data Analysis

The objective of the assessment is to find out about the access of persons with disabilities to the humanitarian aids and some other challenges in the community. The collected data for the assessment will be analyzed in this chapter to produce the report.

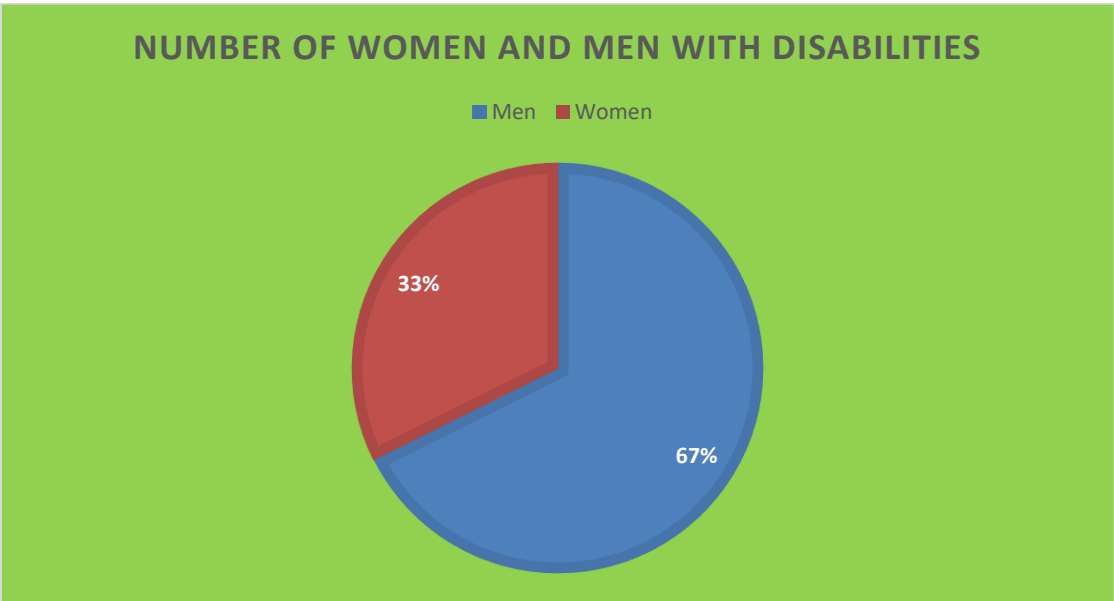


Figure 1: Number of Men and Women with Disabilities Participated in the Assessment

Figure 1 shows that 67% of the participants were men and 33% of them were women who participated in this assessment. Because of limited resources, ALSO was not able to cover more persons with disabilities in the assessment. However, the collected data from the participants will help us to reflect the current situation and challenges of persons with disabilities in the community after the political changes taken place in August 2021.

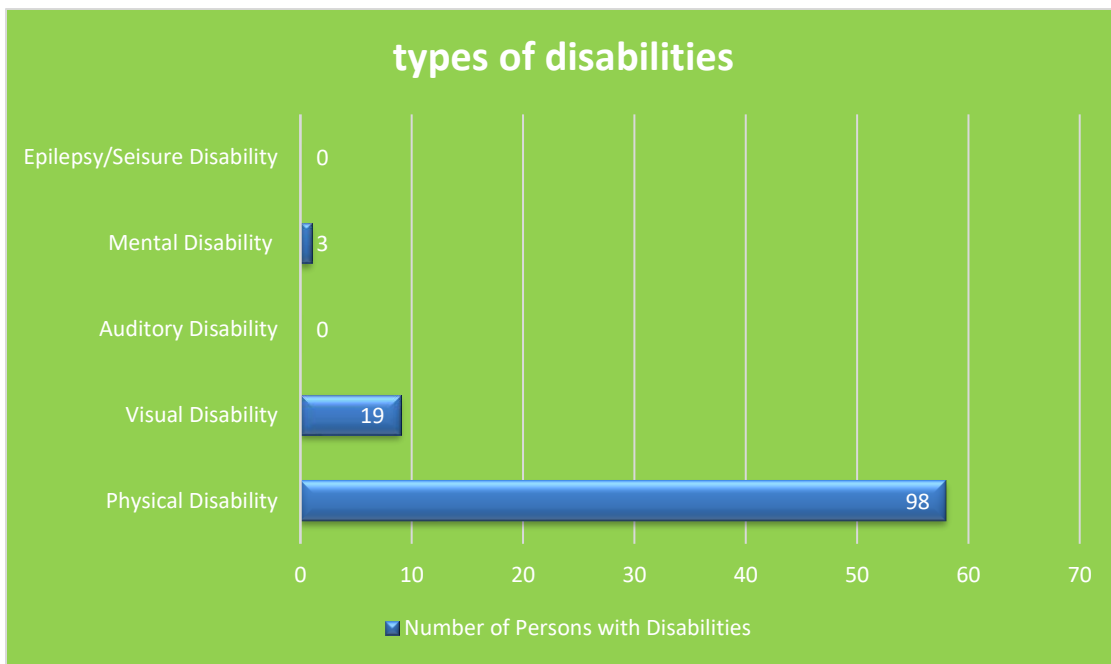


Figure 2: The type of disabilities of the participants of the assessment

Disability has been categorized in different types. In Afghanistan, the type of disabilities was categorized in five “Physical Disability, Sensorial Disability, Mental Disability, Associated Disability and Epilepsy/Seizure⁴”.

Figure 2 indicates that 88% of the participants in the assessment have been persons with physical disabilities, which contains lost of limbs and other physical impairments limiting functions or mobilities and around 12% of them were persons with visual impairments. In assessment, persons with physical disabilities are considerable in terms of number. According to ALSO’s experience, persons with physical disabilities have more mobility and participation in the community rather than other types of disability like persons with

⁴ By NDSA.

visual and mental disabilities. This fact, however, also tells us that persons with disabilities of other types than physical, may be more isolated and in some cases hidden due to social stereotypes.

It is important to note that this assessment doesn't consider the ratio of disability type and all participants for interview were selected randomly for the assessment.

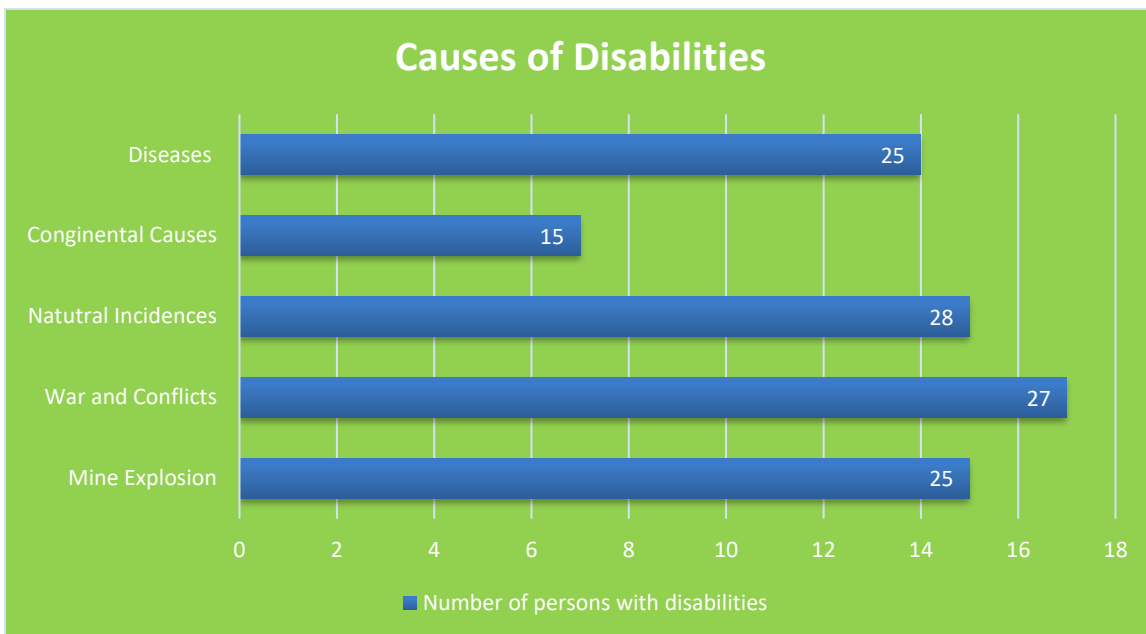


Figure 3: The causes of disabilities of the participants in the assessment

In Afghanistan, war and conflict are one of the major causes of disability, which include landmine explosion, cluster munitions, explosive ordnances and cross fires. NDSA (2005) report indicates that almost 17% of disability causes are linked to war and conflicts in Afghanistan. Figure 3 also indicates that 22% of the participants' causes of their disability were landmine explosions and 25% conflicts related which includes all kinds of situations in which a person get impaired such as cross fires, mortars, fragments of bombs, collapse of infrastructures, burns and etc. If we add up the two figures, they make up 47% of the participants who are the war victims.

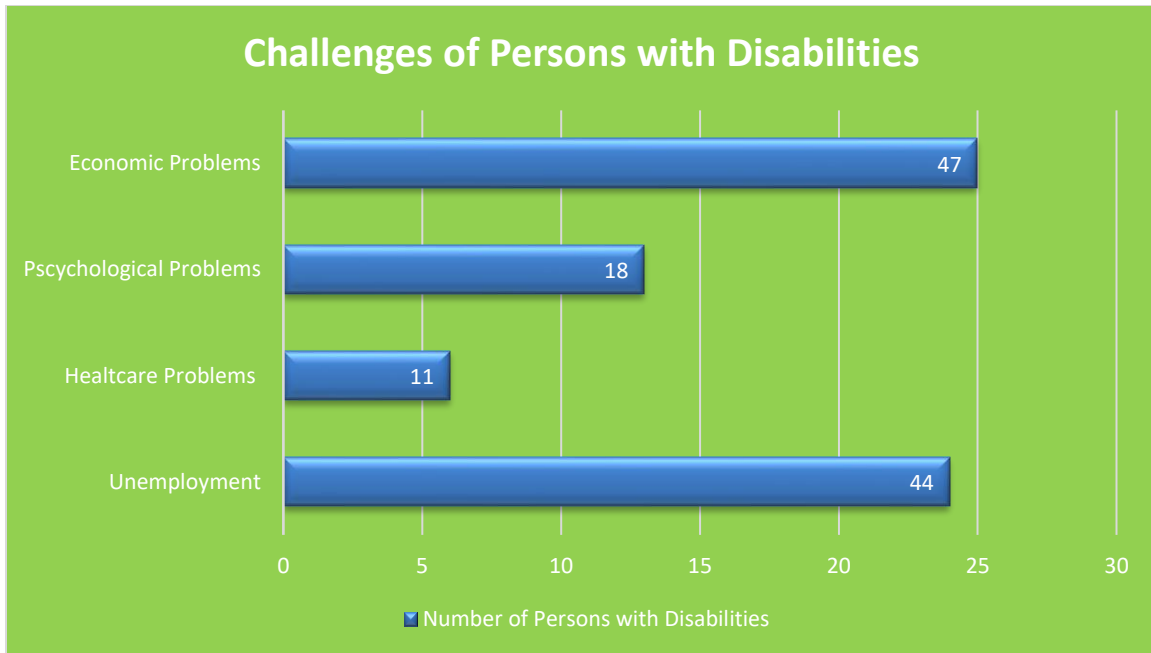


Figure 4: Economic Problems of persons with disabilities in the community

Persons with disabilities have different challenges. Of their challenges is unemployment. In this assessment, the effort was made to focus on employment challenges of persons with disabilities in the Afghan community as well. Unemployment is a very common problem for persons with disabilities worldwide, including in Afghanistan. WHO’s report indicates that 15% of world’s population are persons with disabilities and they suffer from “lower levels of employment, and higher poverty rates [and that]disability may increase the risk of poverty”⁵ in the community. This is true for Afghanistan. The rate of unemployment of persons with disabilities is lower than non-disabled people in the community and the assessment shows that persons with disabilities face extreme poverty and the situation is worsening.

Figure 4 indicates that 35% of the assessment participants were unemployed and 36% of them faced extreme poverty which make up 71% challenges related to economics, primarily lack of food and shelter. In addition, 27% of them reported having psychological and healthcare problems. Theoretically, economic problem could be related to unemployment and income for persons with disabilities. If persons with disabilities have

⁵<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability#:~:text=Barriers%20to%20full%20social%20and,prejudice%20and%20stigma%20in%20society>.

more access to employment opportunities, they would have less economic problem and will have less a psychological and healthcare problems.

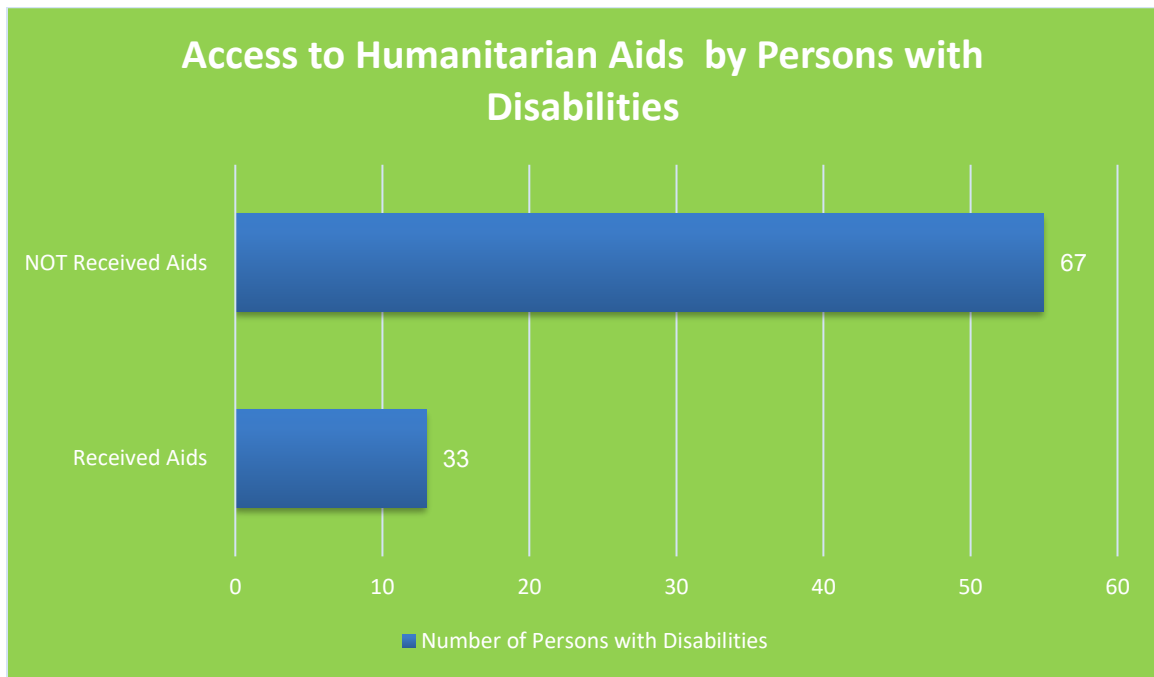


Figure 5: Access of Persons with disabilities to Humanitarian Aids in the Community

Unfair distribution of humanitarian aids has been a problem in the Afghan community. People have often complained about the unfair and corruption in the distribution of aids in the community. The people in need were not considered well in distribution plan and programs of the aid distributors in the community. Persons with disabilities were one the groups who often either got ignored or had much less access to receiving aids. One of the reasons is lack of awareness on situations of persons with disabilities as well as lack of accountability of the organizations distributing aids in the community.

Figure 5 indicates that 80% of persons with who participated in the assessment did not receive aids distributed by national and international organization in the community. The reasons that the participants have mentioned are that districts representatives, districts councils, elders and NGOs did not have good assessment about the needs of persons with disabilities in the community. They expressed their concern that one of the reasons is lack of transparency and inclusion of persons with disabilities in their humanitarian aids programs. Those 20% who received some packages of aids said that they are not

enough. They expect a meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in the policy of the humanitarian organizations.

In fact, persons with disabilities are the most vulnerable group in the community from all aspects. It is highly expected that they should be in priority of IEA and humanitarian organizations' programs and aids distribution in the community.

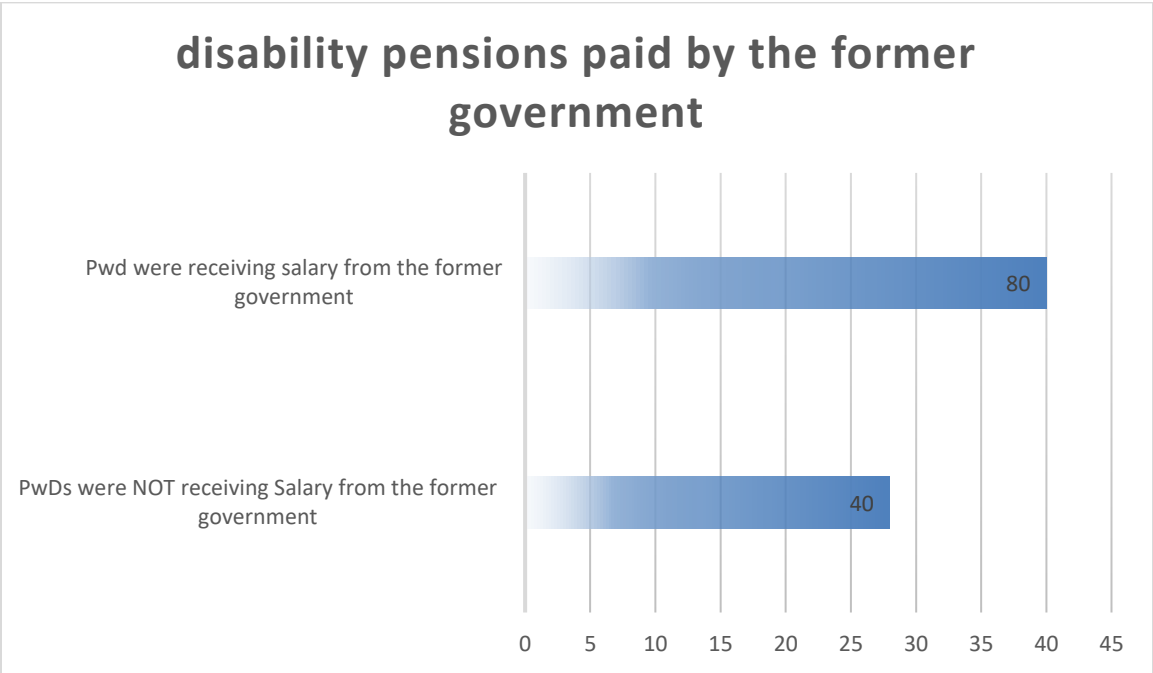


Figure 6: Majority of the Assessment Participants were receiving pensions from former government of Afghanistan.

Article 53 of the Constitution of Afghanistan has enshrined the rights of persons with disabilities. According to National Law on the Rights and Benefits of Persons with Disabilities, the former government of Afghanistan was paying salary for the conflict affected persons with disabilities. But those categories whose disabilities were caused by natural incidences were not receiving pension from the government, which was in contradiction with the provisions of UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). On the other hand, the Taliban administration has changed the criteria for pension payment to persons with disabilities and developed a new instruction, which the highest salary is paid to Mujahidin of IEA, which is also in contradiction with UN CRPD's provisions.

Figure 6 indicates that 58% of the assessment participants had been receiving salary from the former government of Afghanistan while 42% of them had not been receiving salary from the former government of Afghanistan – the salary was around \$ 670 USD

per year. If we compare it, since August 2021, 4% of the participants of this assessment received their three and some six-month salary and the other 96% of them did not receive any salary yet (see Figure 7).

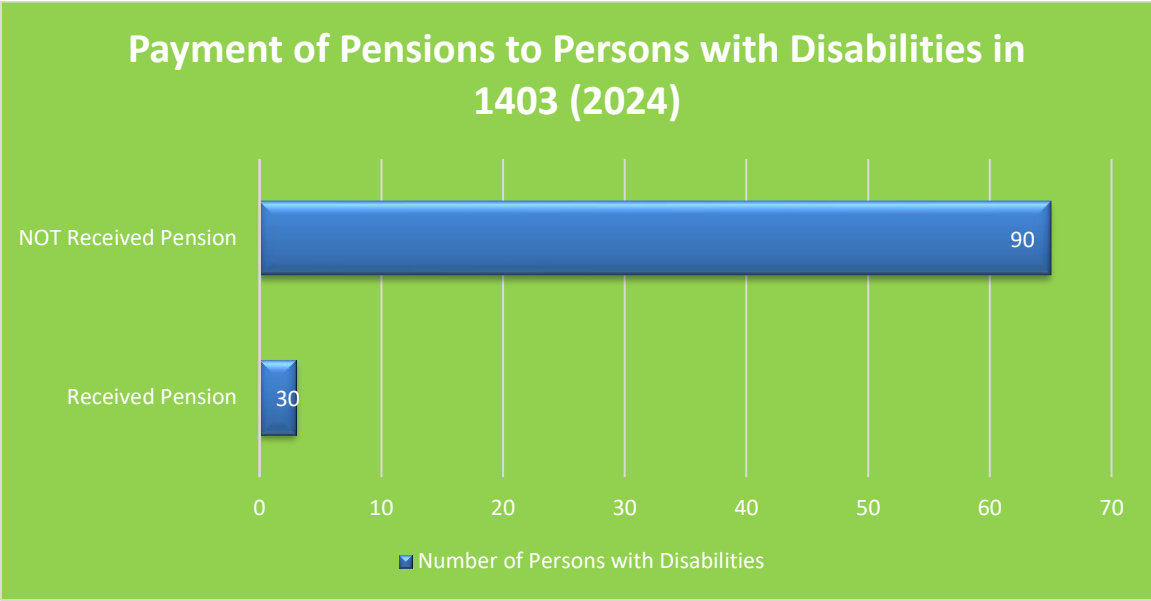


Figure 7: Number of persons with disabilities received their pension from Islamic Emirate

A number of persons with disabilities were receiving pensions from the former government of Afghanistan. Those persons with disabilities were receiving pensions whose disabilities were related to war and conflicts, but persons whose disabilities were due to congenital and natural or incidence were not eligible to receive pension from the republic government . The IEA has changed the pension payment policy. They have started paying pensions to all types of persons with disabilities, war and non-war related disabilities. Under the new policy, only less than a quarter of persons with disabilities participated in this assessment, had received their pension for three or six months.

Figure 7 shows that only around 14% of the people who took part in the assessment have received their pension for the year 2024 (1403) and the other 86% of the participants have not received their pension yet.

The pension payment objective is to support persons with disabilities economically because they are more vulnerable people in the community. They have less access to job opportunity and face more poverty and economic challenges. It is the indicator of the economic challenge that persons with disabilities are facing now. The assessment’s participants suggested that IEA should try to pay the pension or salaries of persons with disabilities.

Details on pension

Persons with disabilities would usually receive their annual pension in one time from the former government of Afghanistan. The problem now is that Islamic Emirate not only paid their pension but also has decreased the amount of the pensions. IEA has given more preference to those who have been the supporters of IEA. However, there is a new development that non-war disabilities have also been registered to receive pension, but it has not practically started yet. The non-war related persons with disabilities were not included in the pension plan before by the former government of Afghanistan. The Law on the Rights and Benefits of Persons with Disabilities were not allowing the conflict and war – affected people to receive pension or salary; it was quite discriminatory according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Afghanistan ratified it in 2012.

The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled (MMD) reported that 117,459 persons with disabilities were registered by the former government of Afghanistan and 16,500 new persons with disabilities have been registered by IEA – total registered (133,959) persons with disabilities. Also, 70 thousand persons have received their pension till now from IEA or MMD.

IEA does not accept all laws passed by the former Afghan government and the Parliament. It is possible that IEA will not follow all the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was ratified by the former Afghan government in 2012, although no clear policy has been announced in this regard.

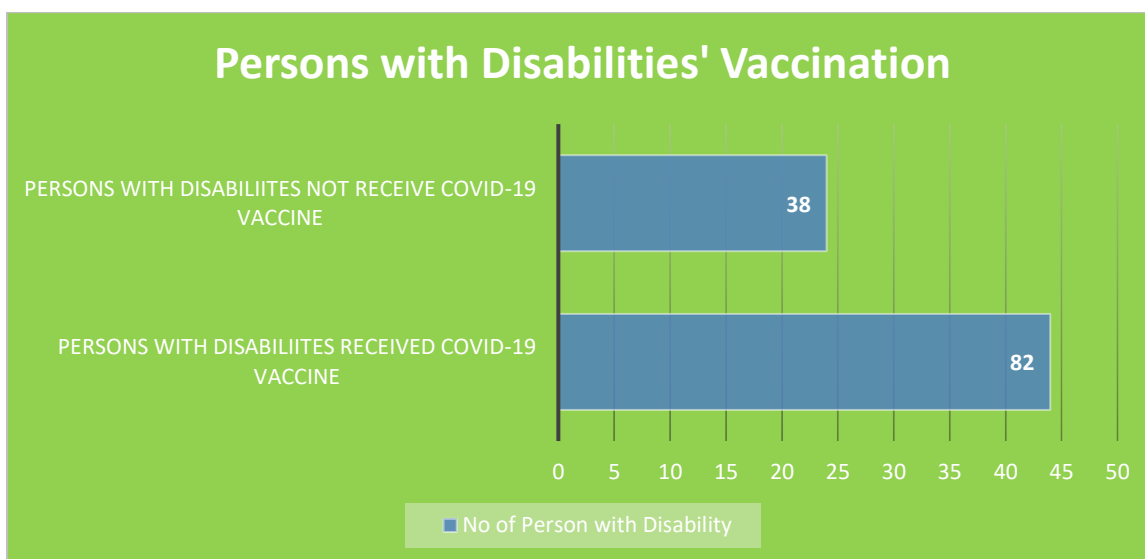


Figure 8: Access of persons with disabilities to Covid-19 vaccination

In general, Covid-19 vaccination will increase the immunity and decrease the vulnerability of the people the Covid-19 virus to decrease the negative impact of the virus. Covid-19

has had considerable social, economic, psychological, educational and health impact on people in the community, including persons with disabilities. Access of persons with disabilities to healthcare services has been a challenge in the community before. So, in this assessment, it was tried to find out access of persons with to Covid-19 vaccination as well.

Figure 8 indicates that 68% of the assessment participants received Covid-19 vaccination and 32% of them did not receive Covid-19 vaccination. The participants have highlighted some of the reasons that persons with disabilities did not get vaccination. The reasons for not vaccinating mentioned by the participants are (1) low access to vaccination centers, (2) low quality vaccine donated, (3) fear of side effects of the vaccine, (4) background diseases of some people, (5) and pregnant and breast-feeding mothers.

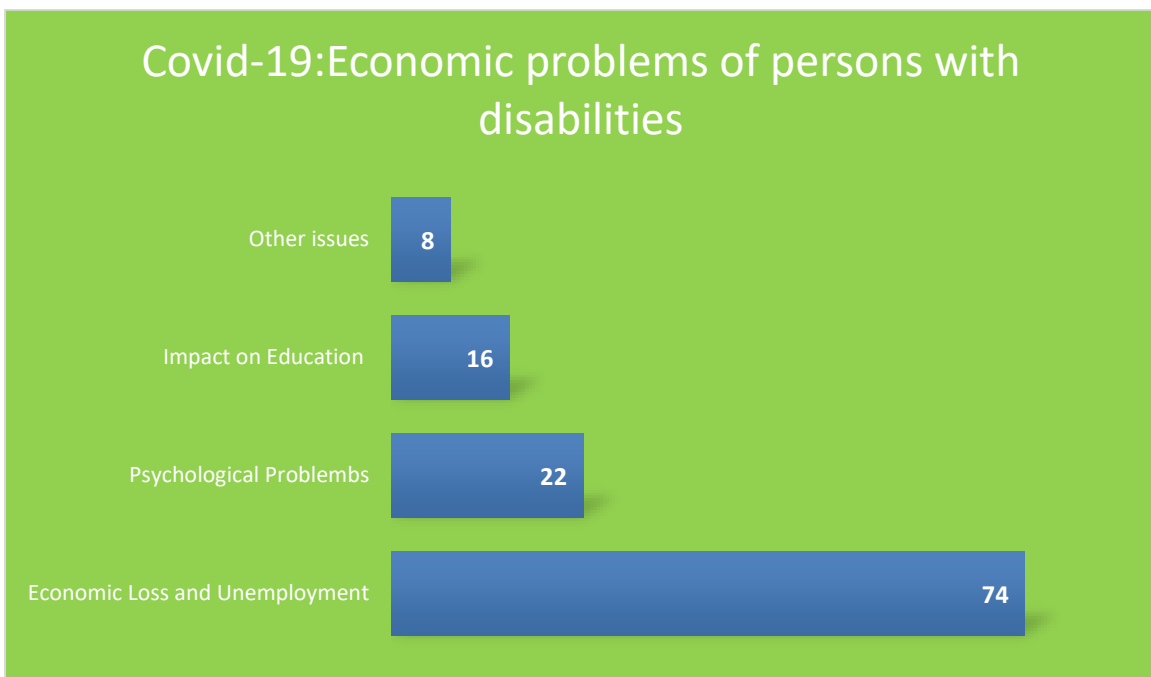


Figure 9: Negative impact of Covid-19 on economic situation of persons with disabilities

Recovery from the impact of Covid-19 will take a longer time. It is necessary that any program should consider persons with disabilities who have been impacted economically and socially by Covid-19 pandemic. The negative impact will remain months and years with persons with disabilities to recover because persons with disabilities have less resilience to stand up quickly because of high vulnerabilities – social, economic, mental and financial vulnerabilities.

Figure 9 indicates that 63% of the participants mentioned that Covid-19 had a negative impact on their economy and employment; it means that they lost their jobs and their businesses. Regarding health issues, 19% of the participants experienced psychological problems during the Covid-19 pandemic in the community.

Moreover, Covid-19 had a negative impact on education of all people because schools were closed by the Ministry of Education. No doubt the educational impact of Covid-19 was huge all over the world and persons with disabilities faced more challenges than others due to lack of communication and other tools in the area of education. For instance, during lockdown in Afghanistan some universities and school continued their program virtually, but most of persons with disabilities were not able to follow the lessons online because they did not have internet and communication tools. Therefore, they lost their educational programs.

On top of that, after August 2021, IEA also banned schools for girls above six grades all over the country. It is now three years since girls have not been allowed to attend their schools, including girls with disabilities – the biggest barriers for their education. Losing the education time is not really possible to compensate later. It is the rights of girls with disabilities to have access to education. IEA should provide education for them.

Request of the applicants from IEA to re-open the girls' schools.

In addition to other issues addressed in this assessment, several participants suggested that the IEA should reopen girls' schools, ensuring that girls with disabilities have access to education and are not deprived of their basic right to education. The closure of schools has had a particularly negative impact on the education of girls with disabilities, including landmine victims. Persons with disabilities already faced limited access to education prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the political changes in Afghanistan, meaning that women and girls with disabilities have been denied their right to education for years. In 2005, the NDSA reported that over 70% of persons with disabilities lacked access to education (NDSA, 2005).

Additionally, in 2019, the MDSA (via the Asia Foundation) highlighted that the greatest challenges faced by persons with disabilities included “physical mobility, community participation, employment, and education,” even before the ban on girls' schools was implemented.



ALSO meeting a girl with disability together with her family members ©ALSO, Kabul, 2024

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

The objective of the assessment was to examine the level of access that persons with disabilities have to humanitarian aid, as well as to identify other challenges they face. The primary focus was on the situation of persons with disabilities and landmine victims in Afghanistan after the takeover by the IEA on 15 August 2021.

The findings of this assessment reveal that persons with disabilities have limited access to humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. 80% of respondents reported not receiving any humanitarian aid from organizations distributing assistance in the five provinces surveyed. This highlights significant gaps in the policies and programs of organizations involved in humanitarian aid distribution, where persons with disabilities are often overlooked. The reasons for this exclusion are unclear—whether it is due to ignorance, lack of data, or discrimination—though some participants suggested that a lack of awareness regarding the situation of persons with disabilities could be a factor. While humanitarian aid has been a crucial source of support since 2021, it is concerning that the vast majority of persons with disabilities have not had access to such aid.

In addition, persons with disabilities are facing severe economic hardships. The majority of respondents did not receive their pension, and some only received three months' worth in 2024 or 2023. Many have also experienced the negative effects of COVID-19 on their employment and financial situations. Unemployment is a major challenge for persons with disabilities, including landmine survivors, contributing to their low income and financial instability. Almost, everyone we meet or asked, raised lack of income as one of the challenges they constantly struggle to overcome.

Healthcare is another critical need for persons with disabilities, encompassing both physical rehabilitation and psychological support. This assessment indicates that persons with disabilities and landmine victims are experiencing significant psychological distress, partly due to the impacts of COVID-19 and the additional economic pressures they face in the community.

Finally, access to education for persons with disabilities and landmine, cluster munitions, explosive ordnance survivors remains limited. While the COVID-19 had severely affected, the ban on girls' schools is a major issue, leaving girls with disabilities completely deprived of their right to education. Participants in the assessment called on the IEA to reopen girls' schools in the country.

Recommendations:

- The IEA, UN agencies, and humanitarian aid organizations should integrate the needs of persons with disabilities into their policies and programs, ensuring equity in the distribution of aid.
- The IEA, UN agencies, and NGOs should prioritize the creation of economic opportunities for persons with disabilities and landmine, cluster munitions and other explosive ordnance victims to enhance their livelihoods. A lot of persons with disabilities suffer from extreme poverty.
- The IEA should ensure the timely payment of pensions to all persons with disabilities, including survivors of landmines, cluster munitions, and other explosive ordnance, as these pensions are often their only source of income.
- Given the psychological pressures faced by persons with disabilities, the IEA, UN agencies, and NGOs should provide or facilitate provision of comprehensive psychological services, including peer-to-peer support, for persons with disabilities and survivors of landmines, cluster munitions, and other explosive ordnance.
- The IEA should reopen girls' schools to allow girls with disabilities to continue their education without barriers.



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