

# Disaster Risk Reduction Response Policy

## International Sign Version

### Preamble

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) recognises that disasters and humanitarian emergencies disproportionately affect deaf communities due to barriers in access to information, communication, emergency services and participation in decision-making spaces in disaster and emergency discussion spaces.

Article 11 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD<sup>1</sup>) requires State Parties to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters. Deaf people must be included in disaster preparedness, response, recovery and reconstruction efforts, with full respect of their linguistic and human rights.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030<sup>2</sup> further emphasises the importance of inclusive disaster risk governance and the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in disaster risk reduction.

In accordance with the Statutes<sup>3</sup> of the WFD, particularly Articles 7 and 8 concerning the objectives of the organisation, the WFD promotes the full realisation of the human rights of deaf people worldwide and supports its members in advancing these rights through international cooperation and advocacy

This policy establishes the framework guiding WFD engagement in disaster contexts affecting deaf communities.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. New York: United Nations. Retrieved from

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2015). Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 retrieved from

<https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

<sup>3</sup> WFD. (2023). WFD revised statutes (10 July 2023) retrieved from

<https://wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/WFD-Revised-Statutes-10-July-2023-FINAL.pdf>

## Introduction

Disasters and humanitarian crises often expose and intensify existing barriers faced by deaf people. Lack of accessible information, absence of communication support, and exclusion from emergency planning can place deaf people at heightened risk during disasters.

Deaf communities and their representative organisations play a critical role in ensuring that disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts are inclusive and accessible.

The WFD works to support its members and partners in advocating for deaf-inclusive disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action so that deaf people are not left behind.

## Purpose of the policy

This policy establishes the framework guiding how the WFD engages in disaster risk reduction and emergency situations affecting deaf communities.

It defines the strategic triggers guiding WFD engagement and clarifies the roles, responsibilities, and procedures through which the WFD Secretariat supports its members and partners in disaster contexts.

The policy aims to ensure that WFD engagement is consistent, principled, and aligned with international human rights standards and humanitarian frameworks.

## Scope of action of the policy

This policy applies to disasters and humanitarian emergencies affecting deaf people, including those resulting from natural hazards, climate-related events, and other crises.

WFD engagement in disaster contexts focuses primarily on:

- Policy advocacy
- Coordination with relevant stakeholders
- Technical guidance on accessibility and sign language rights
- Capacity-building for deaf organisations
- Mobilisation of partnerships and resources

The WFD does not function as a direct humanitarian service provider. Its role is to support and strengthen the work of deaf communities and their representative organisations while advocating for inclusive disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response.

Engagement under this policy shall be guided by the strategic triggers outlined below, the priorities identified by affected deaf communities, and the institutional capacity of the WFD.

## 1. Key terminology

For the purpose of this policy, the following definitions apply<sup>4</sup>:

### **Disaster**

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or society due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to human, material, economic, or environmental losses and impacts.

### **Response**

Actions taken directly before, during or immediately after a disaster in order to save lives, reduce health impacts, ensure public safety and meet the basic subsistence needs of affected people.

### **Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)**

The policy objective of disaster risk management is aimed at preventing new disasters and reducing existing disaster risk while strengthening resilience.

## Strategic Triggers for WFD Engagement

WFD engagement in a disaster or humanitarian situation shall be assessed against the following strategic triggers. These triggers ensure that WFD engagement is justified, principled, and aligned with its mandate.

### Strategic Relevance Trigger

The situation must fall within the mandate and strategic priorities of the WFD. Engagement may be considered where:

- The situation relates to international human rights obligations, including the CRPD.
- The issue involves accessibility, communication rights, or inclusion of deaf people.
- The situation presents an opportunity or a need for international advocacy.
- A formal request is submitted by a WFD Ordinary Member (OM), Associate Member (AM), or recognised disability organisation.

Where an issue remains primarily domestic in nature, WFD will normally encourage the relevant member organisation to address the matter at the national level. However, WFD engagement may still be considered where international advocacy could strengthen the protection of deaf people's rights.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2017). Disaster. UNDRR Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction



### Deaf-Specific Harm Trigger

The situation must demonstrate actual or potential harm that specifically affects deaf people due to barriers in communication, accessibility, or participation.

Such harm may arise where deaf people face barriers in:

- Receiving emergency information or alerts in national sign languages.
- Accessing humanitarian assistance or emergency services.
- Communicating with authorities or humanitarian actors.
- Participating in disaster response decisions.
- Reporting protection concerns or accessing support services.

### Collective concern Trigger

WFD engagement may be triggered where concerns are raised by organisations representing deaf communities. Priority shall be given to requests from WFD member organisations, particularly the Ordinary Member in the affected country.

Requests may also originate from:

- Associate Members.
- Recognised regional deaf organisations.
- Umbrella disability organisations.
- Humanitarian organisations working on disability inclusion.

### Procedural Readiness Trigger

Before intervening, the WFD shall assess whether engagement is feasible and responsible. This includes consideration of:

- Reliability of available information.
- Alignment with WFD mandate and policies.
- Communication with relevant member organisations.
- Potential risks to affected communities.
- Institutional capacity to respond.



## Impact Trigger

WFD engagement shall also consider whether intervention is likely to produce meaningful improvements for deaf people. This may include improving:

- Access to information in the national sign language
- Inclusion of deaf people in humanitarian response
- Protection of rights and safety
- Accessibility of services
- Mobilisation of partnerships and resources

Where engagement is unlikely to produce meaningful improvements, WFD shall prioritise responsible and strategic engagement over symbolic action.

## Strategic Triggers for WFD Engagement

When a disaster occurs, WFD will prioritise engagement with its members and recognised representative organisations in the affected country. The order of priority for contact is:

1. WFD Ordinary Member
2. National-level Associate Member
3. Regional Associate Member
4. National umbrella disability organisation
5. International humanitarian organisations that can facilitate contact with the deaf community.

Emergency engagement shall not depend on membership fee payment status.

## Guiding Principles

WFD engagement in disaster contexts shall be guided by the following frameworks:

- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction
- United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action.

Humanitarian engagement shall also respect the principles of:

- Humanity
- Impartiality
- Neutrality
- Independence



## Operational Procedure

Where a disaster affecting deaf people is identified:

1. The WFD assesses the strategic triggers.
2. Contact is established with the relevant OM or representative organisation.
3. A consultation meeting is organised to identify needs and possible actions.
4. WFD engagement may include advocacy, coordination, capacity-building, or fundraising initiatives.
5. Where appropriate, the WFD may also support follow-up after the disaster, including monitoring developments, facilitating information-sharing and reporting, training and supporting recovery and resilience efforts in collaboration with relevant organisations

## Resource Mobilisation and Fundraising

Where appropriate, WFD may support fundraising initiatives to assist affected deaf communities.

Where funds are raised jointly with a member organisation, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) shall define:

- Objectives
- Responsibilities
- Reporting obligations.

Funds may support activities towards:

- Emergency accessibility
- Advocacy
- Capacity-building
- Disaster preparedness

## Accountability and Reporting

WFD and participating organisations shall ensure transparent use of resources and responsible engagement. Member organisations receiving support shall report on:

- Activities undertaken
- Impact on affected deaf communities
- Lessons learned.

Reporting may be provided in accessible formats, including written reports or international sign video reports.