



Abilis in

# Fragile contexts



This policy document describes the key principles on which Abilis Foundation will carry out its mission in fragile contexts: Part I describes the background of fragile contexts as a concept in international development cooperation and policy. Part II is a practical guideline and tool for how Abilis operates in fragile contexts.

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# Terminology

**Fragility** refers to societal structures that are weak or failing in the delivery of basic services and functions, like resource management, rule of law, equity, safety and protection of the population, and promotion of their human rights and freedoms.

**Resilience** in development refers to a community's capability to recover from and/or adjust to shocks and change, such as conflicts, natural disasters or socio-economic crises. In fragile contexts, 'building resilience' refers to the strengthening of the ability of an institution or a community to deal with external or internal shocks, which is a good starting point for what to focus on to achieve sustainability.

**Conflict-sensitivity** means understanding the operational context of a conflict: how to act in a safe and progressive way in a post-conflict area, or amidst an on-going conflict. In practice, conflict-sensitivity guides action so that activities do not worsen conflicts. It refers to the ability to understand intercommunity tensions and "divisive" issues with potential for conflict, and the "connecting" issues that have the potential to mitigate conflict and strengthen social cohesion.

**Disaster preparedness** refers to measures taken to prepare for and reduce the effects of disasters.

**The g7+** is an intergovernmental voluntary organisation of countries that either have an on-going conflict or have recent experience of conflict and fragility. In 2020, the g7+ has 20 member countries namely Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Timor-Leste, Togo and Yemen.

**The New Deal** is a key agreement between fragile and conflict-affected states, development partners, and civil society to improve development policy and practice in fragile and conflict-affected states. It was developed through the forum of the International Dialogue and signed by more than 40 countries and organizations at the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness on November 30th 2011. Through the New Deal, development partners committed to supporting nationally-owned and led development plans and greater aid effectiveness in fragile situations, and g7+ governments committed to inclusive planning processes, grounded in context. Both parties committed to pursuing the five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals: legitimate politics, justice, security, revenue and services and economic foundations.

**Triple Nexus or Nexus approach** aspires to transform the way that **humanitarian aid**, **development cooperation**, and **peacebuilding** activities are planned, implemented and financed to more effectively and coherently meet needs, reduce risks and build resilience. It encourages mutually complementary activities of these three actors. Nexus between any two fields can contribute to a more comprehensive approach.

**Safeguarding** is a term used in reference to measures to protect the health, well-being and human rights of individuals. The aim is to allow people, especially children, young people and vulnerable adults, to live free from abuse, harm and neglect. In an organisational setting, safeguarding incorporates the policies, reporting systems, and other mechanisms an organisation has in place to handle cases of abuse in a safe and fair way.

## ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	(the United Nations) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CPP	Country Profile Paper
CRPD	(the United Nations) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DPP	Development Policy Programme
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	the United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organisation



# Abilis in fragile contexts

Abilis Foundation continues its long-standing support to organisations of persons with disabilities in **fragile and conflict-affected areas**, in which persons with disabilities are extremely vulnerable. **Fragile contexts** are characterized by an increased risk of violence, conflict, or emergencies such as natural disasters or epidemics, and the state's failure to provide adequate security, justice, basic services or economic opportunities for its citizens. They are often conflict or post-conflict societies that may experience the breakdown of institutions, displacement of population, and humanitarian crises. Together with other principle guiding documents of Abilis, this guideline provides a framework for how Abilis Foundation will engage in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

**Finland's Development Policy** has a strong focus on fragility and provides opportunities for the implementation of development cooperation in fragile contexts, although conditions may be risky and challenging. **Abilis Foundation aims** to support persons with disabilities and their organisations in all situations, including during

and after conflicts. In inclusive development and humanitarian action, persons with disabilities should be included in various interventions and their human rights respected.

This policy document describes the key principles on which Abilis Foundation will carry out its mission in fragile contexts: **Part I** describes the background of fragile contexts as a concept in international development cooperation and policy, and **Part II** is a practical guideline and tool for how Abilis operates in fragile contexts. This guideline should be applied to the coordination and evaluation of country programmes, project applications, active projects, and other activities by Abilis staff in fragile contexts.



## PART 1:

# Background and guiding principles

## Defining fragility

There is no commonly agreed definition of fragility as different actors have slightly different approaches. As with many other themes and topics in international development, the question of how to approach and work in fragile contexts and support them in development, peacebuilding, and state-building has been discussed in many international forums throughout the years. The two main international initiatives formed around this topic are the New Deal for Engagement and the g7+.

**The New Deal** for Engagement in Fragile Contexts (New Deal) is a key international commitment (2011) that defines measures and principles that will make it possible to find a way out of fragility. **The g7+** is a voluntary association of countries that suffer or have suffered from conflict and are now in transition and on the road to sustainable development, promoting the active participation of the citizens of fragile states themselves. Both the New Deal and the g7+ emphasise the importance of understanding the local operating environment and the role of complementary activities that promote participatory political

processes, security, justice, economic foundations, and accountable and fair service delivery in fragile countries.

Since fragility can also occur at a subnational level, in specific areas within a country, the terminology is shifting from "fragile states" towards "fragile contexts". The OECD (2016) defines fragility as "the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks". In fragile contexts the state, system or communities lack adequate coping capacities, which makes them more vulnerable in the face of various risks.

## Dimensions of fragility (OECD 2016, 2018)

**Societal fragility:** Vulnerability to risks affecting societal cohesion that stem from vertical and horizontal inequalities, including inequality between regions or between social groups.

**Political fragility:** Vulnerability to risks related to political processes, events or decisions; political inclusiveness (including of elites); and transparency, corruption and society's ability to accommodate change and avoid repression.

**Economic fragility:** Vulnerability to risks linked to weak economic foundations and human capital, including macroeconomic shocks, unequal growth and high youth unemployment.

**Environmental fragility:** Vulnerability to environmental, climatic and health risks that affect citizens' lives and livelihoods.

**Security fragility:** Vulnerability of overall security to violence and crime, including both political and social violence.

The intensity and the ways these dimensions of fragility manifest in different contexts and societies can vary a lot and change over time. Fragility is of different levels and qualities, and of different root causes, sources and effects. People in conflict and fragile situations also experience their vulnerabilities differently, depending on their social position and available resources.

As the positive inversion of 'fragility', focusing on building **resilience** at all levels is important for promoting and protecting sustainable development. To reduce fragility, states and other social institutions need to improve their resilience, i.e. to develop their ability to cope with the internal and external threats they are exposed to. Identifying these threats and building the resilience of states, institutions, and communities is essential for sustainable development in fragile contexts.


## Fragility and disability

**Fragility** is strongly intertwined with **poverty and disability**. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), 15% of the world's population has a disability. About 80% of them live in developing countries and 30–40% in fragile contexts. Simultaneously about a third of the world's poor live in fragile contexts. Fragility intensifies poverty and makes opportunities for individuals and societies to escape poverty all the more challenging: Where there is conflict, high levels of violence, or climate shocks such as prolonged droughts, rates of extreme poverty can increase as individuals are displaced, livelihoods are destroyed and the broader macroeconomic environment is severely damaged. Approximately half of the people living in extreme poverty today live in fragile contexts. By 2035, it is estimated that 80% of the world's extremely poor will live in fragile contexts. (OECD, 2018)

Often the poorest countries are more vulnerable to new crises and operate in situations where internal or external conflict has eroded the functioning of the state and society. Consequently, fragile countries are more dependent on development aid than other developing countries.

**Persons with disabilities living in fragile contexts are often excluded** from almost all decision-making and planning, and receive little to no support. Despite positive developments, the potential of persons with disabilities to participate

in the reconstruction and development of society is still greatly ignored. Although the needs of persons with disabilities can be recognized, they are not taken into account in practice by the rest of society. In other words, their human rights are not respected.



**Conflict and disaster situations increase the vulnerability of persons with disabilities and raise the number of newly disabled persons.**

The needs and human rights of persons with disabilities during emergencies, conflicts, and disease outbreaks did not emerge as a common concern on the international agenda until the 21st century. Poor knowledge of disability and development and inadequate practical measures to help persons with disabilities in crisis situations have increased human suffering, even deaths. In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic showed that although earlier crises have brought improvements in inclusion of persons with disabilities, there is still a lot of work to be done if states wish to be in-line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Consequences of violent conflict for the community of persons with disabilities are manifold, such as:

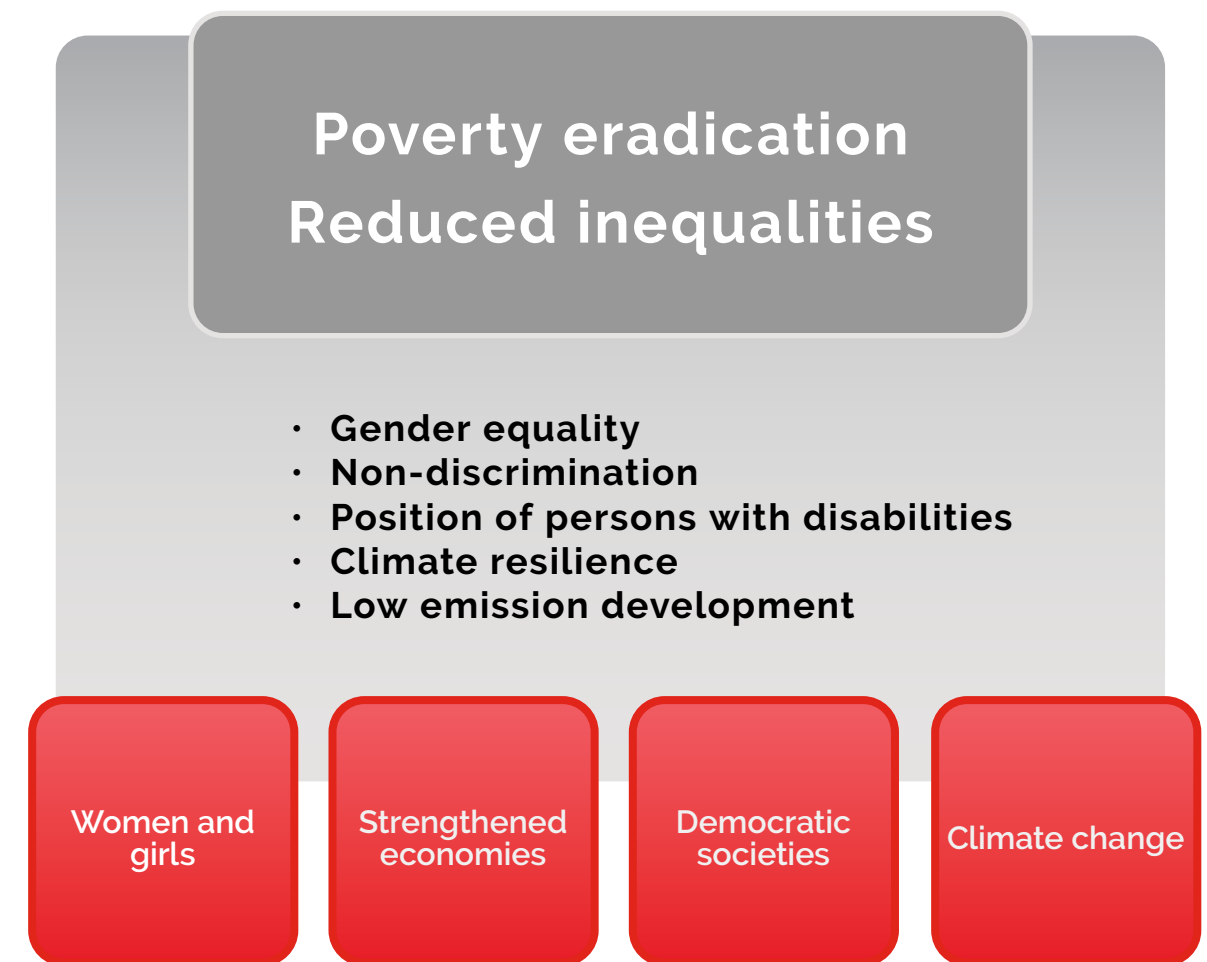
- Increased number of persons with disabilities;
- Discrimination and segregation between disability groups. For instance, war veterans with physical disabilities may get more attention than persons with psycho-social disabilities or congenital diseases;
- Women with disabilities are victimised and increasingly marginalised;
- Children and youth with disabilities are extremely vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict situations;
- Non-accessibility of shelters and other basic needs impedes service delivery;
- Lack of political representation and leadership due to absence or low capacity of persons with disabilities;
- Increased number of persons with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

## Finland's support in fragile contexts

Finland has actively participated in international initiatives around fragility, and Finland's policies and priorities are in line with the g7+ and the New Deal. Finland's development cooperation is guided by the Development Policy Programme (DPP) and Agenda 2030 – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The main goal of Finland's development cooperation is to **eradicate poverty** and **reduce inequalities**. Specific focus is on the cross-cutting issues of gender equality, non-discrimination, the position of persons with disabilities, climate resilience and low emission development, which are considered in all development actions.

The four **thematic priorities of Finland's development policy** are rights of women and girls, strengthening the economies of developing countries, democratic and effective societies, and climate change and natural resources.



GOALS AND PRIORITIES OF FINLAND'S DEVELOPMENT POLICY

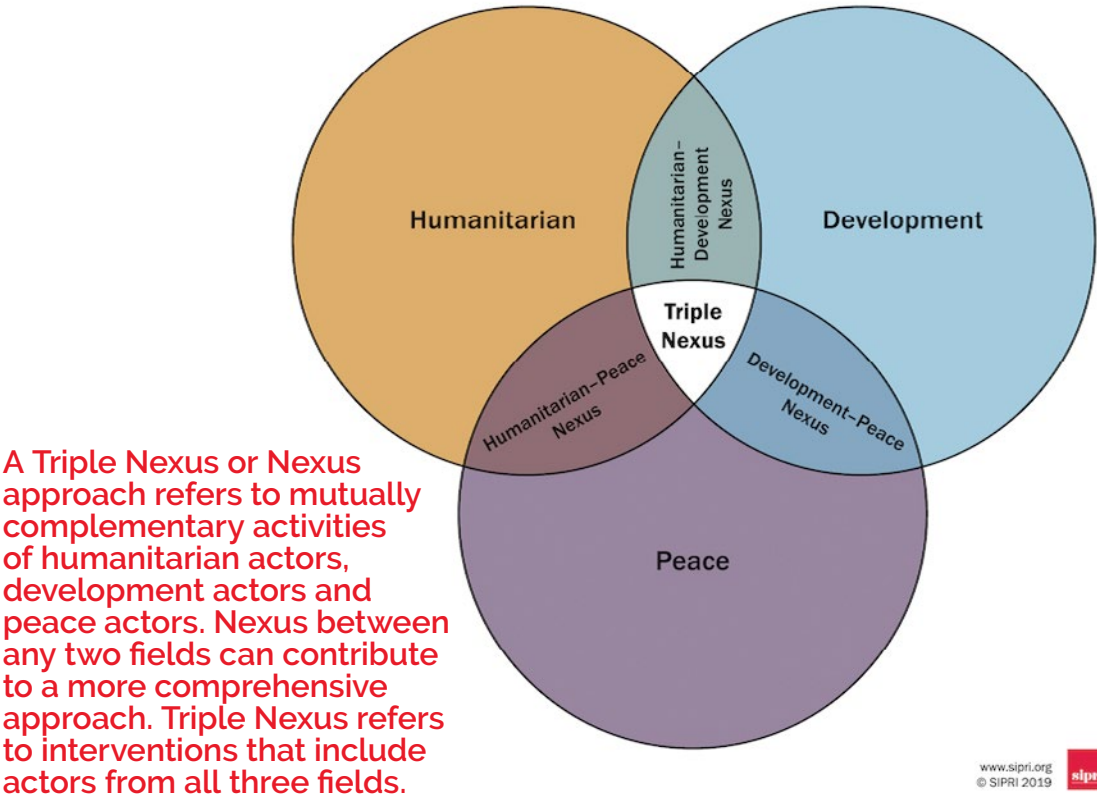
General guiding principles for all Finnish development cooperation include the operationalisation of the **Human Rights Based Approach (HBRA)** and strong local ownership of activities. Following the HBRA, Finland's development cooperation emphasizes the equal participation and non-discrimination of citizens and the importance of increasing the capacity and accountability of local authorities. Development cooperation can strengthen a society's capacity to promote equality and non-discrimination by supporting marginalized groups and making sure that all activities done under development cooperation are inclusive and non-discriminatory.

**Focus on fragility** plays a growing role in Finland's foreign and security policy as fragile contexts have the highest need for support and are often countries of origin for refugees. The majority of Finland's development cooperation is directed to fragile countries or contexts, emphasizing **local ownership** of initiatives and taking the unique needs of each context into account. In addition, **coordination** of aid and **cooperation** between different actors as well as **sustainable development** is underlined.

**Local ownership** is paramount for achieving sustainable results in development cooperation. The participation and dialogue of stakeholders and civil society at all levels support peace and sustainable development, and strengthen the commitment of different actors to the implementation of planned activities.

To achieve lasting results in fragile contexts also require **coordination** of aid and **cooperation** between different actors. Instead of focusing on individual projects, actors should consider the situation at large to create synergies that strengthen local governance structures and contribute to sustainable development objectives. Coordination and working with local experts and other donors, both national and international, is crucial to avoid fragmentation or overlapping of interventions.

A comprehensive approach can include various interventions such as civilian crisis management and peacebuilding, development cooperation, and humanitarian aid as mutually complementary activities. Bridging the gap and creating synergies between these three intervention areas in order to achieve sustainable results is labelled as the **Triple Nexus approach**.



Finland's **thematic priorities in fragile contexts** are in line with the general priorities of Finland's development policy. More specifically, in fragile contexts Finland focuses on **conflict prevention** and alleviating

the root-causes of conflict such as unemployment, inequality, and natural resource management; **democratic and accountable societies** and the development of the rule of law; and **women's participation**.

Conflict prevention	In Myanmar, Finland has provided support to civil society organisations (CSOs) to create dialogue, combat violence, and promote peaceful conflict resolution.
Democratic and accountable societies and the rule of law	In Mozambique, Finland has supported the training of national and county parliaments in good practices relating to management of natural resources and extractive industries. Consequently, they have improved their oversight capacity in the sectors and highlighted environmental and human rights problems.
Participation of women	In Tanzania, Finland's support has promoted women's economic and political empowerment and strengthened civil society's capacities to hold the Government accountable for its actions.

EXAMPLES OF FINLAND'S SUPPORT IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS (MFA, BILATERAL PARTNER COUNTRIES)

Through Finnish NGOs, among other means, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) supports various civil society organisations in fragile contexts. Strengthening civil society is essential for participatory democracy and state governance.

Finland puts special emphasis on the rights and equal opportunities of vulnerable, easily marginalised and discriminated groups, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, religious, ethnic, sexual and gender minorities. Finland has an official country programme for certain countries and it is recommended that NGOs operating in these countries familiarize themselves with the country programmes.



## Abilis principles in fragile contexts

Abilis follows the international commitments as well as Finland's development policy guidelines and thematic priority areas with an emphasis on inclusive development and humanitarian action. Each year, a majority share of Abilis grants go to some of the world's poorest countries, most of which can be classified as fragile contexts. Particular attention is put on persons with disabilities' access to decent work and income, and the empowerment and rights of women and girls with disabilities. Supporting and highlighting the active agency of persons with disabilities is a core value of Abilis.

The main principles of engagement in fragile contexts for Abilis are inclusion and active participation of affected populations, strong focus on gender equality, cooperation and the Triple Nexus approach. In addition, Abilis acknowledges the importance of long-term commitment and risk management when operating in fragile contexts. More detailed guidelines on how Abilis applies these principles in practice are described in Part II: Practical guidelines.

### Inclusion, ownership and active participation of rights-holders

Abilis promotes **inclusion** of persons with disabilities in all its operations and at all levels. Special attention is always given to inclusion of persons who experience multiple discrimination, such as girls and women with disabilities, or persons with disabilities who belong to other potentially discriminated groups such as indigenous peoples, religious minorities, and refugees, among others.

**Ownership** of projects by persons with disabilities themselves is at the very core of Abilis work. Abilis supports initiatives that are considered important by local organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) also in fragile situations.

Strong local ownership is supported by **active participation** of rights-holders. Abilis supports inclusion of persons with disabilities in planning and decision making, as staff members and present in all operations, making sure that the voice of persons with disabilities is strengthened and heard.

### Gender as a mainstreamed priority

Women and girls with disabilities struggle to achieve livelihoods due to social stigma, lack of communication possibilities, and social exclusion enhanced by limited access to education, employment, health and other basic services. Women and girls with disabilities also face a significantly greater risk of sexual and gender-based violence than women without disabilities.

Abilis supports the realisation of the rights of women and girls with disabilities and pays particular attention to their situation, including social norms and gender roles that affect it. Country Profile Papers (CPPs) form the basis for Abilis Country Programmes. Assessing the situation of each country from a gender perspective is a fundamental part of CPPs, and serves the further development of country-specific plans. Through the funded projects Abilis promotes structures, policies and activities that aim to increase gender balance and enhance the rights of women and girls with disabilities. All collected data is sex-disaggregated in order to monitor and evaluate programme performance and gender equality in Abilis operations.

Abilis is updating its monitoring and evaluation framework, including indicators, and will increasingly emphasise how men and women with disabilities benefit from the project and programme outcomes.

### Cooperation and the Nexus approach

Cooperation in fragile contexts supports the Nexus approach that defines Abilis strategy and is essential for a sustainable future. Abilis collaborates with local and global civil society actors for inclusion of persons with disabilities in all development actions, also at the grassroots level. Building connections and reducing barriers between development, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding is a key element to this.

Abilis also supports organisations of persons with disabilities to build their capacity and strengthen their networks and collaboration at the local level. Strong networks and effective cooperation is needed to enhance the sustainability of project activities. When activities of different actors are well-coordinated and complement each other, they also support the achievement of sustainable project outcomes.



## Long-term commitment to fragile contexts

The path to peace and sustainable development is not always straightforward and easy. It is common for interventions in fragile contexts to experience setbacks, for example due to renewal of conflict. Abilis acknowledges this reality and

provides long-term support to the selected fragile contexts. Long-term commitment also requires that Abilis continues to develop its own capacity in handling setbacks or challenges in the operating environment, such as misuse of funds, the shrinking space of civil society, or natural disasters that may destroy property of Abilis country offices.



## Risk management

Engaging in fragile contexts inevitably involves risks. Instead of avoiding these risks, Abilis seeks to have a good understanding of the fragile contexts in which it operates. Local staff and networks contribute significantly to Abilis' knowledge and understanding of its operating environments. When planning and implementing programmes, Abilis considers the internal and external risks on a global level as well as at the country programme and project level, and takes the necessary steps to mitigate them.

Abilis puts effort into securing the safety of its staff who work and travel in fragile contexts. Factors that affect

the security of female staff members, especially female staff with disabilities, are given specific attention. Awareness of the current security situation in the operational areas is essential for the safety of Abilis staff. Context specific security risks that may arise in a country or in a particular area of a country are identified and mitigation measures defined in participatory processes, and they are reviewed regularly to take adequate action when needed. Projects are not funded in the immediate surroundings of active conflicts, except when Abilis is cooperating with other humanitarian or peace-keeping actors. More detailed information can be found in Abilis Risk Management Plan and Abilis Safety Manual.

## PART 2:

# Practical guidelines

Part two describes how the Abilis principles are applied in practice in fragile contexts. First, the general guidelines for all Abilis operations in fragile contexts are described. The second chapter describes different thematic focus areas that can vary from country to country and are defined in country programmes.

## Disability and fragility: General guidelines

The general guidelines of inclusion, conflict sensitivity, and risk management are applied in all Abilis programmes. As an overall guideline, Abilis highlights the importance of cooperation between various actors.

### Strong networks and effective cooperation

is needed to enhance the sustainability of project and programme activities. When activities of different actors are well-coordinated and complement each other, they also support the achievement of sustainable project and programme outcomes.

**Cooperation and combined efforts** are encouraged not only within the disability sector but also between various other stakeholders who have an interest in the field or who could contribute to the programme objectives. Country Coordinators and Facilitators working in the Abilis programme countries can build their networks flexibly and creatively, and support local OPDs to do the same.

Cooperation in fragile contexts supports the Nexus approach. The aim is to continuously strengthen expertise through dialogue between actors in the field. In practice, it can include:

- Advocacy among other civil society actors for inclusion of persons with disabilities
- Needs assessments of vulnerable groups
- Monitoring help
- Technical assistance
- Sharing lessons learned
- Implementing joint efforts

Understanding the connection and overlap between development, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding is an important factor on the road to sustainability and out of fragility.

### Examples of the Nexus approach in Abilis work

- In Somalia, OPDs have cooperated with international humanitarian aid organisations to raise awareness on disability inclusion. Discussions have included concrete measures how to invite local OPDs to cooperation and how to collaborate with disability experts in building more inclusive disaster risk reduction preparedness and humanitarian interventions. Some OPDs have contributed to the peacebuilding negotiations. Disability seems to be observed as a neutral topic supporting cooperation between different clans and groups.
- In Lebanon refugee camp contexts, Abilis-funded projects have filled-in the gaps and supported Finnish and international humanitarian aid agencies and their interventions. Their collaboration has benefitted Syrian and Palestinian refugees with disabilities who are increasingly included in various interventions.



## Inclusion

Promoting **non-discrimination** is a basis for inclusive and stable societies. In all Abilis operations, from planning to implementation, monitoring and reporting, persons with disabilities are key actors. Abilis takes action to ensure that no one is left behind and everyone has a chance to participate in social life and decision-making, regardless of their background. This also strengthens social cohesion and makes communities more resilient against internal conflict.

### Real or perceived discrimination is a potential source of resentment and conflict.

Abilis pays attention to support organisations of persons with various types of disabilities. Abilis funds both disability-specific organisations as well as cross-disability organisations. Yet, representation and participation of persons with different types of disability is an important part of inclusion and equality. Abilis encourages underrepresented groups, including persons who experience **multiple discrimination**, to apply for project funding.

Especially in fragile contexts, lack of information about persons with disabilities - where they live, how to reach them, or how to assist them - can hinder their inclusion in emergency responses. Providing this type of information to government stakeholders and humanitarian actors when the emergency response plans are made supports the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

### Multiple discrimination

**is already commonly recognised in the case of women with disabilities, who experience discrimination based on their gender and disability. In addition, factors such as religion, sexuality, ethnicity, age, or language can be a cause for discrimination and stigma.**

Discrimination based on the type of disability may occur within the disability movement as well as within broader society. Abilis Country Coordinators and Facilitators raise awareness among their networks, and support local OPDs to inform authorities and general NGOs about inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency response and other development or peacebuilding activities.

**When planning for emergency responses, it is important to hear from persons with disabilities themselves about what their needs are, and how to accommodate them. Including the voices of both men and women with disabilities is essential for truly inclusive programming.**

The following elements enhance the real inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction:

- Disability issues as part of disaster preparedness training.
  - Gender-sensitive disability training for disaster preparedness staff.
  - Experts with disabilities, including women with disabilities, as trainers on disability issues.
- Identifying and collecting sex-disaggregated data of persons with disabilities in the area.
  - This requires sensitivity, as families may hide their members with disabilities due to fear or shame.
- Persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, are included in disaster preparedness training.
- Practical arrangements allowing the participation and acquisition of knowledge.
  - Taking notice on gender roles and norms related to women and girls with disabilities to enable their participation.
  - Accessible venue; accessible communication such as plain language, sign-language interpreters; enough time for training, etc.
- Psychological support and encouragement for persons with disabilities and their family members, so that they can participate in trainings and other activities.



## Conflict sensitivity

For Abilis, conflict sensitivity means forming an **understanding of the factors that affect fragility** in the operating environment, and to ensure that the **Abilis work does not exacerbate divisions** in society or other situations that contribute to local fragility and conflict. That is, conflict sensitivity is the application of the "do no harm" principle.

Understanding a conflict's history and background, or how previous conflicts still affect people's lives, forms the base of conflict sensitivity. This requires consideration of several aspects, such as:

- Local power dynamics
- Recognition of disadvantaged groups and inherent biases
- Knowledge of customs and ways of working among other factors
- Risks and consequent risk management.

**Conflict sensitive programme work** of Abilis includes:

- Country Profile Papers as a background for Country Programmes
  - Context analysis of the general situation of the programme country
  - If applicable, a more specific analysis of the geographical areas in which Abilis funds projects
- Ensuring that Abilis grants within a country programme are distributed in an equal and non-divisive manner



**Conflict sensitive work at the project level** takes place within the larger framework of conflict sensitive programme work and is guided by it. Project work requires that country staff assess each project in relation to the project's immediate environment and internal dynamics.

Practical elements that support conflict sensitivity:

- **Expertise of country office and partner organisation staff:** Local staff understand the unique local context and its sensitivities. This guides the assessment of grantees' project plans and implementation. Staff is also encouraged to build their capacity in this field.
- **Background checks on grantees:** Thorough background checks assure that groups are not affiliated with armed groups and have not previously caused harm in their communities.
- **Diverse grantees & non-discrimination:** When looking at grantee OPDs together, they should represent the entire community of persons with disabilities, when realistic and possible. For example, groups that represent only certain ethnicities, faiths, or language-users, should not be favoured over others. Staff is also encouraged to acknowledge and discuss their own personal biases for improved non-discrimination within a country programme.
- **Informing relevant stakeholders and authorities:** It is important that community leaders, government representatives, and other actors are aware of the funded project and its activities to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that the project is implemented in a transparent and reliable manner.
- **Application of a safeguarding system:** In all Abilis work, it is essential to avoid any harm to project beneficiaries, as well as other individuals or groups of people. Please see the Abilis safeguarding policy for further details.

**Conflict sensitive approach is also a key element in risk management.**



## Risk management

Effective risk management becomes ever more important in fragile contexts. Together with the local staff, Abilis identifies the key external and internal risks at global and country level, how they may adversely affect country programme performance and project work, and what type of mitigation measures are needed.

Understanding the operating context is essential to effective risk identification and risk management. Strong country and regional knowledge base is supported by Abilis Country Coordinators and Facilitators, and other local and international networks on the ground. In case any risks actualise, programme and/or project design can be flexibly adjusted so that it will be less vulnerable to interruption.

In addition, the staff who work and travel in fragile contexts may face various personal safety risks. For example political turmoil, violent conflicts and terrorism, as well as natural catastrophes not only affect project and programme work, but can put staff in direct risk. Abilis makes continuous safety assessments of its operational areas and has general operational guidelines for the most common security risks, see details in Abilis Safety Manual.

Context specific risk management plans are included in the Abilis 4-year country programmes and they are revised in annual programme plans when necessary. More detailed information and guidance on Abilis risk management practices can be found on a separate document (TBA).



Disseminating information in an accessible format is one element in ensuring that aid reaches everyone in need.

Abilis funds initiatives that aim at including persons with disabilities in the planning of emergency response

and other humanitarian actions. When persons with disabilities are actively involved in disaster preparedness activities, they can provide important contributions on more inclusive service provision and aid delivery.

## Accelerated funding in emergency and early recovery situations

Systems that respond to emergencies and crises are often designed for the majority population. Thus, persons with disabilities and their specific needs are often excluded and ignored by these responses. Even though Abilis primarily funds development cooperation projects, initiatives that fill-in gaps left by general emergency response can be funded when needed.

There are two main types of activities that can be funded in these situations:

**1) Reconstruction relief and rehabilitation**, such as restarting livelihoods and other necessary steps to return back to normal daily life after a shock.

**2) Disaster prevention and preparedness**, such as development of early warning mechanisms and awareness raising.

Funding in emergencies requires fast actions, and possibilities for thorough background checks are often limited. To mitigate risks of mismanagement of funds, accelerated funding should be granted only to previously-known and trusted organisations with a solid capacity in financial management.



## Building resilience: Thematic focus areas

**In fragile contexts, Abilis focuses on building resilience, i.e. strengthening the abilities of institutions and communities to deal with external or internal shocks.**

In this chapter, you will find practical guidance and examples on different thematic focus areas that Abilis-funded projects may contribute to. Since different country programmes have different objectives and specific thematic priorities, this chapter should be read with the country-specific themes in mind, emphasising the relevant sections. Please also note that not all projects can cover all issues, but complementary interventions by different actors will support the achievement of overall programme objectives.

When applying these tools and questions, it is good to remember that projects may not be "perfect" as sometimes groups and stakeholders may not yet have adequate resources. For example, Abilis does not expect that small groups will organise disaster preparedness training in all projects. Instead of trying to cover all bases, projects should have a clear and well-defined target in which they focus on.

### Gender equality

**Gender equality is the overarching priority in all Abilis operations.**

Persons with disabilities are up to 3 times more likely to experience physical, sexual, and emotional violence than persons without disabilities. Girls and young women with disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience sexual violence and abuse than women without disabilities.

Multiple issues affect women with disabilities disproportionately in comparison to men with disabilities and women without disabilities. At the general level, this is covered in the Abilis Gender Manual, thus this section has a specific focus on gender and disability in fragile contexts.

Women and girls, including those with disabilities, suffer significantly more from violent conflicts than men. This is not only due to the side effects of conflict, but also because rape and sexual violence are used as instruments of war, and women and girls are often directly targeted. The trauma left by violence can affect the entire community and generations to come, and does not disappear when a conflict ends. When the space for civil society is narrow, as is often the case in fragile contexts, combating gender-based violence, transforming norms, and other types of active social change towards gender equality, is challenging.

Conflict often significantly increases incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and for women with disabilities the likelihood is even greater. Women with disabilities who have been in exploitative relationships or have engaged in transactional sex often experience sexual exploitation. Women and girls with disabilities can face gender-based violence in different ways than non-disabled, e.g. by psychologically or physically abusive caregivers, withholding of assistive devices, etc. Young women and girls with disabilities are also more likely to be subject to forced sterilisation or child marriage.

**In fragile contexts, women and girls with disabilities face many barriers and forms of discrimination.**





Women and girls with disabilities may struggle with asking for help or reporting incidents of violence to authorities due to social stigma, lack of communication possibilities, or lack of social networks. Access to sexual and reproductive health services can be even more difficult during times of crisis if resources are not adequate or if emergency clinics are not accessible.

**Intersections of gender, age, ethnicity, being a refugee or a displaced person, indigenous minority, etc. are compounded when a person has a disability. It is essential to consider how all these aspects affect a person's access to resources and available opportunities.**

Women and girls with disabilities are less likely to go to **school** and receive **education** and **employment** than men and boys. They may face **discrimination** and **abuse** both in the community and at home. Parents may want to hide their children with disabilities due to fear or shame, or choose to send a boy to school, but keep the girl child home. Women with disabilities may also face challenges in gaining employment as the surrounding community may not believe in their abilities or provide them opportunities for skills training.

When assessing projects related to gender, or when assessing how well is gender equality integrated into a general project, consider:

- **Are girls and women with disabilities actively encouraged and supported to participate in all project activities and decision making?**  
Active support means making sure that women and girls with disabilities not only feel safe, but are also able to safely participate in meetings and activities, and that participation is accommodated. In practice, this means asking participants about their schedules (women may have responsibilities at home that take up their time), offering safe transportation, accessible training locations and interpreters, and making sure participants are aware of where to report possible incidents of harassment or violence within the project.

See also **Abilis safeguarding policy** for more information on how to:

- Prevent all instances of harm, including sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Support victims, investigate wrongdoing and hold wrongdoers to account, in situations where harm does occur.

- **Are relevant stakeholders involved in the project?**

Projects can benefit from the expertise of other stakeholders in issues relating to gender and fragility. Implementing OPDs can also offer their own expertise on gender and disability to other stakeholders. For example, Finland supports the work of UN Women and UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) in many countries. Making sure that duty-bearers and service providers understand and take into account the unique needs of women and girls with disabilities can be an important part of involving stakeholders in projects.

- **Are different types of tasks and responsibilities shared equally among all genders in projects? Are social norms challenged?**

It is important that certain roles, professions, or positions are not designated according to stereotypical gender roles. Women with disabilities are often portrayed only as victims, but they can be active agents of change. They face unique challenges and offer unique perspectives, but are constantly left out of development, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction processes. Disrupting harmful social norms and gender roles improves the well-being of everyone, not just women.

- **Does the project create spaces for women and girls with disabilities to talk, socialize, and offer peer-support without the involvement of men?**

It may be hard for women with disabilities to seek peer-support and talk about sensitive topics, such as gender-based violence. But it can be even harder to do so with men present. For example, when training service personnel in sign-language, such as healthcare professionals, it is crucial that the persons in-training include women: Deaf women who seek medical treatment, or go to the hospital to give birth, may feel more comfortable sharing intimate details regarding their health with other women who share some of their experiences, rather than men.

**For example, after the 2015 Nepal earthquake, Abilis supported families of women with disabilities to construct temporary sheds that helped them to avoid the risk of sexual violence in mass shelters.**

**Cooperation in fragile contexts supports achievement and sustainability of results. In Ethiopia, the local Abilis partner organisation, Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association, EWDNA, is helping the Finnish Red Cross to identify girls and women with disabilities who could participate in the Red Cross health projects with specific focus on gender and disability inclusive health services.**

## Livelihoods

Reducing poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods has long been one of the key objectives of Abilis work. Fragile contexts often suffer from weak economies, high unemployment rates, and widespread poverty. High economic inequality between different social groups, or based on other factors such as education or region, may increase grievances and tension within a country. Livelihoods are also often seriously affected when a violent conflict, natural catastrophe or

a health shock hits, causing increased human suffering.

Abilis supports the opportunities for persons with disabilities to improve their livelihoods and economic status by promoting employment, education and job training. Active involvement of persons with disabilities is essential when the grantees plan and decide the type of skills and knowledge they need to engage in sustainable income generating activities.



**With improved employment and more diverse livelihood opportunities, persons with disabilities as individuals and their communities can become more resilient against economic shocks and environmental shocks.**

Abilis can fund livelihood projects also **during and after crisis situations**, such as natural disasters or health shocks. Livelihood projects can support food security, income generation and general well-being, and reduce dependency on external support. Establishing livelihoods quickly in post-crisis situations supports a community to recover from the shock and return back to regular life.

The same factors that contribute to general instability and fragility also affect livelihoods. Thus, when planning livelihood projects in fragile contexts, Abilis staff and grantee organisations should pay particular attention to risk management. The key is **to identify potential risks for livelihoods** and

**For example in Nepal, a self-help group of persons with disabilities who lost their house in the 2015 earthquake was supported to establish a street food shop. That helped them to regain their livelihoods according to the principles of Build Back Better.**

to **plan mitigation measures** before the risks actualise. What kind of changes may occur in the operating environment? How would it impact the livelihoods? How to respond and mitigate these risks?

Ways to prepare for shocks and improve resilience and sustainability of livelihoods can include:

- Establishing or joining cooperatives, credit and savings associations, and other communal ways to share the burden of shocks and unpredictable events.
- Planning the business establishment so that tools and equipment are protected from floods and other natural disasters, as well as from crime and robbery.
- Establishing contacts with support services and other stakeholders who are responsible for emergency response activities.
- Emergency food kits and other interventions that help groups survive through the worst stage of a crisis without risking their well-being, thus supporting livelihoods in the long run.

**Flexibility is vital in fragile contexts.** Having more than one source of income - or capacity to engage in different income generating activities when needed - gives greater flexibility in finding a livelihood when sudden changes or shocks occur. Please refer to the Abilis Guidelines for Sustainable Livelihoods for more detailed guidance when facilitating livelihood and income generation projects.



## Education

Education offers a strong base for further opportunities in life, in terms of employment and sustainable livelihoods. Thus, education tackles one of the root causes of conflict and fragility: unemployment. Denying this right from children with disabilities can have life-long negative impacts. Conflicts, whether long-term or sudden, or climate shocks, often disrupt education and can leave an

entire generation illiterate. It should be ensured that once education in emergency is established, it is inclusive to persons with disabilities as well. Even if a conflict does not directly affect the functioning of schools, it can disrupt livelihoods and thus prevent parents from sending their children to school due to lack of money to pay for school supplies.

Abilis-funded projects in the field of education often focus on strengthening inclusive education. Providing **inclusive education** is the responsibility of government actors and other service providers. The role of Abilis-funded projects in these contexts is to fill-in gaps left by existing initiatives, such as

- To connect NGOs focusing on education with local OPDs. Together, they can identify children and other students with disabilities who are not yet enrolled in schools.
- To utilise the expertise of OPDs in building the capacity of general organisations working in the field of education.
- To fund advocacy projects that promote the preparation of a national plan for inclusive education.
- To support OPDs in monitoring the implementation of inclusive education plans, e.g. accessibility of schools.

In addition, Abilis-funded projects have supported parents and caregivers in understanding the abilities of their children with disabilities, overcoming their fears regarding how the outside world treats persons with disabilities, generating income in order to afford sending their children with disabilities (including girls with disabilities) to school, and teaching basic sign-language skills to parents of deaf

children. To tackle the barriers that prevent children with disabilities to access education, a multi-sectoral approach is needed, because these barriers exist both within and outside the education system.

When you start to evaluate a project proposal related to education in fragile contexts, consider:

- **Do the project activities support existing structures and processes of inclusive education?** Projects should not take the role of the government and social services, but seek to fill gaps in implementation of existing inclusive policies. This can include awareness raising and training to challenge predominant views and harmful stereotypes regarding disability and education, or providing families with livelihoods to support payment of school fees, transportation, assistive devices, healthcare, or other basic necessities that make enrolment possible.
- **Are plans related to teaching of sign-language or braille realistic?** This means that enough time must be reserved for learning and goals should be clearly defined and realistic.
- **Is special attention paid to girls with disabilities and their access to education?** Families may have internalised attitudes that do not favour sending girls with disabilities to school. Girls who drop out of school for any given reason (lack of money, pregnancy, menstrual stigma, lack of support from family) need extra encouragement to return to school and continue their education.
- **Are parents or other relevant family members consulted in the project?** It is important that children with disabilities receive necessary support from home, and that their parents or caregivers feel safe sending their children to school and view it as a priority.



## Democracy and the Rule of Law

State or local authorities should always ensure that fundamental human rights are protected and respected. In fragile contexts, civil and political rights may not exist or they are not properly protected, and various violations of rights such as forced labour or forced relocation may take place. Persons with disabilities are often vulnerable in these situations, as they may not have information on where or how to seek help. They may not have IDs and outside their families, people may not even know of their existence - including authorities that respond to emergencies. Thus, persons with disabilities can all too easily be abandoned and forgotten.

As part of democratic processes, governments should assure that persons with disabilities are included in national census data and have a right to vote in elections when they are organised. Voting must also be possible in reality. For example, voting places have to be physically accessible, and voting must be facilitated in a way that is accessible for blind persons and persons with low vision.

Abilis supports inclusion of persons with disabilities in political decision making, and promotes dialogue between OPDs and authorities at different levels. Abilis encourages women with disabilities to participate in political decision-making and planning. The inclusion of women in projects is an important funding criteria for Abilis.



Access to information is an important element that allows all citizens to fully participate in decision making.

Strengthening democracy and the rule of law in fragile contexts can include:

- **Creating linkages and strengthening cooperation** between OPDs and local authorities and lawmakers.

- Advocacy work to **make policies and laws more inclusive** and to reflect the needs and realities of persons with disabilities.
- **Promoting the ratification** of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), **monitoring**

its implementation, and **reporting** weaknesses in implementation to the responsible national authorities, or as a shadow report to the UN Committee on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

- **Building the capacity of OPDs to report human rights situations** to international mechanisms. For example, OPDs can report on the situation of women and girls with disabilities to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- **Legal counselling** and services for persons with disabilities or their family members. Persons with disabilities may not know if they could pursue legal action in a situation in which they have been wronged, or they might not have adequate information about what they are legally entitled to. In some countries, specific services are available only to persons who have been legally recognized as having a disability.

For example

**organisations of persons with disabilities initiated dialogues with the district Disaster Management Committee after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. This ensured the representation of persons with disabilities in the decision making body, and helped to establish a reconstruction grant for persons with disabilities and their families under the Government post-earthquake reform plan.**



## Climate and natural resources

The impact of climate change affects the world's poorest and most vulnerable people more severely than others. Within this group, approximately 20% are persons with disabilities, who are often disadvantaged in multiple ways. Environmental sustainability is not an expertise nor primary focus area of Abilis, but aspects of it must be integrated into all Abilis work to guarantee sustainable livelihoods and well-being. What this means in practice for Abilis offices and all projects is covered in the Abilis environmental guideline.

In fragile contexts, climate change deepens fragility as it can have a significant impact on the lives of persons with disabilities: climate change affects food prices, intensifies health problems, and it can increase migration, or even conflict, when certain areas become uninhabitable or can no longer support livelihoods that depend on specific climatic conditions. Not to mention, vital information about climate change may not be shared in an accessible way to persons with disabilities. This information can include climate-smart farming knowledge that improves livelihoods, but also life-saving information about climate emergencies.

### For example

women with disabilities in rural Nepal are trained in tunnel agriculture that will support more efficient use of land and resources. Tunnel agriculture can reduce the impact of extreme weather such as heat and cold waves, allow for more crop diversification and cultivation throughout the year, which improves food security and adds potential sources of income.

Supporting resilience of persons with disabilities against environmental and climate risks can include:

- Organising strong advocacy by and with persons with disabilities to ensure that **disability inclusion is a key criterion in all climate-related interventions**. The development sector needs to work together with persons with disabilities to build strong, sustainable and innovative solutions and actions. Environmental rights are human rights and can be included in awareness raising and advocacy projects when grantee OPDs see it fit.
- Implementing projects that acknowledge **climate change adaptation and mitigation** as important factors that affect the sustainability of livelihoods. Unpredictable weather patterns require planning and preparation for shocks, such as droughts, and efficient use of scarce or important resources, such as water and trees.
- Implementing projects that take into account legal measures concerning **land ownership, responsible land use and tenure** to avoid disagreements, conflict, and loss of livelihoods.
- Implementing projects that minimise negative impacts on the environment and aim at **environmental sustainability**. This is especially important for livelihood projects in the field of agriculture and other income





## Persons with disabilities as full partners in peacebuilding

Peacebuilding can refer to various measures that aim to reduce the risk of a conflict outbreak. It provides the basis for sustainable peace and development. Local ownership, context-specific needs and alignment with national strategies form the base of all peacebuilding activities.

**Sustainable peace requires the inclusion of all groups affected by a conflict at all stages in the peacebuilding process.**

Intentional inclusion of persons with disabilities is needed to ensure that persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities and other

excluded groups, can become part of all dimensions of the peacebuilding process: to participate actively in policy making and implementation, to share their expertise, to form and join movements. This is all the more important when decisions impact their well-being. As persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by civil conflicts - through the loss of basic services and an increase in the numbers of persons with disabilities from combat and civilian casualties - their views are vital for civil society efforts that aim to provide peace and security.

**Disability can also be a common factor and a shared experience between persons who might otherwise come from very different backgrounds.**

Abilis promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities as full partners in peacebuilding activities. Benefits of disability inclusive peacebuilding include:

- The **shared experience of disability** in all societies is a powerful and successful unifying theme for peacebuilding initiatives across conflict divides.
- A disability-focused, civil society peacebuilding initiative across conflict divides can be successful when initiatives by other civil society actors are not **politically tolerated**.
- Groups which have traditionally been excluded, such as women with disabilities, can play an important role in peacebuilding as they contribute their expertise and unique experiences to negotiation processes and decision making, which will affect society as a whole after a conflict. This approach **strengthens democracy and fosters inclusive political participation** when previously excluded groups have greater opportunities to ensure that their needs are met and that **post-conflict societies are more inclusive and rights-based**.

For example

**including livelihood promotion with leadership development built the capacity of Nepali civil war veterans and strengthened their mutual cooperation. Even though peacebuilding was not the main focus of the project, it brought people from various backgrounds together and enabled them to see each other as fellow humans with similar hopes and aspirations.**

## Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons with disabilities

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have often left areas with active conflicts or prolonged droughts, for example. Yet, due to their circumstances and status they often remain extremely vulnerable. In many cases, the new locations may still be very fragile, even if they are not places with on-going conflicts or other immediate challenges.

Refugees and IDPs live in an uncertain situation in which they do not know when or if they are able to return home, or how long will they stay in a refugee camp or immigration centre. They may have only few belongings with them and have to rebuild their lives, while carrying with them the trauma of conflict and leaving home. In their new environments, refugees and IDPs may face hostile attitudes or other challenges such as language barriers, lack of access to basic services and facilities, or sexual abuse in camps, stop points, and centres.

Refugees with disabilities, and especially refugee children and youth with disabilities, are often even more vulnerable and face unique challenges: they may have lost their

assistive devices, family members or caregivers, or have limited to none communication possibilities to seek help or understand the on-going processes of seeking refuge. Often service providers may overlook some disabilities over others: Refugees that have become disabled due to the conflict they are fleeing from might receive more attention and rehabilitation than those refugees and IDPs who have invisible disabilities.

Despite challenges, refugees and IDPs with disabilities can also be important actors to strengthen friendly connections and negotiate potential tension with local residents who may have negative attitudes towards refugees and IDPs: Disability can be a shared experience that builds bridges between different groups.

Abilis has previously supported refugees with disabilities in Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia and Somaliland. Their projects have revolved around income generation, accessible WASH facilities, and supporting the organisation of refugees with disabilities into their own active groups despite the circumstances.



## For example

Abilis-funded projects have supported income generating activities in refugee camps in Somalia. Though the amount of time spent in refugee camps vary, persons with disabilities still want to work and earn a living.

If you receive proposals concerning refugees or IDPs with disabilities, remember that:

- **Abilis can fund projects of refugees with disabilities either through their own organisation or with the help of another OPD.** Refugees with disabilities may not always be able to officially register as an organisation, but Abilis funding can be channelled to their group via another OPD with official status. This requires that the refugee group has a clear internal structure, and is supported in their organisational capacity building.
- **Project funding can be granted to refugees and IDPs with disabilities in different kinds of circumstances:** for those in long-standing refugee camps, and for those who have recently become displaced. Activities can range from income generation to advocacy for accessibility and disability inclusion, in line with the general Abilis policies.

Refugees and internally displaced persons with disabilities often have an urgent need for livelihood opportunities and support in their income generating activities. Livelihood and income generation projects targeting refugees and IDPs must consider how the needs and available resources have changed, and what type of activities are compatible with the market demand in their new location.



## Concluding words

Working in fragile contexts requires long-term commitment, flexibility, and cooperation between different stakeholders. It would be a challenge to form a comprehensive checklist or a perfect toolkit for working in fragility, as each context is unique and dynamic and should be approached as such. Thus, this guideline does not offer ready-made answers to every possible situation, but instead, its purpose is to offer Abilis staff possible questions to ask, and factors to observe in their working contexts in order to support grantee OPDs in the planning and implementation of sustainable projects that strengthen the resilience of organisations, beneficiaries, and their communities.

Ensuring that human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities, are respected without discrimination, is a prerequisite in assuring that no one is left behind. The role of civil society organisations, including organisations of persons with disabilities, is fundamental in making people's voices and needs heard. CSOs also play an important role in observing that authorities and other duty-bearers take care of their responsibilities. Abilis aims to find flexible ways to fund initiatives of organisations of persons with disabilities in fragile contexts, to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations while paying attention to effective risk management.

Participation is a human right in itself, but it is also a key to the realisation of other fundamental rights that are

needed for persons with disabilities to reach their full potential. It is essential to make sure that the affected populations, especially ones that represent the most vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, are involved in planning and decision making at all levels. Their views must be taken into account when policies are formulated and emergency response activities are formed. Women and men with disabilities have lots of potential and their expertise on disability issues can contribute immensely to more inclusive societies, as long as they are actively involved in development cooperation, humanitarian work, and peacebuilding processes.

Abilis continues to build and strengthen its networks, both globally and locally, to enhance the quality and sustainability of its operations. Now, when the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has recently set up a Centre for Mediation to coordinate collaboration with other actors, the time is ripe for pulling together and promoting the realisation of disability inclusion in all spheres of Triple Nexus. Cooperation, joining forces with various actors and raising awareness of disability inclusion among all stakeholders paves the way to a world in which inclusion and human rights are a shared responsibility, and not an issue advocated only by disability actors. By sharing the lessons learnt, and collecting evidence of factors behind our successes and challenges, we can identify the issues that need particular consideration and find the best practices for future work.



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## Manuals

### Referenced Abilis guidelines and manuals:

Abilis Gender Manual: Gender and Disability in Abilis Foundation

Abilis Guideline for Sustainable Livelihoods

Abilis Guideline for Environmental Sustainability

Abilis HRBA Manual: The Human Rights-Based Approach in Abilis Foundation

Abilis Risk Management Plan

Abilis Safeguarding Guideline

Abilis Safety Manual

**If you do not yet have access to these manuals, please contact Abilis HQ in Helsinki.**



**This policy document describes the key principles on which Abilis Foundation will carry out its mission in fragile contexts: Part I describes the background of fragile contexts as a concept in international development cooperation and policy. Part II is a practical guideline and tool for how Abilis operates in fragile contexts.**



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