



Humanity for all

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Webinar: 3rd December 09:30 - 11:00 CET / Geneva

Developing an IFRC global reference
centre on **Disability Inclusion**

**Introduction by Jagan Chapagain, IFRC Secretary General,
Speakers from Palestine Red Crescent, Turkish Red Crescent,
Kenya Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, Finnish Red Cross**

SUMMARY OF THE WEBINAR

Promoting the Global Reference Centre on Disability Inclusion

Executive Summary

The launch of the Global Reference Centre on Disability Inclusion convened IFRC leadership and National Societies to establish a unified platform for mainstreaming inclusive humanitarian action. Opening the session, Secretary General **Jagan Chapagain** emphasized the strategic shift from isolated initiatives to a global standard, aligned with Strategy 2030. The Centre will be hosted by the **Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS)**, leveraging 30 years of specialized rehabilitation and education experience, with the **Turkish Red Crescent (TRC)** serving as Advisory Working Group Lead, sharing its transformative "Barrier-Free" volunteering model.

National Societies from Kenya, Finland, Australia, Canada and South Sudan highlighted diverse priorities, ranging from climate resilience and social inclusion to advocacy in conflict zones like Gaza and South Sudan. Consultations revealed a critical demand from the network for standardized toolkits, minimum standards, and remote expert support. The event concluded with a clear mandate: the Centre will function not just as a repository, but as an active engine for capacity building. All National Societies are urged to contribute expertise, partner with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), and co-create knowledge products to ensure dignity and access for all.

Welcome and introductions

 Jagan Chapagain Secretary General, IFRC	 Dr. Younis Alkhatib President, Palestine Red Crescent Society	 Yener Tanik Board Member, Turkish Red Crescent Society
--	--	--

Speakers from National Societies:

 Dalal El-Taji Palestine Red Crescent	 Dr. Hatem El Dabbakeh Palestine Red Crescent
 Ece Ceren Doğar Turkish Red Crescent	 Lejla Tursum Aru Turkish Red Crescent
 Wilson Opudo Kenya Red Cross	 Leeanne Marshall Australian Red Cross
 Suvi Virkkunen Finnish Red Cross	 Morgan Cunningham Canadian Red Cross


Stephen Wainwright
Moderator - IFRC

1. Leadership Perspectives & Strategic Vision

Jagan Chapagain (Secretary General, IFRC): The Vision for a Unified Platform



Opening the webinar, Jagan Chapagain provided the foundational context for the Centre, explaining that its creation is the result of years of cumulative effort and dialogue across the network. He highlighted the critical need to move beyond isolated initiatives toward a unified global platform.

- **Origins:** The concept emerged from the specific strengths of National Societies, notably the **Palestinian Red Crescent's** historic work in deaf education and rehabilitation, the Turkish **Red Crescent's** dedicated working groups, and the **Finnish Red Cross's** long-standing advocacy.
- **Core Purpose:** The Centre is not just a repository but an active engine for sharing lived experiences and support, ensuring that disability inclusion is standardized and elevated across all National Societies.

Dr. Younus Al-Khatib (President, Palestine Red Crescent Society)



Dr. Al-Khatib reaffirmed that disability inclusion is not a "temporary project" but an "integral part of our humanitarian mission and institutional identity."

- **Hosting Commitment:** He expressed that PRCS is honored to host the Reference Centre, leveraging their extensive history in rehabilitation and specialized services.
- **Centre Mandate:** He defined the Centre's role as a cooperative hub designed to gather effective practices and develop unified methodologies, pledging full resource support to ensure its success.

Yener Tanık (Chair, Turkish Red Crescent Barrier-Free Coordination Committee)



Mr. Tanık outlined the philosophy behind "Barrier-Free Kızılay" (Kızılay Engelsiz), established in 2021 with the motto "Kindness and solidarity know no barriers."

- **Empowerment Model:** The core goal is shifting the paradigm from viewing persons with disabilities as aid recipients to empowering them as active volunteers who contribute meaningfully to society.
- **Scale & Ambition:** With 117 Barrier-Free Representatives active across Türkiye, the Turkish Red Crescent aims to share this sustainable volunteer structure with the global network, helping to co-create a more inclusive humanitarian movement under the IFRC umbrella.
- **Host National Society:** Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS).
- **Advisory Working Group Lead:** Turkish Red Crescent (TRC).
- **Scope of Work:** To serve as a cooperative hub that gathers best practices, harmonizes technical approaches, and supports the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision-making roles.

2. Founding National Societies: Models & Innovations



Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) - Dalal El-Taji

Dalal outlined the PRCS's comprehensive ecosystem of inclusion, built over **30 years of specialized experience**, particularly in deaf education and physical rehabilitation.

- **Educational & Vocational Pillars:**
 - PRCS operates elementary and secondary schools specifically for students with hearing impairments.
 - **Vocational Training Centers:** These centers provide certified training in carpentry, sewing, and bamboo crafts, facilitating economic independence.
 - **Open Studio:** A dedicated space for talent development, art, and psycho-social support.
 - **Sign Language Standardization:** PRCS has been pivotal in developing a unified Palestinian Sign Language dictionary and contributing to the broader Arabic Sign Language dictionary.
- **Rehabilitation Infrastructure:**
 - **Specialized Centers:** Major rehabilitation centers operate in Hebron and Nablus, providing physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and assistive devices.
 - **Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR):** A robust outreach program that utilizes mobile units and home visits to reach remote areas. This program focuses on school integration, modifying home environments, and a structured referral system.
- **Crisis Response & Gaza Operations:**
 - **Field Hospital Launch: Suhier Al Badarneh** announced the official opening of a new rehabilitation hospital in Khan Younis, specifically dedicated to treating the high volume of conflict-related injuries and mobility impairments.
 - **Shelter Accessibility:** In response to the war in Gaza, PRCS rehabilitation teams are active in IDP shelters, installing accessible latrines and adapting tents to ensure dignity and access for displaced persons with disabilities.

Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) - Lejla Tursum Aru



Lejla presented the "Barrier-Free Kızılay" (Kızılay Engelsiz) initiative, emphasizing that it is not a temporary project but a permanent **organizational model** established in 2021.

- **The "Barrier-Free" Philosophy:** The model is built on three core pillars:
 1. **Inclusive Volunteering:** Shifting the narrative from "beneficiary" to "active contributor." The structure includes a central coordination board and **117 Barrier-Free Representatives** across provinces, ensuring persons with disabilities lead volunteer activities.

2. **Accessible Organization:** A commitment to making all TRC physical buildings and digital platforms fully accessible.
 3. **Effective Communication:** Ensuring all materials and interactions are inclusive.
- **Specialized Assets & Tools:**
 - **Accessible Refreshment Vehicle:** A custom-designed mobile unit with lowered counters, Braille descriptions, and ramps, allowing volunteers with physical disabilities to serve refreshments during events or disasters.
 - **Accessible Tents:** Larger, ramp-equipped tents designed for disaster zones to accommodate wheelchairs and medical equipment.
 - **Capacity Building:**
 - Development of a mandatory "**Approach to Disability**" training module for all TRC staff and volunteers.
 - Post-Earthquake Response: Following the Kahramanmaraş earthquake, the Barrier-Free teams were crucial in identifying specific needs, distributing prosthetics, and setting up specialized accessible living spaces for affected families.

Consortium Members:

- **Kenya Red Cross (Wilson Opudo):**



- **Focus:** Discussed their strategic influence as chair of the Inclusive Humanitarian and Climate Action Subcommittee, focusing on harmonized frameworks and partnerships with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).
- **Contribution:** Wilson offered to support **joint resource mobilization** and the development of quality assurance standards. He highlighted Kenya's readiness to **drive innovation** by testing and scaling up new models, such as inclusive early warning systems and community engagement tools.

- **Finnish Red Cross (Suvi Virkkunen):**



- **Focus:** Emphasized the "social inclusion" aspect, shifting the focus from addressing individual needs to **transforming the environments and systems** that create exclusion in the first place.
- **Contribution:** Suvi pledged to bring **global visibility and ambition** to the agenda. A key contribution will be supporting the formalization of pathways for persons with disabilities to shape the Centre's governance and priorities, ensuring lived experience is integrated into all tools.

- **Australian Red Cross (Leeanne Marshall):**



- **Focus:** Advocated for a structured global platform to ensure that technical expertise is not siloed but shared effectively across sectors.
- **Contribution:** Leeanne offered specific technical expertise in **Shelter and Settlements** (updating global guidance) and **Disability Data**, aiming to move the

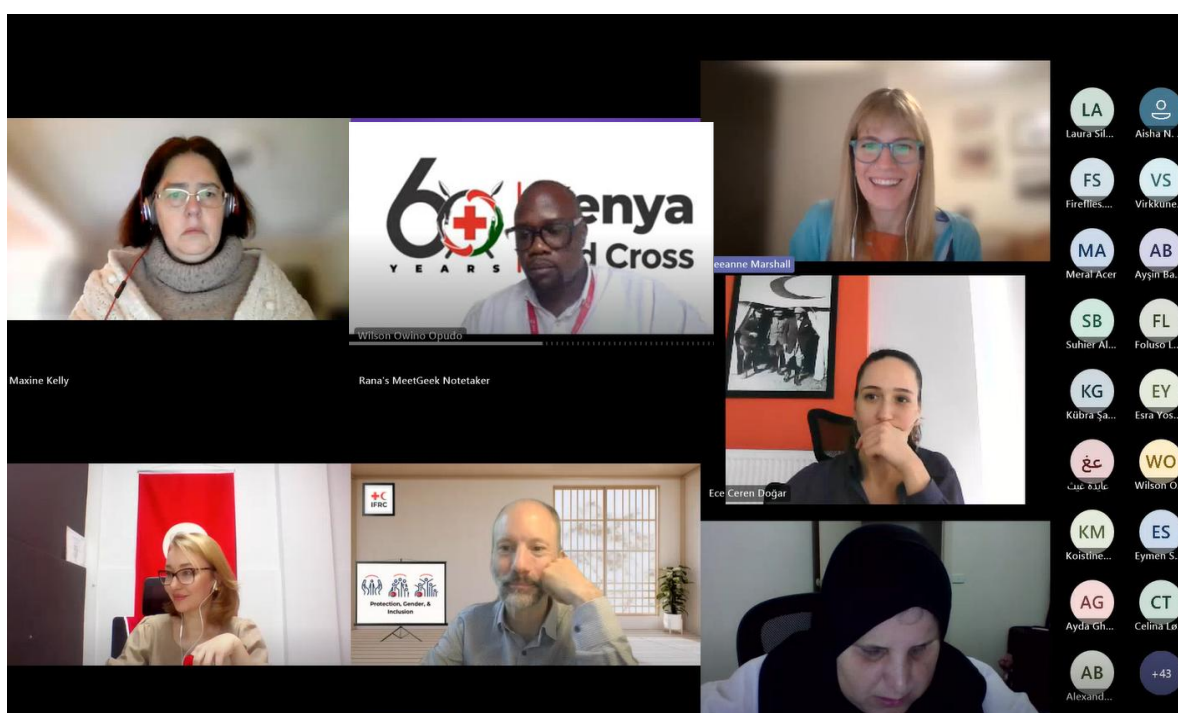
network from ad-hoc inclusion to robust, evidence-based programming. She also committed to connecting domestic inclusion teams with global efforts to foster mutual learning.

- **Canadian Red Cross (Morgan Cunningham):**



- **Focus:** Emphasized the Centre's critical role in **reducing duplication of effort** by facilitating shared learning across the network.
- **Contribution:** While National Societies are at different stages of the "same journey," Canada sees the Centre as a vital tool to **bring everyone to a certain standard**, allowing members to leverage collective resources and information to advance their own progress more efficiently.

3. Discussion on priorities needs and offers of support (Mentimeter)



The consultation session used Mentimeter to gather voting data and open-text feedback from participants (approx. 25 respondents).

A) Priority support needs expressed by participants

Participants provided specific text responses to open-ended questions, highlighting distinct themes for the Centre's roadmap.

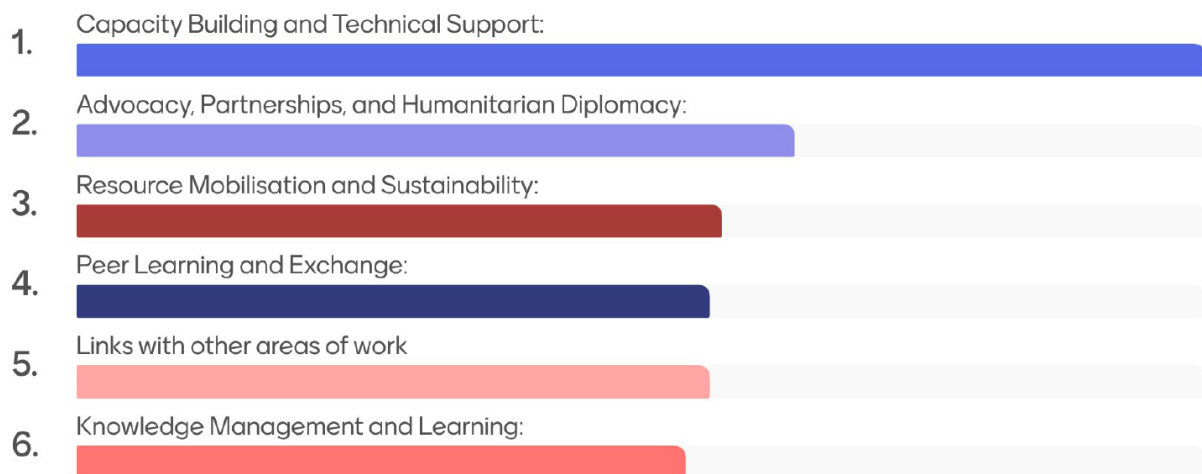
Question 1: "What support would be most important from the Working Group and Reference centre?"

- **Standardization & Harmonization:**

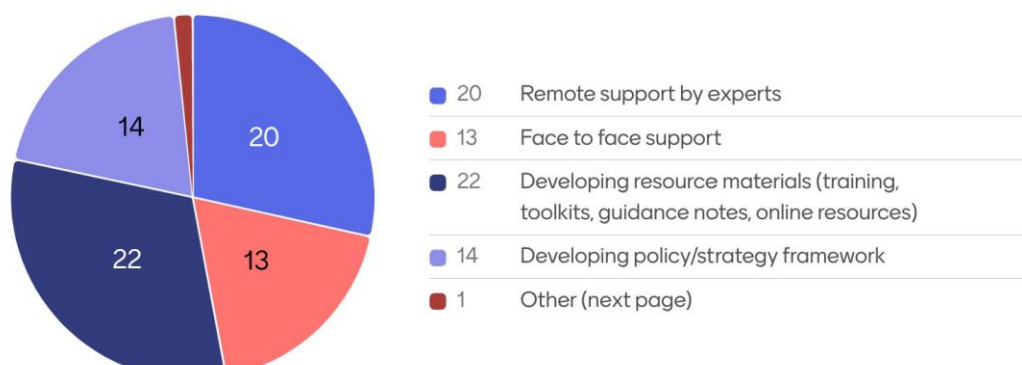
- There is a clear call to "set minimum standards for the Movement" and "harmonise approaches" to ensure consistency.
- Participants requested a "joint vision" and support in "enhancing quality and consistency" across different regions.

- **Practical Tools & Databases:**
 - Requests for a "database with all the useful tools" and "Training Tools, SOPs and Guidelines."
 - Specific interest in "guidance on how to revise processes and services to allow more inclusion."
- **Specialized Contexts:**
 - **Climate:** "Supporting Inclusive Humanitarian & Climate Action."
 - **Crises:** Specific guidance needed for "Disability inclusion in protracted crises."
- **Connection & Advocacy:**
 - "Global connections with organisations" and "learning from disability organizations for best practice."
 - "Peer reflections on challenges" was noted as a critical form of support, moving beyond just success stories to honest problem-solving.

Question 2 : What are the most important services that you would like to receive?



Question 3: "In which ways should the reference centre/WG provide support?"



Question 4: "What would your National Society like to contribute to the development and running of the working group & reference centre?"

- **Expertise & Personnel:**
 - Offers of "Technical Knowledge & Experience" and "Time of our experts to work together with others."
 - **Turkish Red Crescent** specifically committed to: *"We will actively support coordination, share our inclusive volunteering models, and help develop practical tools and peer-learning activities to strengthen the entire network."*
- **Partnership & OPD Engagement:**
 - Several societies offered to lead on "Collaboration and partnerships with OPDs" and "Strengthening OPD Engagement."
- **Innovation & Testing:**
 - Commitments to "Co-Creation & Testing of Tools and Guidance" and "Piloting & Testing" new methodologies.
 - "Leadership in Inclusive Climate and Humanitarian Action" was offered as a specific niche contribution.

6. Participant & Partner Interventions

Key insights, offers of collaboration, and specific country contexts shared during the discussion.

- **South Sudan Red Cross (Daniel Juma):** Emphasized the importance of advocacy in conflict settings and shared the success of the "Smile of Hope" camp.
 - **Identifying Barriers:** Daniel Juma highlighted systemic barriers facing persons with disabilities, specifically citing inaccessible infrastructure (roads, schools), unemployment, and financial exclusion.
 - **Call for PGI Integration:** He urged the Reference Centre to serve as a lobbying forum to mobilize support for integrating disability into **Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI)** frameworks. He noted that in the absence of standalone disability projects, embedding these needs into broader PGI emergency response is critical to protecting the most vulnerable during disasters.
- **Mobilizing Special Needs Centres (Shao Yi Liew):** Suggested that the Reference Centre should provide guidance on how to mobilize the wealth of knowledge currently sitting within National Societies' existing schools and centres for special needs, transforming them into hubs for broader program development.
- **External Partnership (Sander Schot, CBM Global):** Expressed a strong willingness to collaborate with the Reference Centre, specifically offering to share technical resources and work together on joint initiatives.

4. Key Takeaways

- **Accessibility is Continuous:** Technical challenges experienced during the webinar (video playback issues) served as a poignant reminder of the everyday barriers faced by persons with disabilities, reinforcing the Centre's mission to design inclusive platforms.
- **Global Alignment:** There is strong consensus on the need to formalize pathways for the voices of persons with disabilities to shape IFRC priorities and operations.

9. Call to Action: Join the development of the Reference Centre and Working Group

The organizing committee invites all National Societies to actively engage with the Reference Centre, whether through formal commitments or informal brainstorming.

- **Open Invitation:** National Societies are encouraged to reach out even if they are not yet ready to commit to specific outputs. The organizing group (Stephen Wainwright, PRCS, and TRC) welcomes informal conversations to brainstorm ideas or discuss potential future contributions.
- **Areas for Contribution:** As highlighted by Leeanne Marshall, the Centre is particularly seeking collaboration on:
 - **Experience Sharing:** Peer-to-peer exchange of success stories and challenges.
 - **OPD Partnerships:** Guidance on setting up MOUs and managing relationships with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities.
 - **Inclusive Volunteering:** Sharing successful models for recruiting and retaining volunteers with disabilities.
 - **Knowledge Products:** Co-developing practical tools and learning resources based on real-world experiences.

For more information, please contact disability.inclusion@ifrc.org

pgi.ifrc.org/disability