



**IDRC Research Chair
West Africa**



**CENTRE FOR
MIGRATION STUDIES**

**IDRC RESEARCH CHAIR ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN
ANGLOPHONE WEST AFRICA**

POLICY BRIEF III

**Disability and Flood-Induced Internal Displacement in Urban Monrovia:
Operationalising Inclusive Protection for Persons with Disabilities**



2025



IDRC · CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada

POLICY BRIEF III

Strengthening Knowledge, Evidence Use, and Leadership in the Global South on Forced Displacement

An outcome of the IDRC Chair's fieldwork conducted in November 2025 in Monrovia, Liberia, highlights research undertaken in flood-prone communities including Doe Estates, Bernard Farm, FDA Junction, Mount Barclay and Dour Town. The exercise, part of the Chair's broader regional research on forced displacement, involved close engagement with local institutions, community leaders, and affected households to generate evidence on displacement dynamics. This research contributes to a better understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable populations and supports the development of informed, context-specific policy and programmatic responses.

Author:

SETRANA, MARY BOATEMAA

Summary

Globally, over 108 million people are forcibly displaced, and an estimated 16% of the world's population (1.3 billion people) live with disabilities (UNHCR,2024; WHO, 2022). Evidence further shows that persons with disabilities are 2-4 times more likely to die or be injured during disasters due to barriers in evacuation, information access and infrastructure design (UNDRR, 2014).

In Monrovia's flood-prone settlements, these global inequalities are reflected at the community level. Field findings from Doe Estates demonstrate that flood-induced internal displacement disproportionately harms persons with disabilities, particularly blind women and individuals with mobility impairments.

During heavy rainfall, inaccessible pathways, flooded sanitation systems and the collapse of informal support networks confine persons with disabilities indoors or expose them to neglect, exploitation and preventable illness. Displacement is therefore not only environmental, it is a profound rights and protection crisis.

Although Liberia is a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and engages in displacement governance structures (IDMC,2023), disability inclusion remains weakly operationalised in flood preparedness and internal displacement response.

Without immediate, disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction measures, flood events will continue to deepen structural exclusion in Monrovia's most vulnerable communities.

Introduction

Disability and flood-induced displacement are known to intersect in ways that amplify vulnerability, particularly in urban environments. Persons with disabilities are often disproportionately affected during extreme weather events due to limited mobility, inaccessible infrastructure and barriers to timely information and services.

These challenges highlight the urgent need for inclusive disaster preparedness, urban planning, and social protection measures that safeguard the rights, dignity and well-being of all residents, ensuring that no one is left behind during times of crisis.

What causes this problem?

a. The Problem: Disability as a Risk Multiplier in Displacement

Flooding is the primary driver of cyclical internal displacement in Monrovia's informal settlements. For persons with disabilities, each flood event magnifies existing barriers:

- Limited independent mobility during evacuation
- Inaccessible temporary shelters
- Unsafe and submerged sanitation facilities
- Loss of assistive devices and livelihood tools
- Heightened exposure to theft and exploitation

Field evidence documented blind women dependent on children for mobility and survival, relying on begging as their primary livelihood. During floods, muddy terrain and stagnant water make navigation hazardous or impossible. Their source of livelihood, which is begging in the main town, such as Red light and other busy areas, is stripped of them and therefore, for that day and the preceding days, it becomes a headache to have what to feed on. Also, in situations where evacuation is delayed or unsupported, persons with disabilities remain in flood-affected homes, increasing exposure to disease and injury.

b. Legal and Normative Obligations

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities obligates States to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters. This requires proactive inclusion in disaster preparedness and response and not just post-disaster accommodation.

Also, the Kampala Convention Mandates State responsibility to prevent displacement and protect internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly those with specific vulnerabilities such as the visually impaired among others. Although, Liberia participates in displacement governance frameworks, operational congruence with disability inclusion remains limited at both the national and community level.

c. Protection Gaps

- There are no structured evacuation registries for persons requiring assisted mobility
- Temporary shelters provided during the response lack accessible water and sanitation facilities
- Health facilities remain physically and financially inaccessible
- Limited disability-disaggregated data within IDP systems

These gaps transform environmental hazards into systemic exclusion.

Policy Recommendations

- **Institutionalise Disability-Inclusive Flood Preparedness**
 - Develop community evacuation registries: Maintain up-to-date lists of persons with disabilities in flood-prone areas to ensure timely and safe evacuation during emergencies.
 - Train volunteers in assisted evacuation procedures: Equip community volunteers and first responders with skills to safely support individuals with mobility or sensory impairments.
 - Integrate disability focal persons into flood response committees: Ensure that planning and decision-making for disaster preparedness consistently includes perspectives of persons with disabilities.
- **Improve Emergency Shelters for Accessibility**
 - Make latrines accessible and disability-friendly: Retrofit existing shelters with ramps, handrails, and barrier-free toilets to ensure safe use for all.
 - Provide navigational lighting and designated safe spaces: Create clearly marked and well-lit areas within shelters to allow persons with visual or mobility impairments to move safely during floods.
- **Expand Targeted Social Protection**
 - Provide cash transfers to households headed by persons with disabilities: Support financial resilience by ensuring affected households can meet basic needs during and after displacement.
 - Support alternative livelihood training beyond begging-based survival: Provide vocational skills and income-generating opportunities tailored to the capacities of persons with disabilities.

- **Improve Health Access During Flood Seasons**

- Deploy mobile clinics: Bring healthcare services directly to flood-affected communities, reducing the need for travel through hazardous conditions.
- Provide transport subsidies: Ensure persons with mobility challenges can reach health facilities or temporary shelters safely.
- Prioritise treatment for high-risk individuals: Identify and fast-track care for persons with disabilities who are more vulnerable to disease or injury during flooding.

- **Strengthen Disability Data Systems**

- Collect disability-disaggregated data within IDP assessments: Track the number, needs, and locations of persons with disabilities to inform planning, resource allocation, and emergency response.
- Align monitoring mechanisms with CRPD obligations: Ensure national and local disaster management systems adhere to international standards for protecting and including persons with disabilities in all stages of disaster risk reduction.

Conclusion

Persons with disabilities in Monrovia's flood-prone settlements experience displacement not as temporary disruption, but as compounded marginalisation contrasting with respect for human dignity. Field evidence shows restricted mobility, sanitation barriers, economic precarity and heightened protection risks during flood events.

Given that persons with disabilities globally face significantly higher disaster mortality and injury risks, failure to mainstream disability inclusion in Liberia's flood and displacement governance systems risks preventable harm. A disability-inclusive approach to flood-induced internal displacement is not only a humanitarian imperative but rather a legal obligation and a measurable indicator of equitable urban resilience.



Contact Author

Mary Boatemaa Setrana,
Centre for Migration Studies,
University of Ghana
Email: cms@ug.edu.gh

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated institutions, the University of Ghana, or the IDRC Research Chair funders, the IDRC. The funders are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

