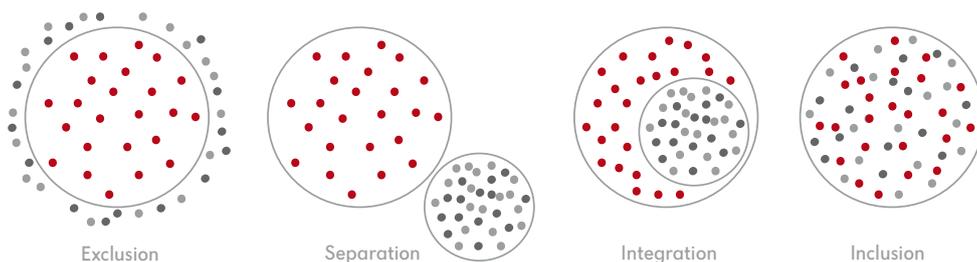


POSITION PAPER

SOCIAL INCLUSION



Social inclusion is a human right issue.

It is based on the principles of participation, empowerment and non-discrimination.

Despite the socio-economic progress achieved in the past few decades, many societies around the world are facing increasing social inequalities, often resulting in the marginalisation of particular groups. Older people, people with disabilities, the unemployed, single parents, minorities and migrants are particular vulnerable to poverty and hence to social exclusion. This means that they are often excluded from social relations or services and prevented from fully participating in social, economic, political and cultural life. The Austrian Red Cross follows a diversity approach in its work by considering differences, such as age, physical ability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious and political beliefs.

Social inclusion focus of the Austrian Red Cross International Cooperation:

Older people

Rising life expectancy and falling fertility rates are two major trends explaining why societies around the world are ageing. According to the *UN report on World Population Ageing*¹, the number of older persons has tripled over the last 50 years, and will more than triple over the next 50 years. This growing trend in ageing is also true for Europe, where the proportion of population aged over 65 years will double by 2050.

Older persons require special attention at individual and community level. With age, health risks increase, along with the prospective loss of independent living. These changes in life often lead to social isolation, depression and exclusion. At the same time many older people today live longer and are healthier. They represent an incomparable resource for their families, communities and the society as a whole. The process of ageing brings along a series of challenges, but also involves potential opportunities for our societies, depending on how well we are prepared.

People with disabilities

More than one billion people, about 15% of the world's overall population, live with some form of disability. In developing countries more than two thirds of people with disabilities live below the poverty line. Their access to health services, education and economic participation is more limited than that of the general population². Poverty and disability are also highly interlinked: poor people have a higher risk of acquiring disabilities e.g. through dangerous jobs, bad living conditions, inadequate medical care and nutrition etc. and disabilities in return may increase the risk of falling into poverty³. In addition the number of people with disabilities is growing due to demographic ageing and the increase in chronic health conditions associated with disability, such as diabetes or cardiovascular diseases⁴. The marginalisation and exclusion of people with disabilities often starts with the society's attitude towards an individual's impairment. It is, however, not the impairment itself, but more often the lack of an enabling environment that hinders persons with disabilities to fully participate in all aspects of life⁵.

Social inclusion can be understood as the process of providing groups or individuals with the opportunities and means to fully participate in social, economic and political life. Inclusion needs to be supported for, by and with excluded marginalised groups.



AUSTRIAN RED CROSS

Socially excluded people face risks:

- Discrimination based on prejudice and the fact that marginalised groups are invisible or ignored by society.
- Higher rates of poverty due to lower economic participation.
- Poor level of health due to poor living conditions and low access to publically available health, and social care services.
- Social isolation, stress, loneliness and/or depression.
- Lower access to information, lower educational attainments.
- Limited political participation and representation.

In order to address the environmental, societal and attitudinal barriers and challenges of exclusion, states and societies need to be equipped with integrated strategies and tools. The inclusion and political participation of marginalised groups through empowerment and capacity-building is a key part of this process.



The Austrian Red Cross internationally contributes to:

Development cooperation: We promote social inclusion by supporting vulnerable groups, especially older people and people with disabilities. Older people are supported with the development of community-based home care services in Western Balkan countries. In our projects for people with disabilities in Belarus we particularly focus on children, who shall receive adequate health and social services as well as assistance for independent living. Through service provision and advocacy, basic needs of these two vulnerable groups shall be met and their political participation fostered.

Expertise: Experts from the department of health and social services ensure quality assurance in our social inclusion programmes through their extensive experience in conceptual work in health and social services and care for older people. Activities focus on the support of active ageing, lifelong learning and health promotion for older people.

Disaster response and humanitarian aid: We support the development of inclusive policies and programming in our disaster response and humanitarian aid work by including people with disabilities and older people throughout all emergency phases.

Advocacy and Public relations: We actively engage in policy dialogue on all levels and use communication to raise awareness about socially marginalised and disadvantaged groups and advocate for their inclusion and rights.

The Austrian Red Cross internationally advocates for:

- Increasing public awareness and understanding for socially excluded groups.
- Supporting the provision of community-based health and social services and securing access to available public services.
- Strengthening solidarity between generations and promoting volunteering as a contribution to active ageing based on the Red Cross Vienna Commitments⁶.

1 | http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WPA2009/WPA2009_WorkingPaper.pdf

2 | WHO, 2011

3 | Count me in, LFDW, 2012

4 | World Report on Disability, WHO and World Bank, 2011

5 | UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

6 | Red Cross regional conference, 2010

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