



Language and disability¹

The use of correct language when engaging directly with and referring to persons with disabilities (in written and verbal communications) is essential to ensure that respect and dignity is afforded at all times.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) advocates that **'person-first'** language must be used at all times, without exception. This means that when referring to persons with disabilities, we are recognizing the **person first**, before acknowledging the **disability**. Therefore, disability does not define who the person is.

Below is a table which outlines common mistakes in language, which are a result of long-standing misperceptions and negative attitudes regarding persons with disabilities.

The Inclusion Technical Working Group of the Syria Protection Cluster (Turkey), in line with the UNCRPD, strongly advocates that the language in the left-hand column ("Don'ts") is abolished from all sectors of the Syria humanitarian response and replaced with the language in the right hand column ("Do's").

Don'ts	Do's
A handicapped person, the disabled, disabled person, PWD, PwD	Persons with disabilities, people with disabilities; children with disabilities, women with disabilities, men with disabilities, older persons with disabilities
A normal person, people living normal lives	A person without disabilities
A crippled, physically challenged, infirm	A person with a physical disability
The blind	A person with low vision / A person who is blind/ A person with a visual impairment
The deaf, the hard of hearing	A person who is hard of hearing / A person who is deaf
Mentally retarded, mentally challenged	A person with an intellectual disability
Insane, lunatic, mentally sick, mentally imbalanced, mad person, mentally ill person, psycho, crazy people	A person with a mental health condition

¹ Humanity & Inclusion (2020) Language and disability