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Climate action:

Guidance for organisations of persons with disabilities



Introduction

This guidance note provides an overview of the key issues relating to climate action and disability inclusion. It highlights key considerations for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) working on this topic.

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All links were correct at the time of publication.

Key terminology

- **Climate change:** Refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or because of human activity.
- **Climate action:** Refers to efforts taken to combat the causes and impacts of climate change.
- **Disaster risk reduction (DRR):** Refers to action which aims to prevent and reduce disaster risk. There are significant overlaps between climate change adaptation (CCA) and DRR - they both seek to build community resilience to risks relating to natural hazards. DRR, however, is concerned with all hazards whilst CCA is only concerned with climate-related hazards.
- **Preparedness:** Refers to the knowledge and capacities developed by governments, response and recovery organisations, communities, and individuals, to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent, or current disasters.
- **Recovery:** The restoration or improvement of livelihoods and health, as well as economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets, systems, and activities, of a disaster-affected community or society.
- **Resilience:** The ability of individuals, households, communities, cities, institutions, systems, and societies to prevent, resist, absorb, adapt, respond, and recover when faced with a wide range of risks.

Key issues

Climate change disproportionately impacts persons with disabilities.

Existing inequalities, discrimination, and limited access to resources leave them more at risk from the impact of climate-related hazards such as storms, floods, droughts, landslides, wildfires, and extreme weather. The [2022 IPCC report](#)¹ highlights this heightened risk.

Climate change creates a cascade of problems for persons with disabilities. It threatens their livelihoods, food security, and health (including mental health). These challenges can be further amplified by existing discrimination and inequalities related to poverty, political and social exclusion, and inaccessible

environments. Risks can be further increased by intersectional stigma and discrimination for some groups, e.g., women and girls with disabilities and under-represented groups.

The global climate crisis contributes to increased conflict over access to scarce resources and contributes significantly to forced migration.

Persons with disabilities are often excluded from the conversation on climate solutions. A [2022 analysis by McGill University](#)² revealed a significant gap - only 35 out of 192 countries considered disability in their climate action plans.

International frameworks on climate change

- [OHCHR \(2020\)](#) ³ (p.8) details the legal and normative frameworks for a disability-inclusive, rights-based approach to climate action.
- [The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) ⁴ guarantees equal rights for persons with disabilities, including decision-making on climate change (Article 11 focuses on protection during disasters).
- [The Paris Agreement](#) ⁵ is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015.
- [The 27th UN Climate Conference \(2022\)](#) ⁶ includes specific actions for disability inclusion.
- [The Sendai Framework \(2015\)](#) ⁷ emphasises including persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction strategies, recognising them as 'active contributors'.
- [The Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) ⁸ mention disability in several goals but lack specific targets for climate action (SDG 13).



Climate change impact

Climate change can increase existing inequalities and create new challenges for persons with disabilities such as:

- **Evacuation challenges:** Climate hazards such as hurricanes, floods, or fires can necessitate rapid evacuation. Persons with physical disability, visual or hearing disability, or reliance on medical equipment face difficulties escaping danger zones at short notice. Accessible evacuation plans and training become crucial in these situations.
- **Infrastructure breakdown:** Climate hazards can damage critical infrastructure, disrupting elevators, ramps, and transportation systems that many persons with disabilities rely on for daily living. This can make it harder to access essential services, food, and medication.
- **Health vulnerability:** Extreme heat events and air quality decline due to climate change can exacerbate respiratory problems and other health conditions that persons with disabilities may already manage. Access to regular medical care can also be disrupted during climate-related disasters.
- **Social isolation:** Disasters can displace people from their homes and communities, scattering support networks. This can be particularly detrimental for persons with disabilities who rely on caregivers or assistance for daily tasks. Social isolation can lead to depression, anxiety, and a decline in overall well-being.
- **Economic strain:** Climate change can disrupt agricultural production, damage livelihoods, and reduce job opportunities. This can disproportionately impact persons with disabilities who already face challenges in employment due to societal barriers.

It is important to remember that the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities varies depending on individual support needs and context. However, by understanding the general risks, OPDs and communities can take steps to build resilience and ensure everyone is included in disaster preparedness and response processes.

Taking action

OPDs can play an important role in ensuring persons with disabilities are included in national plans and actions to prevent and respond to climate change. Some ideas include:



Awareness raising and capacity building

- Organise workshops and campaigns within your OPD and community to educate persons with disabilities on climate change and its impact.
- Share stories of persons with disabilities who are already taking climate action as inspiration.
- Support persons with disabilities and other OPDs to join climate action events, workshops or campaigns.



Policy advice and advocacy

- Engage with local and national government officials to ensure representation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes, such as the development of a national action plan on climate change and disaster risk reduction.
- Ensure information and communication on climate action is accessible (e.g., sign language, braille, audio).
- Analyse existing climate change policies and identify gaps regarding accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities.
- Develop policy recommendations and position papers advocating for disability-inclusive climate action.
- Integrate disability inclusion considerations into social safety net policies and systems for climate-related shocks (sometimes called shock-responsive social protection).



Community resilience

- Organise community workshops on sustainable practices like water conservation, waste reduction, upcycling, and eco-friendly gardening.
- Conduct training on green agricultural practices to improve nutrition and promote access to sustainable food sources.
- Advocate for accessible public transport and green spaces to encourage healthier lifestyles.
- Conduct training on best practices for minimising plastic use within operations, training on recycling and upcycling handmade products.
- Promote energy saving and efficiency within your OPD (turning off unused lights and appliances, solar power, power-saving appliances where possible).

Resources and further information

The following are public resource repositories dedicated to disability and climate action:

- [DID4All – Climate change resources](#) ⁹
- [Disability debrief – Resources on climate change and disability](#) ¹⁰

Online training courses on climate action:

- [UN Climate Change Learning Partnership](#) ¹¹
- [Amnesty International – Human rights and climate change](#) ¹²

Notes

- 1 IPCC. (2022). [Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability – frequently asked questions](#)
- 2 Jodoin, S., Lofts, K., & Bowie-Edwards, A. (2022). [Disability rights in national climate policies: Status report](#). Centre for Human Rights & Legal Pluralism & International Disability Alliance.
- 3 OHCHR. (2020). [Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change - Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#)
- 4 UN General Assembly. (2007). [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/61/106, 24 January 2007](#)
- 5 UNFCCC. (2018). [The Paris agreement](#)
- 6 United Nations. (2022). [COP27 Climate Change Conference](#).
- 7 UNDRR. (2015). [The Sendai Framework](#)
- 8 UNDESA. (2015). [Sustainable Development Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts](#)
- 9 DID4ALL. (Undated). [Disability Inclusive Development Resource: Climate Change](#)
- 10 Disability Debrief. (Undated). [Climate change and disability](#)
- 11 UNCC. (Undated). [E-learn courses catalogue](#)
- 12 Amnesty International. (Undated). [Championing Change: Human rights and the climate crisis](#)