



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy

ADVANCING EQUITY TO TRANSFORM LIVES

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Government acknowledges Australia's First Nations peoples as the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and recognises and respects their continuing connections to lands, waters and communities.

The Government pays respect to Elders past and present, to emerging leaders, and to all First Nations peoples, and recognises the continuation of diverse cultural, spiritual and educational practices.

The Government thanks all First Nations peoples who have generously shared their knowledge and expertise to inform Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy.

This publication may contain images of or references to First Nations people who are deceased. The Australian Government does not wish to cause distress to any First Nations community members.

Voices from our region

We thank those who contributed their time and knowledge to the development of this Strategy, particularly people with disability – their views and perspectives have shaped our priorities. We also thank the members of our External Reference Group for their commitment, advice and support. We extend our sincerest condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Dr Bhargavi Davar, an External Reference Group member who passed while we were developing this Strategy. Dr Davar's important contributions to the External Reference Group strengthened our focus on the rights of people with psychosocial disability.

Cover Images Credit:

Clockwise from top left: DFAT; BEQUAL; DFAT; ACCESS-Phase 1

Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy

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Ministerial Foreword



Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Minister for Foreign Affairs

The Australian Government is firmly committed to disability equity and rights to transform lives, reduce inequalities, and build inclusive, cohesive communities.

Supporting the rights of people with disability reflects Australian values and helps advance our national interest in a more peaceful, stable and prosperous world, where human dignity is respected and no one is left behind.

It has been more than 15 years since Australia first adopted a disability-inclusive development strategy. At the time, we were at the forefront of international efforts – the first development partner country to develop a distinct strategy on disability inclusion to guide our international development program.

Nearly two decades later, disability is now firmly on the global agenda, yet significant work remains. People with disability continue to be among the poorest and most marginalised in all societies. Conflict, instability, and the impacts of climate change exacerbate these inequalities, putting people with disability at even greater risk of poverty, marginalisation, injury and death.

A focus on inclusion alone has not been sufficient in successfully removing barriers and creating opportunities for people with disability.

This International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy outlines how Australia will meet the demands of a changing world. It marks a shift in focus from inclusion to equity and rights, championing outcomes that remove barriers for people with disability so that they can fully and equitably participate in and contribute to society.

The Strategy embeds disability equity and rights as a key component of our international engagement, including our international development program. It introduces Australia's first-ever performance target for disability equity in our international development program investments – 60 per cent performing effectively on disability equity by 2026, and 70 per cent by 2030 – making clear our expectation that our international development program will deliver better outcomes for people with disability.

We will deepen partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, supporting local leadership and genuine partnerships based on respect, listening, and mutual learning. We will also contribute beyond our region, supporting international cooperation and advocating for an inclusive, transparent and effective multilateral system that prioritises disability equity and rights. And we will establish an annual International Disability Rights Dialogue, to ensure our international advocacy continues to evolve and improve, reflecting the perspectives and priorities of people with disability.

This strategy attests to Australia's commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of people with disability. Through genuine partnerships, we can shape a more inclusive global community where everyone is enabled to contribute and thrive.

Ministerial Foreword

Australia has a proud history of championing the rights of people with disability. We have established ourselves as a global leader, driving initiatives that have transformed lives and strengthened our region.

Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy sets our agenda for the future, outlining our commitment to partnering with people with disability and supporting their priorities.

This Strategy was shaped by people with disability. We consulted widely, listening to leaders, advocates and experts both in Australia and overseas. We actively engaged those whose voices are under-represented across the disability rights movement. We developed our approach in dialogue with partner governments across the Indo-Pacific.

This Strategy responds to a call for equity, embracing an intersectional approach that acknowledges diverse life experiences within and beyond the disability community – across gender, LGBTQIA+ rights, First Nations perspectives, and more. We thank everyone who contributed their insights and perspectives.

Guided by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we are steadfast in our commitment to ensuring disability equity is integrated across our foreign policy, international development policy and program, trade policy, humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction and climate action.

Disability equity benefits everyone. It strengthens economic growth – the return on investment is substantial – and enhances regional stability. It also contributes to peace and security: peacebuilding initiatives are more successful and impactful when they include people with disability.

And at its core, promoting disability equity is simply the right thing to do. People with disability continue to face unacceptably high levels of poverty, exclusion, violence and discrimination. This must be addressed.

The case for Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy is clear. By building on our longstanding expertise and partnerships, we can drive impactful change, strengthen regional stability, and reinforce Australia's reputation as a global leader in disability equity.

Together, we are committed to a fairer, more inclusive Indo-Pacific in which disability equity uplifts all.



The Hon Pat Conroy MP

Minister for International
Development and the Pacific



Credit: ACCESS-Phase 1

Executive Summary

The Australian Government is committed to advancing disability equity and rights as an integral part of Australia's international engagement.

Our approach is grounded in the understanding that any country that wants to achieve peace, stability and prosperity must support the full participation of all. For sustainable development to be achieved, we must deliver on our commitment to leave no one behind, including people with disability.

Everyone benefits from disability equity. Poverty, isolation and disadvantage are reduced. The potential for economic growth is stronger. Cohesive societies are more peaceful, resilient and stable.

Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy outlines how we will harness our expertise and resources to tackle the challenges ahead and advance disability equity and rights now and into the future. It prioritises support for local leadership and decision-making and highlights the importance of working in partnership – with partner governments, civil society, and with the international community.

This Strategy marks a shift in Australia's focus from disability inclusion to disability equity and rights. An approach grounded in equity recognises different people need different settings in place to thrive. Equity calls not just for a seat at the table, but for a change in our systems and processes so people with disability can contribute fully and meaningfully to the discussion. Australia is responding to this call.

Australia will focus on five priorities to:

- Invest in partnerships and movements
- Address discrimination and exclusion
- Promote the preconditions for inclusion
- Support equity in humanitarian assistance and climate action
- Strengthen the evidence base.

We will support the delivery of these priorities by augmenting existing effort and through new initiatives.

We will introduce reforms to align our international development program more closely with international standards.

We will deepen our partnerships with organisations of people with disability across the Indo-Pacific and ensure these partnerships remain at the core of our work.

We will support Australia Awards scholars with disability to develop as leaders and implement change in their communities.

We will establish an annual International Disability Rights Dialogue with civil society from Australia and the Indo-Pacific, to inform priorities for Australia's international human rights advocacy.

Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy outlines how we will harness our expertise and resources to tackle the challenges ahead and advance disability equity and rights now and into the future.

We will invest in projects to increase the supply of assistive technology and products across the Indo-Pacific, including in humanitarian disaster response.

Through this Strategy, we will continue Australia's proud legacy of support for the rights of people with disability across the globe. We will elevate our efforts, draw on our strengths, and hone our focus to drive real positive change for people with disability.

The need for effective and accountable action on disability equity is more crucial than ever. This Strategy commits Australia to working with our partners towards a fairer, more equitable world in which people with disability participate as valued members of the community with equal rights, dignity, and the support they need to achieve equal outcomes.



Credit: CBM Australia

Strategic Overview

Strategic Overview



OUR VISION

A fairer, more equitable world in which people with disability are valued members of the community with equal rights, dignity, and the support they need to achieve equal outcomes

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Recognise that **disability rights are human rights**

Follow the movement's call for **nothing without us**

People with disability are **valued members of the community**

Support inclusion, equity and diversity for all people across our work

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Invest in partnerships and movements to enable a strong, effective disability rights movement

Address discrimination and exclusion in all sectors across all societies

Promote the preconditions for inclusion to build more equitable and inclusive systems

Support equity in humanitarian assistance and climate action informed by the expertise of people with disability

Strengthen the evidence base on what works to inform policies, programs and decision-making

OUR APPROACH

Support **local leadership and decision-making**

Amplify our impact by **working in partnership**

Do no harm in our international engagements

Leave no one behind

Twin-track efforts – both targeted and mainstream



Participants visiting a school in Laos to learn about teaching strategies used to support children with disability. Credit: BEQUAL

Chapter 1

The global picture

Everyone benefits from disability equity.



1.3 billion people
have disability

Some 1.3 billion people – approximately 16 per cent of the global population – have disability,¹ approximately 750 million of whom live in Asia and the Pacific.²

Global prevalence of disability has grown over the last decade and is expected to continue to rise.³ While this is partly attributable to increased awareness and acceptance of disability, the combined impacts of climate change, more severe and frequent disasters, increased conflict, demographic shifts including a growing number of older persons,⁴ and increased rates of noncommunicable diseases⁵ will also contribute to this increase.

Everyone benefits from disability equity. The potential for economic growth is stronger – the full empowerment of people with disability could contribute an estimated 7 per cent or more to gross domestic product,⁶ and could unlock access to global markets with over USD13 trillion in disposable income.⁷ In some sectors, spending on disability equity can generate a tenfold return on investment.⁸ Poverty,⁹ isolation and disadvantage are reduced,¹⁰ and inclusive societies are more peaceful, resilient and stable.¹¹

Box 1

What is disability?

This Strategy is based on a social model of disability. It recognises attitudes, practices and structures can be disabling and act as barriers preventing people from fulfilling their potential and exercising their rights as members of the community. The Strategy is grounded in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

Disability rights are firmly on the global agenda. Disability is a cross-cutting priority in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* is near-universally ratified.

Disability rights are firmly on the global agenda. Disability is a cross-cutting priority in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) is near-universally ratified. The Pacific has set its priorities through the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) community has declared its fourth Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2023–2032) to ‘make the right real’ for people with disability.

Despite good progress, significant work remains. People with disability are among the poorest, most marginalised and acutely disadvantaged people across society in all countries. They face significant barriers to accessing education, health, the economy, cultural and public life, assistive technology and support services.

From disability inclusion to disability equity

‘Inclusion can ensure we have a seat at the table, but it is equity that will transform and reconfigure that table to guarantee our full, effective and meaningful participation.’

Setareki Macanawai, former Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Disability Forum

Inclusion alone has not been successful in removing barriers and creating opportunities for people with disability.

This strategy shifts our focus from inclusion to pursuing outcomes that remove barriers so that people with disability can fully and equitably participate in and contribute to society.

Australia’s role

Advancing equity for people with disability and advocating for their human rights is a priority for Australia, both at home and overseas.

We are a long-term champion of disability-inclusive development and human rights. We were the first development partner country to publish a standalone strategy for disability-inclusive development, Development for All in 2009. We released a second in 2015. We have spearheaded initiatives to boost disability inclusion at the local, regional and global levels.

This third Strategy will guide our next steps. It increases our ambition and shifts the dial from inclusion to equity and rights. It expands our efforts to achieve disability equity through our international engagement on foreign policy, international development, trade policy, humanitarian assistance and climate action. This Strategy complements Australia’s existing national strategies and plans, including Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021–2031, which is our national policy framework to drive action at all levels of government to improve the lives of people with disability.

We are a long-term champion of disability-inclusive development and human rights.





Box 3

First Nations artist, Travis Hogan. Credit: NDIS

Research has shown First Nations Australians with disability participate in social activities and events within their community at the same rates as people without disability.

Australian First Nations perspectives on disability

Disability is not a concept that readily translates into many Australian First Nations languages and cultures – particularly the focus on individual impairment.¹² Research has shown that First Nations Australians with disability participate in social activities and events within their community at the same rates as people without disability.¹³

The prevalence of disability is much higher among First Nations Australians than the general population. First Nations Australians with disability face multiple and compounding forms of discrimination. To help address these challenges, the Australian Government is working alongside First Nations people on the cross-cutting outcome of disability under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and accompanying Disability Sector Strengthening Plan.

This Strategy draws on lessons learned in Australia to support disability equity and rights for all through our international engagement.



San Isidro Care Centre program participants, West Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands. Credit: DFAT

Chapter 2

Towards a fairer, more equitable world

Our vision

A fairer, more equitable world in which people with disability are valued members of the community with equal rights, dignity, and the support they need to achieve equal outcomes



International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy consultations in Suva, Fiji. Credit: DFAT

Guiding principles

In implementing this Strategy, we will be led by four guiding principles.

Disability rights are human rights

People with disability have the same human rights and fundamental freedoms as people without disability. We will ground our work in the principles enshrined in the CRPD: human dignity, non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, respect for difference, equality of opportunity, accessibility, gender equality and respect for the rights of children.¹⁴

Nothing without us

‘Nothing without us’ is a call from the disability rights movement for people with disability to be listened to, to participate and to contribute at all stages of policy and program development and across all sectors. It is anchored in ‘nothing about us without us’, a call to be included in conversations about their lives, and goes further, recognising that perspectives of people with disability should be integrated into all policies and programs with a human impact.

We will respect this call, enabling people with disability and their representative organisations to engage with our policies and programs as leaders, decision-makers, experts, implementing partners and participants.

Valued members of the community

People with disability live in every country, region and city of our world. However, people with disability are too often excluded from the communities in which they live, shut out of services and facilities and segregated through institutions. Many factors contribute to this, including stigma, lack of awareness, assumption of incapability, and a belief that institutionalisation is the right path.

We will prioritise approaches that bring change to the lives of people with disability at the community level, working with local groups and organisations to transform attitudes, address challenges and remove barriers. This will help to ensure people with disability live, participate and are fully included in the community.

Support inclusion, equity and diversity

People with disability have specific needs, priorities and perspectives based on their individual identities, including their gender, age, culture, beliefs, or sexuality.

As we implement this Strategy, we will continue to consider and respond to the wide diversity of people with disability through our international engagement and address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

‘Nothing without us’ is a call from the disability rights movement for people with disability to be listened to, to participate and to contribute at all stages of policy and program development and across all sectors.

We will prioritise approaches that bring change to the lives of people with disability at the community level, working with local groups and organisations to transform attitudes, address challenges and remove barriers.



Credit: DFAT

Chapter 3

Strategic priorities

Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy has five strategic priorities.

Priority 1: Invest in partnerships and movements

A strong, diverse and representative international disability rights movement – with organisations of people with disability (OPDs) at its core – is essential to advancing disability equity and rights. People with disability will be involved in all parts of our work as leaders, decision-makers, experts, implementing partners and participants. We will deepen our engagement with OPDs, maintain genuine and respectful long-term partnerships and be guided by their priorities. We will increase support for OPDs across the Indo-Pacific (see Initiative 1) and establish a new program that supports Australia Award scholars with disability to develop as leaders (see Initiative 2).

We will **advocate** for:

- continued recognition of people with disability as leaders, experts and partners across our international engagements on foreign policy, human rights, international development, trade policy, humanitarian assistance and climate action
- stronger partnerships between OPDs and a range of stakeholders including partner governments, multilateral agencies, financial institutions and development banks, the private sector and research institutions.

We will **act** by:

- investing in ongoing disability movement strengthening by providing core funding and capacity-building support to OPDs, particularly in the Indo-Pacific
- promoting opportunities and enabling OPDs to participate in national, regional and global discussions to help set the agenda and influence decision-making
- increasing efforts to partner with and learn from OPDs across our work and at all stages of policy and program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- partnering with and supporting groups that experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including those marginalised within the disability rights movement. Examples include, but are not limited to, women and girls, LGBTQIA+ people, people who are Deaf, Blind, Deafblind, and people with psychosocial, intellectual and cognitive disability.

People with disability will be involved in all parts of our work as leaders, decision-makers, experts, implementing partners and participants.

Initiative 1

Stronger Movements, Stronger Futures

Through the Stronger Movements, Stronger Futures initiative, we will increase our support for OPDs across the Indo-Pacific and encourage them to engage with regional and international processes. This investment will boost collaboration and dialogue between global, regional and local partners, create new spaces for learning, and share innovative solutions and good practice. It will support OPD leaders to influence and shape regional and global forums.

Initiative 2

People with Disability Leading and Influencing

We will establish a new program to support Australia Awards scholars with disability to develop as leaders, implement change in their communities, and navigate career transitions. Through this Leading and Influencing initiative, we will offer leadership development opportunities, training and networks for Australia Awards scholars with disability while they are on award in Australia and will facilitate ongoing connections and networks after they return home.

Priority 2: Address discrimination and exclusion

Australia will strengthen its long-standing investments in inclusive health, education and livelihoods, recognising their role as critical enablers to the independence and autonomy of people with disability.

If the CRPD were implemented in full across society, people with disability would have equitable access to education, health, employment, be supported to make decisions, would have access to justice, and participate fully in culture, the community, sport, political processes and family life. However, despite almost universal ratification of the CRPD, people with disability continue to face significant discrimination and exclusion.

Australia will strengthen its longstanding investments in disability-responsive health, education and livelihoods, recognising them as critical enablers of the independence and autonomy of people with disability (see Case study 1). We will work with regional and global partners to implement disability-responsive initiatives including the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2023–2032, and the UN’s Disability Inclusion Strategy. We will establish a Disability Rights Dialogue to inform Australia’s international human rights advocacy (see Initiative 3).

Case study 1

Valuing diversity through inclusive education (Lao People’s Democratic Republic)

Australia and Laos are working together to ensure primary education is inclusive of all students and teachers. The Basic Education Quality and Access in Lao PDR program supports the Lao Ministry of Education to promote disability equity and rights through the new primary school curriculum. For the first time in the country’s history, curriculum materials feature stories and images of people with disability that highlight their strengths and contributions at home, at work, and in the classroom. By challenging harmful stereotypes and stigma about disability, the new curriculum is paving the way for a more equitable and accessible future for all Lao students.



BEQUAL works with organisations of people with disability to develop learning resources for teachers that feature stories and images of people with disability, such as this textbook illustration. Credit: BEQUAL

We will **advocate** for:

- the universal ratification and full implementation of the CRPD, in partnership with OPDs and broader civil society
- an inclusive, transparent and effective multilateral system that prioritises disability rights
- stronger international cooperation to achieve disability equity in all sectors of all societies
- reasonable accommodation provisions that enable the full and effective participation of people with disability across society.

We will **act** by:

- strengthening our investments in critical sectors such as disability-responsive health, education, economic empowerment, and access to justice
- advancing inclusive trade to enable people with disability to share in its benefits, including through multilateral aid-for-trade investments and non-discrimination provisions for people with disability in future free trade agreements (see Case study 2)
- engaging with partners at all levels, including the private sector, to address discrimination and exclusion in sectors including education, health, employment, cultural life, sport, tourism and recreation
- sharing Australia's experience of CRPD implementation, including by being open about the barriers we face and the models we use to support Australians with disability and their carers
- investing in equitable access to affordable sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for women and girls with disability.

Initiative 3

International Disability Rights Dialogue

We will establish an annual International Disability Rights Dialogue with civil society from Australia and the Indo-Pacific to inform priorities for Australia's international human rights advocacy. We will advocate for greater profile for the voices of people with disability from Australia and our region on the global stage.

Case study 2

Empowering Cambodian entrepreneurs with disability through Regional Trade for Development

Australia's Regional Trade for Development (RT4D) supports Cambodian entrepreneurs with disability through comprehensive intellectual property education and strategic brand development training. In partnership with Cambodia's Department of Intellectual Property and the Cambodian Physical Therapy Association, RT4D developed dedicated training and materials that were used in a training course to upskill 89 participants from micro, small and medium enterprises, including 20 people with disability. A dedicated adviser also assisted participants in developing and registering a trademark logo. Participants reported that the project was their first experience of receiving targeted assistance and said they believed the new knowledge would help them engage more deeply in trade, bringing benefits to their businesses and their communities.

Priority 3. Promote the preconditions for inclusion

We will promote the preconditions for inclusion across our international engagement, investing in enabling projects and raising awareness of their critical role in building more equitable and inclusive systems.

We will support partners at all levels to use the preconditions as a guiding framework to remove barriers to the equal participation of people with disability, from inaccessible meetings to inadequate social protection systems. In particular, we will work with our partners in the Pacific to achieve our collective *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* ambition to recognise, accelerate and apply the preconditions for inclusion in the region. We will also increase our support for equitable access to assistive technology across the Pacific (see Initiative 4).

Box 4

What are the preconditions for inclusion?

For people with disability to participate fully and meaningfully, certain settings – or preconditions – need to be in place.

The *2050 Strategy Implementation Plan 2023–2030* commits to accelerating six preconditions based on a model developed by the Pacific Disability Forum, which includes:¹⁵

- **Accessibility** – All barriers to access must be removed, including ensuring buildings, transport, services, communications systems and information adhere to universal design principles and are accessible to all
- **Assistive technology** – Products such as wheelchairs, hearing aids and screen readers can be critical enablers to the full and meaningful participation of some people with disability
- **Support services** – Similarly, some people need services such as sign language interpretation, daily living assistance and supported decision-making
- **Social protection** – Having disability can increase the cost of living by up to 40 per cent of average income.¹⁶ Robust social protection systems can help offset these costs and transform the lives of people with disability and their families
- **Community-based inclusive development** – Development efforts should be as inclusive as possible, with people with disability living in and receiving supports in the community rather than in segregated settings
- **Non-discrimination** – Removing discrimination and its root causes must be a cross-cutting priority.

We will advocate for:

- systems-level change through fulfilment of the preconditions for inclusion at all levels
- stronger legal and policy frameworks that empower, support and protect people with disability, including antidiscrimination legislation, supported decision-making, transparent and accountable justice systems, and inclusive electoral processes
- recognition that reasonable accommodation, assistive technology and support services are critical enablers of education, employment and community participation, and that not providing these adjustments can be a form of discrimination

- the availability of information and communications products in accessible formats, recognising that access to information can promote human rights and support sustainable development (see Case study 3)
- robust disability-inclusive social protection systems that can transform lives.

We will act by:

- investing in projects that improve access to high-quality, affordable assistive technology, and supporting the systems, policies and personnel required to sustain assistive technology supply chains and ongoing maintenance
- advancing accessibility for people with disability in new development infrastructure investments supported by Australia, including through locally relevant guidance on universal design principles that can be integrated into relevant programs
- supporting partner governments to develop and implement disability-inclusive social protection systems
- increasing the number of Australian Volunteers placements in disability service providers, with OPDs, and in positions that support assistive technology, inclusive education and healthcare systems
- raising the profile of the care and support economy as a critical piece of both disability equity and gender equality
- supporting locally led development efforts through our Development Partnership Plans.

We will support partners at all levels to use the preconditions as a guiding framework to remove barriers to the equal participation of people with disability, from inaccessible meetings to inadequate social protection systems.

Initiative 4

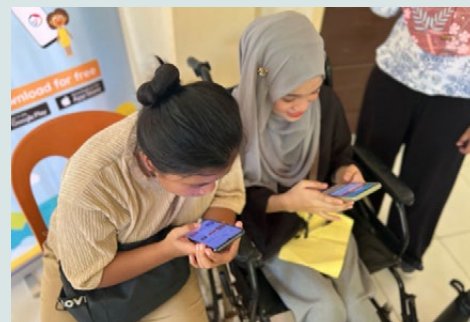
Increasing access to assistive technology

We will increase our support for equitable access to assistive technology across the Indo-Pacific. This will include enabling children in schools to access high-quality vision, hearing and mobility screening and affordable, high-quality devices. We will deepen our partnership with the ATscale Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, bringing this innovative global public-private partnership into the region.

Case study 3

Promoting accessible reproductive health information with the Oky app (Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea)

Due to stigma, negative social norms and a lack of information in accessible formats, girls and women with disability often experience difficulty in managing their menstruation with dignity. To help address some of the stigma and shame surrounding menstruation, Australia supports the Oky app – the first period tracker and menstruation education app co-designed with girls, for girls. Australia’s support to Oky in the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea provides accessible, contextualised content for girls with disability. It supports girls and their carers to manage menstruation in a more informed and independent way. To better reflect the realities of girls with disability, local OPDs and girls with disability are active stakeholders in co-creation, user testing, marketing and dissemination.



Sahera Matabalao, a 22-year-old Youth Leader from Maguindanao, demonstrating the offline feature by sharing the Oky Period Tracker app with her friend. Credit: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)



Credit: DFAT

In *Australia's Humanitarian Policy*, we committed to ensuring that the needs of people with disability are integrated across our humanitarian and disaster risk reduction efforts.

Priority 4: Support equity in humanitarian assistance and climate action

Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of natural hazards and exacerbating community vulnerabilities across the globe. Around 3.3 to 3.6 billion people live in highly climate-vulnerable countries,¹⁷ with people with disability among those most impacted by its effects.

Humanitarian emergencies, including disasters and conflicts, amplify existing inequalities and introduce new barriers for people with disability. During disaster events, people with disability are up to four times more likely to be injured or die,¹⁸ and are more at risk of being left behind during evacuations.¹⁹ Measures to adapt and build resilience to climate impacts that include people with disability on an equal basis are urgently needed.

In *Australia's Humanitarian Policy*, we committed to ensuring that the needs of people with disability are integrated across our humanitarian and disaster risk reduction efforts. This includes supporting people with disability to be better prepared for disasters and crises. We will increase the availability of assistive technology and products in our humanitarian emergency relief supplies for use in disaster responses in our region (see Initiative 5).

We will **advocate** for:

- amplifying the voices of people with disability in all areas of humanitarian assistance and climate action, including climate mitigation, adaptation, disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery

- inclusion of disability equity and rights in regional and global discussions on climate, conflict and disaster risks, which currently insufficiently consider the needs and perspectives of people with disability
- climate-informed universal design, reasonable accommodation and gender, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) principles in development, climate and disaster risk investments
- accessibility as an essential component of disaster responses, including through early warning systems and communications, evacuations, humanitarian emergency supply kits, pre-positioning storage facilities, and relief distribution
- greater awareness of the need to empower and protect people with disability in situations of conflict, as reflected in UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019) on people with disability in situations of armed conflict.

We will act by:

- mainstreaming disability equity in our humanitarian responses, disaster risk reduction and climate action
- working with partners in the international humanitarian system so that policies, preparation and responses are disability-responsive, create opportunities for leadership by people with disability and include strong accountability measures
- working with partners in the Indo-Pacific to support their resilience to climate change and ensure their actions are inclusive of people with disability
- increasing access to, and provision of, assistive technology and support services in crisis settings
- sharing expertise and finding opportunities for joint action through multilateral forums
- when requested, providing technical support to partner countries to improve their reporting of disability, gender and age disaggregated data through monitoring of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and to build their capacity through training and peer learning exchanges.

Initiative 5

Humanitarian preparedness and disability equity

Advancing disability equity and rights is a focus of Australian humanitarian assistance. Through *Australia's Humanitarian Policy: Making a difference for people in crisis*, we will ensure that the needs of people with disability are integrated across our humanitarian and disaster risk reduction efforts.

Australia's Humanitarian Logistics Capability investment is piloting the inclusion of assistive products in humanitarian disaster response, in partnership with CBM Australia. Following consultation across the Pacific, the assistive products chosen include wheelchairs, communications boards, noise-cancelling headphones and earplugs. Basic product information has been developed to accompany each assistive product, including product cards in accessible and easy-to-read formats. We are working closely with local OPDs and partner governments on how products can be deployed most effectively.

Priority 5: Strengthen the evidence base

Data on the prevalence of disability is unreliable in many countries, significantly underrepresenting the actual level of need. While the World Health Organization estimates a global prevalence of 16 per cent, official statistics from some countries report disability prevalence as low as 3 per cent. This impacts resource allocation and government decision-making.

To ensure our international engagement continues to have meaningful positive impacts for people with disability, we will increase our investment in performance, analysis, data and research to support evidence for reform (see Case study 4).



Case study 4

Credit: World Bank

KOTAKU (Indonesia)

Through our support for a World Bank study on the Australia-funded Indonesia KOTAKU project, we are improving the evidence base for integrating universal accessibility (UA) into urban infrastructure design. Promoting UA and building the evidence base were two priorities raised consistently throughout the Strategy consultation process as challenges for people with disability. *The Economic Impact of Universal Accessibility in Tertiary Infrastructure Projects* study provided crucial insights into how investing in UA can positively impact small-scale projects, and highlighted the benefits of scaling up disability-inclusive tertiary infrastructure. The study demonstrated that prioritising UA can create more equitable and sustainable urban environments.

Australia has embedded the OECD-DAC disability policy marker in our development assistance systems, and will promote greater use by other OECD-DAC donors.

Australia is a leader in using the disability policy marker established by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) in 2018.²⁰ The marker provides a global standard designed to track official development assistance (ODA) flows to disability equity – and help identify opportunities to improve the precision, transparency and efficiency of ODA.²¹ Australia has embedded the OECD-DAC disability policy marker in our international development program and will promote its use to our OECD-DAC development partners.

We will **advocate** for:

- increased use of the OECD-DAC disability policy marker by other donors to mobilise and track global development finance flows to disability equity
- enhanced disability research and data collection by partners at all levels, in partnership with OPDs
- better analysis of existing disability data and research, with greater partnership between researchers, statistics agencies and OPDs.

We will **act** by:

- improving the performance of Australian development assistance and setting our first ever performance target on disability equity (see Initiative 6)
- ensuring new international development investments are informed by a disability analysis
- investing in evidence-based capacity building for our staff and partners to increase our reach and impact
- investing in data and research on disability equity and rights in the Indo-Pacific, in partnership with OPDs, focused on best practice initiatives and stronger disability prevalence data
- supporting the capacity of national statistics offices and OPDs to collect, analyse, share and use disability disaggregated data.

Initiative 6

Stronger performance on disability equity

Australia will establish our first ever performance target on disability equity for our international development program: a phased performance target of 60 per cent of development and humanitarian investments performing effectively on disability equity by 2026, and 70 per cent by 2030. Progress and achievement will be assessed through DFAT's annual Investment Performance Reporting rounds. To support this target, we will strengthen our investment in technical assistance, reporting, and staff capability.



Credit: CBM Australia

Chapter 4

Our approach



International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy consultations in Suva, Fiji. Credit: DFAT

Australia's approach to disability equity and rights will be guided by a commitment to partnership, respect, listening and learning. We believe the voices, needs and aspirations of people with disability should be at the centre of everything we do, and we are strongly committed to leaving no one behind. Our approach will be underpinned by five key concepts.

Supporting local leadership and decision-making

Advancing equity and rights for people with disability requires strong leadership and commitment at the local level. We are committed to supporting and empowering partner governments to implement their own solutions, take accountability and exercise sovereignty over their development trajectories. Many important policy levers, including social protection, health and education systems, are the responsibility of our partners. We will respond to their requests for technical support, share our own journey and ongoing challenges when asked, and encourage others to share their experiences of implementing the CRPD.

We are committed to supporting and empowering partner governments to implement their own solutions, take accountability and have sovereignty over their development trajectories.

Working in partnership

Disability equity and rights can only be achieved through strong collaborations. Australia will champion disability rights as a cross-cutting issue at international forums including the UN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Pacific Islands Forum and the Commonwealth, and will promote coalitions that advance equity and rights. We will work with trading partners to advance inclusive and sustainable trade policies through channels such as the World Trade Organization and future free trade agreements.

Partnership with OPDs that are focused on our mutual priorities will be an integral part of how Australia implements this Strategy. We will leverage partners' technical expertise and networks, elevate their voices, and provide enhanced capacity-building supports.

Do no harm

People with disability experience violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse at significantly higher rates than people without disability.²² Some groups are at even greater risk, including women and girls with disability, LGBTQIA+ people with disability, First Nations people with disability, and people with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disability.

Through our work we will identify, mitigate and manage these risks. We will strengthen the use of disability analysis across our research, policies and programs to avoid unintended negative consequences. We will set higher standards for DFAT staff and our implementing partners and bolster our safeguarding mechanisms to ensure we do no harm. We will maintain a zero-tolerance approach to exploitation and abuse. We will ensure that robust, accessible reporting and accountability mechanisms are in place.

We will maintain a zero-tolerance approach to exploitation and abuse.

Leave no one behind

The UN's *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* establishes an ambitious plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. At its core is the pledge to leave no one behind – including people with disability – in efforts to achieve the SDGs. Australia is a strong supporter of the SDGs and is committed to ensuring people with disability are not left behind as the world develops.

Twin-track efforts

Australia will continue its long-term twin-track approach by supporting both targeted and mainstream approaches to disability equity. Targeted approaches address the specific priorities and needs of people with disability, and mainstream approaches work to actively include people with disability in all policies and programs. Mainstreaming disability equity requires deep expertise, resourcing and commitment. A combination of these two approaches at all levels is critical to achieving the vision set out in this Strategy.



The Australia–Indonesia Partnership towards an Inclusive Society (INKLUSI). Credit: INKLUSI

Chapter 5

Performance, accountability and transparency

We will be accountable to Australians and our partners through improved transparency.

Our approach reflects Australia’s commitment to improved performance, accountability and transparency on disability equity.

Improved performance will be supported by additional resources to training, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation of Australia’s efforts to promote disability equity.

We will be accountable to Australians and to our partners through improved transparency. Progress towards our phased performance target will be assessed through DFAT’s annual Investment Performance Reporting rounds, and achievement will be assessed in 2026–27 and 2030–31. We will report on our overall ODA performance and expenditure on disability through the annual Performance of Australian Development Cooperation, ODA Budget Summary, and ODA Statistical Summary reports, as well as through the online transparency portal.

At the regional and country levels, our Development Partnership Plans (DPPs) are informed by disability analysis as part of a GEDSI analysis. DPPs include outcomes related to advancing disability equity and indicators to monitor progress. We will report on these through mid-cycle reviews.

We recognise that the Australian Government’s strength and influence as an advocate for disability equity on the world stage is linked to our efforts to improve disability equity at home. Within DFAT, this means actively involving staff with disability in our foreign policy and making real improvements to our workplaces, systems and culture to achieve equitable outcomes for staff with disability. DFAT’s *Inclusion, Equity and Diversity Strategy* outlines our approach (see Text box 5).

This Strategy will guide Australia’s next steps as we shift the dial from inclusion to equity through our international engagement. Meaningful change in the lives of people with disability requires sustained, long-term commitment, evolution and continuous improvement. Through these principles, priorities and our approaches, Australia will help build a fairer, more equitable world.



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Inclusion, Equity and Diversity Strategy

Embracing diversity for global influence

2024–2027



Box 5

Walking the talk: Disability diversity at DFAT

DFAT aims to reflect the diversity of Australia's communities in our workforce and provide safe and inclusive workplaces. We have a unique role and responsibility in managing Australia's whole-of-government overseas network of 120 embassies, consulates, high commissions and representative offices. These are workplaces where people from across the Australian Government come to work.

Our *Inclusion, Equity and Diversity Strategy – Embracing Diversity for Global Influence* outlines DFAT's approach to building workplaces that project diversity, where staff feel respected and valued, and where everyone has equitable access to opportunities. The Strategy sets out how DFAT will work towards disability equity in our workplaces, including for the 6 per cent of staff who identify as having disability²³ and the 5 per cent who identify as neurodivergent.²⁴ Key lines of effort include identifying barriers, improving accessibility across our physical, digital and collaborative environments, providing better access to assistive technology and supporting carers. DFAT's Disability Network and our Disability Champion also help promote disability equity and advocate for staff with disability and those who are carers.

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