

Inclusion International Submission to DFAT New International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy

Inclusion International is an international network of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Our network includes more than two hundred members from around the world.

Our members are organisations of people with intellectual disabilities and organisations that promote the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. Our members are local, national, and international organisations.

In this submission, we will share the findings of a recent report that reviews the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Official Development Assistance (ODA). We also include feedback from members in the Asia Pacific region who shared their experiences and ideas for this submission.

Excluded from the Excluded report on Official Development Assistance

In 2020, Inclusion International published the report “Excluded from The Excluded”.

The report looked at including people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Official Development Assistance (ODA). The report also looked at how funders followed or did not follow what the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) says. [The full report is available here.](#)

The report shows that development projects did not include people with intellectual disabilities. 99.98% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding between 2014 and 2018 did not include people with intellectual disabilities.

In many cases, projects funded by Official Development Assistance (ODA) supported segregation and other human rights violations against people with disabilities. 36% of the Official Development Assistance that included people with intellectual disabilities in 2018 did not follow what the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) says. For example, financing education systems that are not inclusive, such as special schools or building housing or services that institutionalise people with intellectual disabilities.

Recommendations of “Excluded from the Excluded” Report

Donors have the power to challenge the systems. Donors can help ensure the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

The report recommends that donor agencies do what they say so that “no one is left behind” by:

- Fund projects with the primary goal of building communities that include people with intellectual disabilities.

- Make sure that all projects being funded include people with intellectual disabilities in their design. These projects should budget for accessible communication and inclusive decision-making.
- Make sure all projects follow what the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) says. Commit to only fund projects that promote inclusion in communities.
- Give opportunities first to Organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to be part of Official Development assistance delivery channels so that they can design and deliver projects.
- Collect data on the inclusion of people with disabilities and people with intellectual disabilities and their families in official development assistance projects. Report and share this data in an accessible way.

Recommendations from Inclusion International in consultation with members in Asia Pacific

Below are Inclusion International's responses to the questions [DFAT proposed in its call for submission](#). These submissions were created in consultation with our members in Asia Pacific.

What are the most important things Australia should work on to help ensure disability rights internationally?

- Projects that promote self-advocacy, family empowerment, and leadership of organisations of persons with disabilities (ODPs) will help ensure development work follows what the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) says. By investing in self-advocates, family members of people with intellectual disabilities, and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (ODPs), you are supporting the development of more voices for inclusion. This will help build more inclusive communities and better understand human rights.
- Humanitarian emergencies. People with disabilities are often left behind (literally) and excluded from emergency relief. Emergency help is often not accessible or suitable for what people with intellectual disabilities need. All humanitarian aid should explicitly include people with intellectual disabilities.
- Violence, abuse and neglect of people with intellectual disabilities is still a big issue in our communities across the region. There should be a focus on the issue of gender-based violence against girls and women with intellectual disability.
- Inclusive education. Stopping segregation in the early years will help societies be more inclusive in other areas, such as employment and leisure. Inclusive education is critical to people with intellectual disabilities, who are generally the most excluded and discriminated against

- Projects that promote deinstitutionalisation and Article 19 of the CRPD so that there is community-based support and services for everyone. All work in developing inclusive services and communities should be accessible. This means thinking about buildings, transport, how our cities are built, and the accessibility of information and communication. This will help to make sure that people with intellectual disabilities can take part alongside everyone else. No projects or work should contribute to building segregated or “special” housing and services.
- Inclusive employment aligns with CRPD Article 27 and its General Comment 8. People with intellectual disabilities should have equal opportunities to get a job in the community like anyone else. Projects should support this to happen. Projects should work with employers to understand how to support and include people with intellectual disabilities in the workforce. No projects should contribute to training centres or workplaces that are just for people with intellectual disabilities. These are sheltered workshops and do not follow what the CRPD says.
- People with the highest support needs, such as people with profound and multiple disabilities or people with high communication needs, are the furthest left behind and are rarely included in the community globally, even within the disability movement. Projects should be created to consider this group’s needs.

What are the most effective approaches to progress these priorities?

- Do not fund any projects that promote segregation or violate the rights of people with intellectual disabilities.
- Consult people with intellectual disabilities, their families, and representative groups to understand what inclusion means to them and how they want to be included in their communities.
- Fund organisations that build the capacity of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, such as self-advocacy organisations.
- Raise awareness of the rights of people with intellectual disabilities across the region and at a governmental level, including at The Australian Government. There is still minimal knowledge and low expectations around people with intellectual disabilities. All awareness-raising activities should be created or led by people with intellectual disabilities and their organisations.
- Share the government policies, strategies and processes that work when including people with disabilities. Help to build connections between governments.
- Fund and partner with organisations with a proven record of successful inclusive development across regions and running evidence-based programs that empower people with disabilities.

- Share case studies and resources about projects that have been funded. Include transparent step-by-step processes and the why and how of running an excellent inclusive project.
- Encourage larger international organisations to focus on disability inclusion. Many prominent international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) do not focus on disability and exclude people with intellectual disabilities from their activities rather than concentrate on helping the most left behind.
- Identify, collaborate with, and strengthen local organisations. Support organisations to build connections between local, national and international organisations of people with disabilities.
- Support initiatives that guide the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. For example, the global guidelines on inclusive participation, [Listen Include Respect](#), were created by Inclusion International and Down Syndrome International networks.

How can DFAT support the role of and partner with organisations of persons with disabilities?

- Fund opportunities for cross-cultural learning between organisations of persons with disabilities in the region. Sharing different perspectives and exchanging knowledge, ideas, challenges, and experiences related to inclusion can help create more inclusive and effective work. For example, they support regional members of Inclusion International to connect or fund site visits and field trips for global disability advocates.
- Recognising that excellent inclusion initiatives exist in the region and globally. There is no need to recreate the wheel but give a platform to the organisations of persons with disabilities (ODPs) doing practical work.
- Form or fund consortiums between Australian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and regional organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to help grow operations.

What are the biggest challenges to advancing disability rights internationally?

- Widespread rights violations against people with intellectual disabilities make prioritising and addressing them difficult.
- Limited funding, as poorer countries have many competing priorities for reducing poverty overall. Multiple areas of disadvantage (economic, climate, political) in the Asia-Pacific region means disability rights get sidelined. In addition, disability is not being prioritised and funded as a development issue.
- Negative attitudes and beliefs about people with intellectual disabilities are deeply set in society. This leads to continuing discrimination, mistreatment, and low beliefs about what disabled people can do.
- Exclusion from education is a critical barrier for people with intellectual disabilities. Stigma, discrimination and lack of awareness create barriers to inclusive education, which stops

students with intellectual disabilities from learning and building lives alongside their peers without disabilities.

- Lack of access to assistive technologies to help people with intellectual disabilities be included in their organisations and communities.
- Most people with intellectual disabilities are excluded from employment.
- Not enough focus on healthcare, including mental health support.
- Language barriers and high travel costs limit collaboration.
- There is not enough progress or accountability by governments to follow human rights conventions like the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). General comments are often disregarded as legally non-binding.
- There is a lack of collaboration between human rights movements. There are gaps in the inclusion of disability rights by the movements of women, children, and indigenous peoples.

What are the opportunities that can help Australia to improve disability rights internationally?

- The main opportunities involve utilising global partnerships and networks, supporting significant international legislative and advocacy efforts, facilitating knowledge sharing across borders, and removing language barriers to providing rights-focused disability programs/training.
- Leverage relationships and networks with major international disability organisations like the International Disability Alliance and Inclusion International and their member groups.
- Support the attendance of key global and regional events on disability rights issues.
- Support and learn from landmark legislation and accessibility initiatives in other countries that promote inclusion and employment of people with disabilities.
- Collaborate with the United Nations and their Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to advance global disability rights efforts.
- Enable international and cross-organizational collaboration to share best practices and resources that can progress disability rights across countries.
- Proactively provide training materials and resources translated into multiple languages to increase global adoption.

More information

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