



## Australia's New International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy

### Inputs provided by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

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With the development of a new International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy, Australia has an opportunity to further extend its global leadership in championing disability rights and the leadership of persons with disabilities. Central to this should be a focus on ensuring that disasters do not further discriminate against, and drive the inequalities faced by, persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters and continue to experience barriers to participation and societal exclusion which influences their resilience and capacity to recover from disasters. They are frequently the most affected by natural hazards, climate-induced disasters, and global health emergencies, yet are rarely included in leadership and decision-making on reducing disaster risk. 80 per cent of persons with disabilities reside in low- and middle-income countries, many of which are highly climate vulnerable.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, which increases their vulnerability and exposure to hazards.<sup>2</sup> As a result, they endure more significant human and material losses during and after disasters, with mortality rates sometimes two to four times greater than those of persons without disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, we are facing more disaster risks than ever before. In the past twenty years climate-related disasters have almost doubled compared to the previous twenty years. Driven by climate and conflict, often interrelated, humanitarian needs are at their highest ever, with one in every 33 people globally in need of assistance and protection.<sup>4</sup> In October 2023, the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide was estimated at 114 million.<sup>5</sup> Using the World Health Organization's estimated global

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<sup>1</sup> "For example, 54.3% and 27% of the adult populations of Afghanistan and Syria respectively have a disability." United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and International Disability Alliance, "Disability, displacement and climate change", April 2021. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/media/disability-displacement-and-climate-change> (accessed 16 November 2023).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Goals, by, for and with Persons with Disabilities* (New York, United Nations, 2019); Sébastien Jodoin, Katherine Lofts, Amanda Bowie-Edwards, Laurence Leblanc, Naomi Gupta and Chloe Rourke, *Disability Rights in National Climate Policies: Status Report* (Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism and IDA, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Goals, by, for and with Persons with Disabilities* (New York, United Nations, 2019); Sébastien Jodoin, Katherine Lofts, Amanda Bowie-Edwards, Laurence Leblanc, Naomi Gupta and Chloe Rourke, *Disability Rights in National Climate Policies: Status Report* (Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism and IDA, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> UNDRR Policy Brief "Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change" 2021

<sup>5</sup> Filippo Grandi, "High Commissioner's Statement to the United Nations Security Council", UNHCR, 31 October 2023. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/news/speeches-and-statements/high-commissioner-s-statement-united-nations-security-council>

disability prevalence rate of 16 per cent, at least 18.2 million people are forcibly displaced persons with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> Ensuring that disaster risk reduction is prioritised in every development and humanitarian investment is essential to ensure that gains are sustainable and long-term value for money.

To better understand the progress made in disability inclusion in DRR, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) conducted the 2023 Global Survey on Persons with Disabilities and Disasters as a follow-up to the 2013 Global Survey.<sup>7</sup> The survey aimed to identify if persons with disabilities are prepared for potential disasters, whether early warning and risk information is available and accessible, if persons with disabilities are aware of DRR plans at national and local levels, and if persons with disabilities are participating in DRR decision-making and planning.

**The results show limited progress in disability inclusion over the past 10 years, with no significant differences across the regions. Key findings include:**

- 56% of respondents reported not being aware of or not having access to disaster risk information in accessible formats in their communities
- While adequate early warning enables persons with disabilities to evacuate with fewer difficulties, even with sufficient advance warning 17% of persons with disabilities would still face a lot of difficulties evacuating, and 6% would be unable to evacuate independently at all.
- Only 8% reported that local DRR plans addressed the specific needs of persons with disabilities.
- 86 per cent of respondents reported not participating in community-based DRR decision-making in both 2013 and 2023. Yet 57 per cent of respondents expressed willingness to participate in community-based DRR.
- 25 per cent of respondents reported the availability of a mechanism for participation by persons with disabilities in community-based risk management and reduction processes.
- 16 per cent reported there are now dedicated leadership roles for disability inclusion in governance structures. However, personnel with disability expertise are often not assigned to these roles.
- 84 per cent of persons with disabilities reported not having a personal preparedness plan for disasters.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) recognises that a “disability [...] perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk reduction policies and practices,” and that “empowering [...] persons with disabilities to publicly lead and promote [...] universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches is key.” Yet disability inclusion continues to be under resourced and under prioritized with limited initiatives to increase inclusion. Despite some improvement in supportive policies and legislation for disability-inclusive DRR, implementation remains slow and uneven, often driven by stand-alone projects and non-state actors with short-term funding.

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(accessed 16 November 2023). Key trends and the latest numbers of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced and stateless persons worldwide are available from the UNHCR Global Trend Reports, available

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organization, *Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities* (Geneva, WHO, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> The survey was conducted between January and March 2023 and resulted in a total of 6,342 responses from 132 countries. For comparison, the 2013 survey resulted in 5,717 responses from 137 countries.

Indeed, the midterm review of the Sendai Framework highlighted that the majority of member states acknowledge that gender equality, disability inclusion and broader social equity issues are essential for reducing disaster risk, however a persistent gap in implementation remains and accelerated efforts and investments in these areas are required over the next seven years. Member states themselves have identified a number of specific measures that could enhance gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion which need greater support to be actioned. Aligned with this, Australia's international disability equity and rights strategy should aim to:

**1. Support countries with technical assistance in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in particular its article 11.**

- Policies and legislation must be fully compliant with CRPD. Article 11 of the CRPD is a unique provision, which for the first time in a United Nations human rights treaty, explicitly refers to obligations in situations of risk, including “humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters.” This article recognizes the particular vulnerability of persons with disabilities during situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies and requires states to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including conflict, humanitarian emergencies and natural-hazard events. In the context of disaster risk reduction, it is important to recognise that while the CRPD specifically references ‘natural disasters’, disaster risk is the result of choices, or lack of thereof, of a socio-political-economic nature, hence while hazards may be natural, disasters are not.<sup>8</sup> UNDRR is currently contributing to the development by the Committee of a General Comment on article 11, which will enhance a preventative, inclusive and multi-hazard approach to disaster risk. In addition to the Committee’s Guidelines on periodic reporting, which contains key references to the Sendai Framework, the upcoming General Comment will help clarify the legal foundation of disaster risk reduction, support a human-rights based approach to DRR, and make DRR inclusive.

**2. Widen and improve the use of disability data to better understand disaster risk, improve reporting and measurement of impact, and to facilitate evidence-informed decision-making.**

- Disability data needs to improve to better understand disaster risk, report and measure impact, and facilitate evidence-informed decision-making. The importance of disability data is recognized but not consistently reported. Beyond prevalence data, disability data that seeks to understand barriers and quantify efforts to remove them is required.<sup>9</sup> A priority should be addressing the challenges that hinder the collection of disability disaggregated data such as additional costs, time and resources, data privacy concerns, and outdated data infrastructure.

**3. Increase investments in disability-inclusive DRR, including direct resourcing of OPDs in recognition of their leadership and contributions to achieving Sendai Framework outcomes.**

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<sup>8</sup> UNDRR (2022), Persons with disabilities in situations of risk: a scoping study on Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2023, July). Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Thematic report on disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction in the Pacific.

- Investments in disability inclusion in DRR are increasing. However, it remains seriously under-resourced with the true costs of accessibility underestimated in programme budgets.<sup>10</sup> Anticipatory action and the use of existing social protection mechanisms are promising approaches to target persons with disabilities.

#### **4. Move from isolated and stand-alone initiatives to the full integration of disability-inclusive DRR across programmes and practice.**

- While alignment of disability and DRR policy has improved, it is still not being translated into action, including at the local and community levels. A fundamental shift is required from isolated and stand-alone initiatives to the full integration of disability-inclusive DRR across all programmes and practice. Currently examples of inclusive DRR practice are not clearly resulting in positive outcomes or equity for persons with disabilities.<sup>11</sup> Ensuring that universal design principles are applied in DRR, including to ensure accessible and resilient infrastructure, facilities, and transportation is essential.

#### **5. Avoid tokenism and box ticking and proactively ensure the full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in DRR decision-making.**

- Efforts to include persons with disabilities have increased and OPDs are increasingly engaging with, and being consulted by, governments in the implementation of the Sendai Framework.<sup>12</sup> Governments and DRR stakeholders must ensure equity between persons with and without disabilities in all measures to reduce and prevent disaster risk. The Pacific has good examples of leadership by persons with disabilities in DRR, including women with disabilities. This leadership needs to be better recognized, acknowledged, and built on. Dedicated leadership roles for disability experts in decision making is essential – persons with disabilities should be included in all policymaking and implementation for disaster resilience. Necessary support to enhance participation comes from both individual and societal domains.<sup>13</sup> On an individual level, support involves improving knowledge, competence and confidence. On a societal level, it encompasses provisions for physical access and infrastructure, livelihood/economic empowerment and cash support/social security, as well as increased awareness and policy commitments to ensure the safety and protection of displaced and stateless persons with disabilities in situations of risk and disasters. To enhance meaningful and impactful participation, it is therefore essential to build partnerships and adopt a dual approach that involves individuals and institutions working together effectively.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2023, July). Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Thematic report on disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction in the Pacific.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2023, July). Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Thematic report on disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction in the Pacific.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2023, July). Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030: Thematic report on disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction in the Pacific.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2023). *Disability, displacement and disaster resilience: ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of forced displacement and statelessness*. Geneva.

## 6. Address underlying risk factors faced by persons with disabilities that exacerbate their disaster risk

- Higher poverty and inadequate housing increase vulnerability to hazards and displacement among persons with disabilities.<sup>14</sup> These include poverty and inequity that are exacerbated by limited access to livelihoods, education, and the ability of individuals or communities to effectively mitigate and respond to disaster risks. Women with disabilities face additional risks related to gender-based violence based on both their disability and gender. Governments and DRR stakeholders must take actions to better address intersectionality and diversity in all aspects of DRR policy and practice. Persons with disabilities incur extra costs during disasters which can amount to 30–40 per cent of their average income, further straining their limited resources.<sup>15</sup> Often the value of social benefits for persons with disabilities is inadequate and lower than other types of social assistance despite higher living costs for persons with disabilities, highlighting a systemic neglect.<sup>16</sup>

Processes of inclusion are only effective when they result in equitable change. This requires political will, prioritization, and investment. Investments in disability inclusive disaster risk reduction are investments in whole-of-society resilience and are critical to achieving global commitments.

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<sup>14</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Advancing Disability-inclusive Action on Internal Displacement* (Geneva, IDMC, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022–31 January 2023* (OHCHR, 2023)

<sup>16</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Advancing Disability-inclusive Action on Internal Displacement* (Geneva, IDMC, 2022)