

Technical brief:

## Disability Inclusion and Climate priorities

This brief provides short guidance on how to take a disability inclusive approach to climate adaptations, green economy and sustainable cities.

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## 1. Achieving a sustainable future for all

A sustainable approach to development is critical for the protection of our planet's resources. Global normative and development frameworks commit development actors such as the European Union to ensure external action priorities contribute to a greener world. The European Green Deal adopted in 2020 includes commitments to work with partner countries capacities in several areas such as mitigation, adaptation and supporting the transition towards green and circular economies. Included also is a focus on diplomacy and the EU's role as a key donor on climate finance.<sup>1</sup>

The transition to a greener world is not only about the economic and social systems' transitions that are needed, but also about ensuring those most impacted by climate change, such as persons with disabilities, are part of the transition and able to benefit from new opportunities that may arise through new ways of working. Understanding the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities is an emerging issue with evidence being gathered by a range of different stakeholders including the UN, academic researchers and civil society but it remains quite new to the field of climate policy and programming.

This technical brief draws together findings from available research and guidance to help guide EU staff involved in working on climate priorities in external action to take a disability inclusive approach.

## 2. Specific concerns of persons with disabilities and climate change

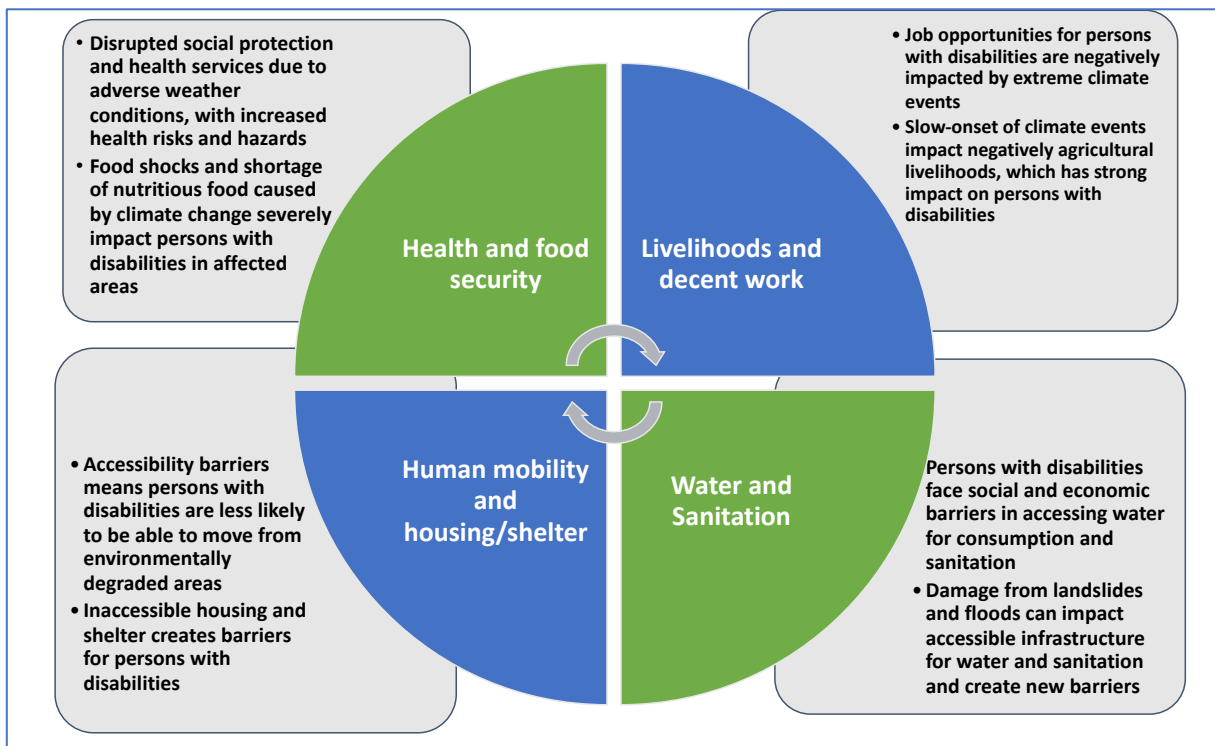
The lives of persons with disabilities are affected by climate change as with all other people, but due to discrimination, marginalisation and social and economic barriers, they may experience the effects of climate change differently and more intensely than others may. Some areas where persons with disabilities have their human rights negatively affected include food security and nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation, healthcare services and medicines, education and vocational training, adequate and safe housing and access to decent work. Persons with disabilities are also differently affected by climate change, for example, women with disabilities are often more impacted than men with disabilities and those living in poverty may feel it more intensely. Graphic one highlights the disruption and challenges for persons with disabilities because of climate change that were identified by the OHCHR in 2020.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [A European Green Deal](#). Striving to be the first climate-neutral continent. 2021.

<sup>2</sup> 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 OHCHR.

**Graphic 1 Impact of climate change on persons with disabilities**



### 3. Developing disability inclusive-climate programmes

The EU’s focus on climate in external action can be broadly described as supporting policy and systems changes in programme countries for sustainable development, including transitioning to become greener and sustainable economies and societies.<sup>3</sup> The outcomes of these policy priorities and programme interventions will have an impact on many diverse groups, including persons with disabilities. In some situations, the impact can be negative on persons with disabilities, particularly interventions focused on climate mitigation and adaptation that do not acknowledge the needs of persons with disabilities. For example, measures to manage the increased occurrence of heatwaves combined with measures to reduce and renew energy supply might negatively affect persons with disabilities, who are more dependent on regular electricity supply for example to store medication, power assistive devices or lifesaving support, or to keep cool due to medical conditions. Thus, the involvement of persons with disabilities is crucial in discussing, planning and designing climate adaptation and mitigation measures.

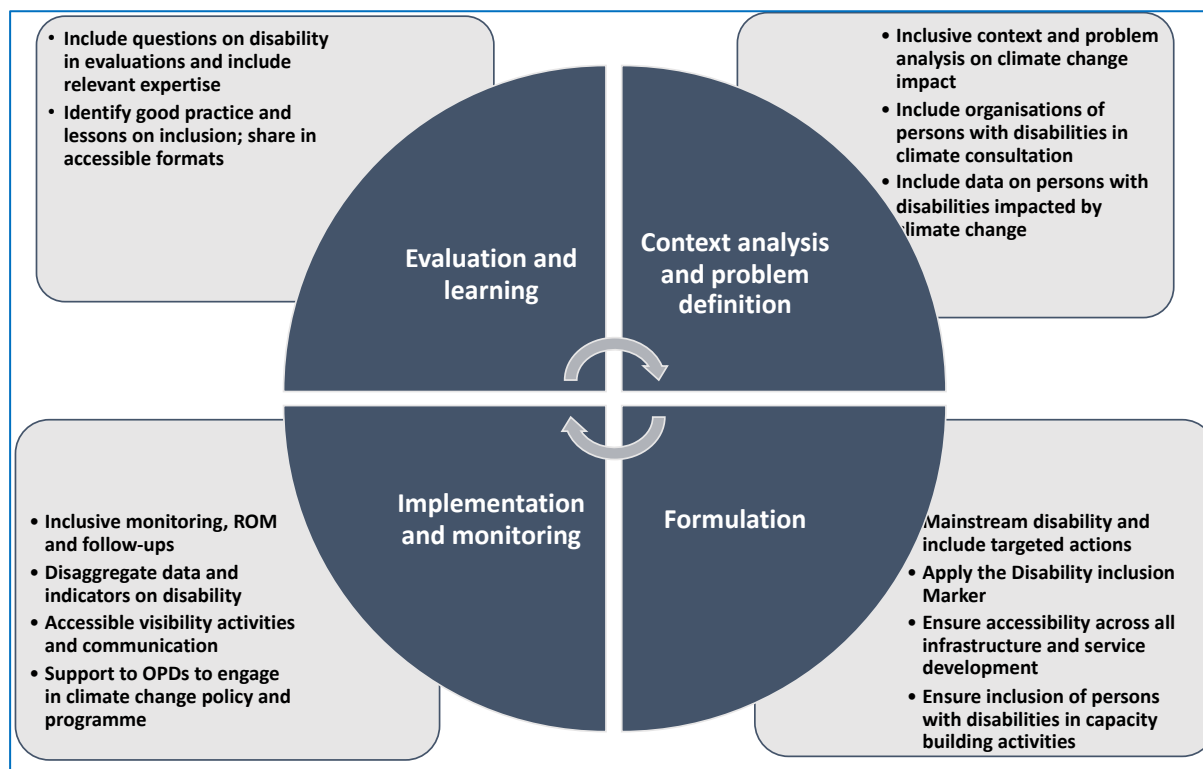
Other example is the fact that many persons with disabilities live in deprived areas that are more prone to weather hazards and climate change, and which often have poorly developed and inaccessible infrastructure. This puts them at higher risk and therefore Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) need to be included in the measures planned to mitigate climate change and its impact.

This section provides some short practical guidance on how to mainstream disability in climate action taken under EU external action, focusing on a few areas relevant to persons with disabilities:

<sup>3</sup> INTPA (2020). Strategic Plan 2020 -2024, see generally theme 2,3 and 4.

- Inclusive participatory approach to developing national adaptation plans,
- An inclusive and just transition to green economy, and
- Accessible approach to developing sustainable cities for the future.

**Graphic 2 Entry points in the intervention cycle on disability and climate change**



### 3.1. Inclusive participatory approach to developing national adaptation plans

Including the perspective of persons with disabilities in the development of National Mitigation and Adaptation Plans (NAPs) is important, it is also a requirement for governments to do so in following the Paris Treaty and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 4 of the CRPD requires local and national governments to engage and consult with persons with disabilities and their representative organisation to ensure their opinions are included. Recent research shows there are gaps in disability inclusive climate policies and lack of consultation with organisations of persons with disabilities. A status report in 2022 showed that out of 195 countries reviewed, no government includes disability in its mitigation plans and only 45 governments include disability in their national adaptation plans.<sup>4</sup>

#### Box 1 Examples of disability inclusive adaptation plans

- **Zimbabwe’s National Adaptation Plan** includes specific obligations with respect to persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, such as: the promotion of user-friendly, climate

<sup>4</sup> McGill University and International Disability Alliance (2022). [Status Report on Disability Inclusion in National Climate Commitments and Policies](#).

smart technologies, and support for the development and dissemination of simplified meteorological and agrometeorological information.<sup>5</sup>

- **Nepal’s National Adaptation plan** highlights persons with disabilities from the perspective of their vulnerability to risks and hazards from climate change.<sup>6</sup>
- **New Zealand** for the development of their National Adaptation plan specifically targeted the disability community for input it’s development.<sup>7</sup>

Within national level consultations on adaptation and mitigation plans, persons with disabilities and their representative organisation must have opportunities to represent themselves and contribute to the solutions to address climate change and green transitions, as they best understand the problems they face. Sometimes to do this, they may need capacity building support and accessible information and communication on climate change, emergencies, and climate action. For guidance on how to organise inclusive meetings for development of climate adaptation and mitigation plans, consult the [practice note](#) to inclusive and accessible consultations and dialogues.

### 3.2. An inclusive and just transition to green economy

A priority for EU external action is a just transition to a low carbon green economy. The transition to a low carbon economy means that many workers will be displaced from their jobs, needing transitional support such as social protection. It will also create possibilities for retraining and new types of jobs, and in the longer term a more sustainable world.<sup>8</sup> This gives a good opportunity to reach out to the untapped potential of persons with disabilities. As programmes are implemented to support the transition in EU programme countries, thinking how to include persons with disabilities in the retraining and new job creation as well as in social protection programmes can be a way for the investments made by the EU to reach those who are most left behind.

Investment areas	Inclusion of persons with disabilities
<b>Public employment services, including any specialized green job employment services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In the planning stage of developing programmes to support green jobs (e.g. in the sectors of transport, agriculture, forestry, digitalisation and energy sector among others), ensure that the analysis undertaken shows areas where persons with disabilities can be employed.</li><li>• For public employment services, consider reaching out to organisations representing persons with</li></ul>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry for the Environment- Manatū Mō Te Taiao. (2022). [Climate change and disabled people: Have your say on the draft national adaptation plan](#). New Zealand.

<sup>8</sup> ILO’s *World Employment and Social Outlook (2018) Greening with jobs* reports that measures taken in the production and use of energy alone will lead to job losses of around 6 million as well as the creation of some 24 million jobs. The net increase of approximately 18 million jobs across the world will be the result of the adoption of sustainable practices, including changes in the energy mix, the projected growth in the use of electric vehicles, and increases in energy efficiency in existing and future buildings.

	<p>disabilities to keep them informed and updated of new employment services. They may also provide advice on accessibility and adaptations to employment programmes and facilities.</p>
<p><b>Green skills development, including TVET programmes, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship programmes,</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These programmes should mainstream disability and ensure targeted actions, such as outreach to persons with disabilities and their networks during recruitment phase.</li> <li>• Programmes that focus on building skills of youth, including young women’s skills development, should be inclusive of young persons with disabilities.</li> <li>• Education and training systems focused on conservation, agriculture, renewable energy, sustainable tourism or green urban design could directly make efforts to reach out and include trainees with disabilities and in doing so, equip them with the knowledge and competencies to compete in the emerging green jobs market.</li> <li>• Reasonable accommodation for trainees to participate on an equal basis would need to be provided.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Innovation and entrepreneurship, including development of new services and new products</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All innovative technologies that are invested in to facilitate greener ways of working should be inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities, for instance through teleworking or other flexible and adapted arrangements.</li> <li>• Actions targeted on increased digitalisation of services should consider accessible platforms as a critical part so that persons with disabilities can access them on an equal basis with others.</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship programmes could be developed in partnerships with OPDs to ensure persons with disabilities are able to access training, grants and microfinance schemes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social protection systems and mechanisms that can support to manage and reduce the adverse impacts of climate change</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that persons with disabilities equally can access social protection, including the coverage of other disability related costs they may have, if they have experienced loss of livelihood or assets because of an extreme weather event e.g., flooding destroying crops etc.<sup>9</sup></li> <li>• Ensure that transitional social protection programmes are inclusive of persons with disabilities to mitigate against loss in income from jobs being phased out due to shift to low carbon employment.</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> Globally in low and middle countries, [only 1 in 5 persons with significant disability have access to disability benefits.](#)

### 3.3. Design inclusive and accessible sustainable cities

Between 2015 and 2020, urban populations globally grew by more than 397 million people, with more than 90 percent of this growth taking place in Less Developed Regions.<sup>10</sup> This creates significant pressures on cities to adapt to growing diverse populations, including increasing number of persons with disabilities, older persons and people from rural areas, who move to cities due to environmental degradation in their communities or for better job opportunities. Investments by the EU into programmes and interventions that promote sustainable cities should mainstream disability into their design. Mainstreaming disability can be supported by:

- **Complying with global normative and development frameworks:** Taking measures to ensure national and local governments and city planners follow Article 9 (on accessibility) of the CRPD is important as it is an obligation for countries that have ratified the CRPD. In many countries, there are also domestic accessibility laws and policies to comply. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, includes several targets related to accessibility.
- **Investing in accessible and inclusive urban design:** Housing, transport, ICT (Information and Communications Technologies) services, public space, water and sanitation as well as social and educational services are all important areas to ensure functioning and barrier free cities. Measures that promote low carbon transport, living and services will only be useable by everyone if the perspectives of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations are included. Practically this means including OPDs in the development and design of such programmes and it also means inclusive budgeting to ensure funding is provided for inclusive and accessible measures e.g. investments in public transport must consider accessibility, investment in new greener living spaces should consider the accessible housing.
- **Bringing together multistakeholder groups,** which include the perspective of ministries that handle urban planning and design along with ministries responsible for enabling and supporting persons with disabilities, for cross collaboration. OPDs should be included among these stakeholders.

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<sup>10</sup> IPCC (2022). Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, see pg.96, of Technical summary, available here: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>



## Annex 1: Normative and Global Frameworks on Disability Rights, Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change

### **Paris Agreement:**

Signatory parties acknowledge that efforts to mitigate the risks of climate change should respect human rights obligations, including the rights of ‘persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations’. Specific Articles speak directly to the importance of ensuring that adaptation is rights-based and inclusive.

### **Agenda 2030 and the SDGs:**

Over half of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) have a link to protecting the environment, society and economies from the negative impact of climate change: SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (health and wellbeing), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 6 (water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 10 (reducing inequality), and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities).

### **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction:**

The Sendai Framework explicitly calls for accessibility, inclusion and the principles of universal design throughout the framework. The framework calls for: (1) a disability perspective to be applied in all planning and policy-making concerning risk management and (2) data related to disaster mortality, economic losses and health impacts to be disaggregated by disability to build the evidence needed to make risk-sensitive investments.

### **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:**

The CRPD does not have direct reference to climate change or its impact, but it does address a vast array of areas directly or indirectly related to climate change, such as migration, mobility, access to basic services like food and water, health, education and employment opportunities. It also includes Article 11, which obliges States to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risks and humanitarian emergencies, which can arise from extreme weather events.

### **European Consensus on Development:**

The EU Consensus on Development (2017) includes a chapter on the planet with the overarching commitments: protecting the environment, managing natural resources and tackling climate change. It also outlines how the EU and its Member States will promote resource efficiency and sustainable development, consumption and production, including the sustainable management of water, chemicals and waste, with a view to decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation and enabling the transition to a circular economy. The Consensus commits EU to consider the specific needs of persons with disabilities in all external actions, and particularly addressing the disproportionate impact that climate change has on persons with disabilities.

## Annex 2: Further reading on disability and climate

International Labour Organization (2019). "[Persons with Disabilities in a Just Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy](#)".

Kett, M., Lee, H., Meaney-Davis, J. and Wapling, L. (2020). "[Climate resilience and disability inclusion: mapping and rapid evidence review](#)".

Kett, M. and Cole, E. (2018). "[Disability and Climate Resilience Research Report](#)". Research report. Leonard Cheshire Research Centre, UCL.

Kett, M. and Meaney-Davis, J (2021). "Disability inclusion in climate change programming in the Middle East, available here: [https://www.sddirect.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/DISABI~1\\_9.PDF](https://www.sddirect.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-07/DISABI~1_9.PDF)

OHCHR (2020). [Panel discussion on promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change](#). Report of the OHCHR.

OHCHR (2020). "[Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change](#)". A/HRC/44/30.

Stein, P. and Stein, M. (2021). "[Climate change and the right to health of people with disabilities](#)".

UNHCR, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and International Disability Alliance (2021). "[Disability Displacement and Climate Change](#)".

International Labour Organization (2022). "[Inclusion of persons with disabilities in the digital and green economy](#)".