



African Disability Forum and European Disability Forum Submission to the European Union Ahead of the EU-AU Human Rights Dialogue

January 19, 2024

The [African Disability Forum](#) and the [European Disability Forum](#) appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the preparations for the upcoming European Union-African Union Human Rights Dialogue, scheduled to be held in Addis Ababa on January 25, 2024. Our joint submission focuses on the legal framework safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities, addressing critical issues such as the right to education, disability rights in conflict zones, constraints related to limited financial resources, and funding challenges. We offer recommendations to address these issues to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities across the region.

Background

An estimated [100 million people](#) in the European Union (EU) and between [110 million and 190 million people](#)¹ in the African Union (AU) are persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, persons with disabilities face persistent barriers in various aspects of life, including education, employment, access to health and social inclusion. The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#), a landmark international instrument setting the minimum standard for the rights of individuals with disabilities, has garnered widespread ratification across Africa, the EU, and all its Member States over the past two decades to address these barriers. Notably, Articles 11, 24, and 32 of the CRPD specifically delineate the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, humanitarian emergencies, education, and international cooperation.

Simultaneously, the AU has adopted the [African Disability Rights Protocol](#) to address disability rights from an African perspective. However, the Protocol awaits ratification by at least [15 AU Member States](#), with [only 12 Member States](#) formalizing their commitment to it as of 2023.

Right to Education

Children with disabilities remain among the most marginalized groups globally. In the EU, [around 29% of young people with disabilities](#) lack access to education, training, or employment. **In Africa, less than 10% of children with disabilities attend school**, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, only [1 in 4 students with disabilities](#) complete secondary school. Addressing this issue requires increased awareness, improved teacher training, equitable resource distribution, and robust anti-discrimination measures.

Disability Rights in Conflict & Post-conflict Environments

¹ The anticipated number of individuals with disabilities in Africa is likely higher; however, the lack of comprehensive disaggregated data in the region poses challenges in determining the precise figure.



[Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected in conflict settings](#), facing increased risks of injury, death, sexual violence, and other serious harm. Existing discrimination and stigma against persons with disabilities are exacerbated during armed conflicts. In post-conflict settings, persons with disabilities are routinely denied access to justice and excluded from peace processes. Recognizing persons with disabilities as agents of change is crucial for a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution.

Limited Resources & Funding

While the EU and its Member States are one of the largest donors to Africa, there remains a significant gap in funding directed towards supporting persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). Despite positive strides such as the ratification of the CRPD outlining the need to include persons with disabilities in international cooperation initiatives [less than three percent](#) of EU Official Development Assistance is allocated to projects focusing on persons with disabilities. The need for increased funding to support the disability community and mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities is paramount. It is necessary for the EU to collaborate with the AU and regional and national OPDs to ensure persons with disabilities are not left behind and have **equal access to the right to development**.

Recommendations

To better support the rights of persons with disabilities and OPDs across Africa as outlined by the CRPD, we strongly urge the EU to consider the following recommendations ahead of this year's EU-AU Human Rights Dialogue.

- 1. Support Adoption of the African Disability Protocol:**
Advocate for the swift adoption of the African Disability Protocol by AU Member States to establish robust legal frameworks that safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities, promoting inclusivity and equality across the African continent.
- 2. Encourage Disability Focal Points at EU Delegations in Africa and the AU Commission:**
Ensure the presence of designated focal points at the various **EU Delegations across Africa and the AU Commission** to facilitate communication and resource distribution, including financial support, for OPDs and the broader disability rights movement. This will bolster capacity-building initiatives.
- 3. Consultation with Persons with Disabilities on Humanitarian Measures:**
Encourage both EU and AU staff to engage in meaningful consultations with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the development and execution of humanitarian measures. This collaborative approach ensures tailored support and saves lives in times of crisis.
- 4. Inclusive and Accessible Learning Environments:**
In alignment with [UNICEF's recommendations](#) advocate for:
 - **Physical Accessibility:** Ensure schools are physically accessible, providing safe entry to classrooms and essential facilities for students with disabilities.



- **Accessible Learning Materials:** Ensure learning materials are available in accessible formats to accommodate various disabilities.
- **Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:** Address barriers to education through collaboration across sectors, including transportation, healthcare, and social services.
- **Teacher Training for Inclusive Education:** Prioritize the training of teachers to effectively implement inclusive education practices, supporting families in keeping children with disabilities in school.
- **Community Involvement:** Foster strong involvement from immediate family and the broader community to enhance the success of inclusive education practices.

5. **Data Collection:**

Support the collection and analysis of data on disability to inform policy and program development, paying special attention to rural regions.

Opportunities: African Conference on Disability

Between March 20-24, the African Disability Forum will host a conference titled 'Persons with Disabilities in a Post-Pandemic World: Redefining the Inclusive Development & Humanitarian Agenda in Africa,' in Addis Ababa. This conference aims to address the diverse challenges faced by persons with disabilities, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides a platform for collaborative discussions on fostering inclusivity, combating discrimination, and tackling various forms of marginalization experienced by individuals with disabilities in the African context. Through shared insights, the conference seeks to formulate an action plan to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable future for persons with disabilities in the region.

If the EU along with its EU Delegations in the region are interested in contributing to the success of the disability rights movement in Africa and help galvanize its collective strength, please contact **Shuaib Chalklen, ADF's Executive Director**, at schalklen@adf-secretariat.org.

More about the African Disability Forum:

The [African Disability Forum \(ADF\)](#) is the continental membership Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) in Africa. ADF seeks to strengthen and unify the representative voices of Africans with disabilities, their families and organizations.

More about the European Disability Forum:

Similarly, the [European Disability Forum \(EDF\)](#) acts as the regional forum for persons with disabilities in Europe, advocating for the implementation of the CRPD. EDF actively supports the inclusion of individuals with disabilities and OPDs in all EU-related external action initiatives.

Contact Information

Please contact **Erika Hudson, EDF's International Cooperation Policy Officer**, at erika.hudson@edf-feph.org with any questions or for more information.