



Disability Inclusion in UNFCCC Processes: Accessibility, Participation, and Operationalization

Key Messages



Although COPs have made progress in physical accessibility, disability inclusion is still inconsistent and fragmented. The UNFCCC must ensure structural and predictable design is integrated into all aspects of conference delivery



Institutionalise disability representation and accountability by establishing a formal Disability Constituency and mandate the use of disability-specific indicators and disaggregated data across all reporting frameworks

Current Gaps

Most official documents are not available in accessible formats. Interpretation is often restricted to plenaries, excluding participants with accessibility needs from critical informal negotiations

Executive Summary

Persons with disabilities represent approximately 16% of the global population yet remain among the most structurally excluded from global climate governance. Although the Paris Agreement preamble explicitly calls on Parties to respect the rights of persons with disabilities, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates their safety and protection in situations of risk, operational inclusion is not on track.

The Paris Agreement’s human-rights-based framing combined with the growing recognition of disability rights within global climate policy spaces outlines a foundation for systematic mainstreaming. Climate decisions that are not inclusive of persons with disabilities fail to reflect the full spectrum of societal needs and risk entrenching inequities in adaptation, mitigation, finance, and transition pathways.

As COPs continue to grow in scale, disability inclusion must require structural and predictable design. This mandates integrating accessibility into every domain of conference delivery: host country agreements, accreditation systems, venue contracting, emergency planning, room layouts, digital platforms, communication standards, constituency frameworks, and monitoring arrangements.

The lack of a formal Disability Constituency restricts OPDs from consistently influencing agendas. Without disability-disaggregated data, the impact of climate action is unmeasured and unprioritised

Navigation is still difficult in smaller negotiation rooms and side events. Emergency evacuation protocols rarely account for disability-specific needs.



Policy Recommendations

P1

Strengthen physical and operational accessibility

Mandate and implement universal accessibility design principles across all COP venues, ensuring accessible entry points, clear signage, lowered counters, seating arrangements, and rest areas. All venues must meet or exceed accessibility standards. Develop and implement disability-specific evacuation protocols in consultation with OPDs, ensuring accessible evacuation routes, inclusive warning systems, and the provision of assistive devices to support individuals with disabilities. These protocols must be tested during emergency drills with OPD participation.

P2

Enhance communication and information accessibility

Mandate all COP documents shared with delegates and the public are provided in accessible formats. Implement real-time captioning and International Sign Language interpretation in all plenary sessions, contact groups, and side events. This should be an integral part of all official communication platforms, including digital media and streamed events.

P3

Capacity building and staff training

Develop and implement disability inclusion training for all UNFCCC staff, volunteers, and contractors, including those involved in logistics, security, and event management. This training should cover disability awareness, etiquette, emergency procedures, and the use of assistive technologies.



P4

Mental health support

Provide mental health and well-being support for all participants, including dedicated counselling services, stress relief interventions, and accessible "quiet spaces" for relaxation and de-escalation.

P5

Institutionalise disability representation and governance

Establish a Formal Disability Constituency within the UNFCCC process.

P5

Integrate disability-specific monitoring, reporting and data collection

Develop and integrate disability-specific indicators into the UNFCCC's Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification systems.



This policy brief was researched and written by Wambui Muchaba and Belinda Momanyi in their capacity as consultants commissioned by the European Disability Forum for the UNFCCC Disability Caucus, under the supervision of Marion Steff (EDF), and funded by the Disability Rights Fund.