



# EU in the World 2025

**Driving Disability-Inclusive**

**EU External Action**

# Contents

<b>Foreword by Nadia Hadad</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Key Highlights of 2025</b>	<b>6</b>
International Cooperation	6
Humanitarian Action & Disaster Risk Reduction	7
Disaster Risk Reduction	7
Climate Action	8
<b>Introduction: EDF and EU External Action</b>	<b>9</b>
Key Policy Frameworks Guiding EU External Action	10
<b>Three Major EU Opportunities to Advance Disability-Inclusion</b>	<b>12</b>
European Disability Rights Strategy at Midpoint: Time for a Disability Action Plan	13
Observations from the CRPD Committee: Better Disability Inclusion in External Action	14
Shaping the 2028–2034 EU Budget: Embedding Disability Inclusion from the Start	15
<b>Driving Disability-Inclusive EU External Action</b>	<b>17</b>
International Cooperation & Development	18
Calling on the EU to Fund OPDs Impacted by USAID Cuts	18
Including Disability Rights in EU Human Rights Dialogues	19
Building EU External Action Capacity on Disability Inclusion	19
Tracking Disability Inclusion in EU Official Development Assistance	20

Humanitarian Action	22
Advocating for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine	22
Influencing the Council of the EU on Humanitarian Action	23
Embedding Disability Inclusion in the EU’s Humanitarian Aid Communication	24
Calling on the EU to Strengthen Humanitarian Action for Palestinians with Disabilities	25
Disaster Risk Reduction	26
EU Youth Policy Dialogue on Citizen Risk Awareness and Emergency Preparedness	26
Embedding Disability Rights in EU Preparedness	27
Disability Inclusion in the EU Preparedness Union Strategy	28
Climate Action	29
Meeting with EU Commissioner for Climate Cabinet Members	30
Centring Disability Rights in the Just Transition	30
<b>High-Level EU External Action Events</b>	<b>31</b>
Global Disability Summit 2025	32
EU–African Union Civil Society and Youth Forum	34
United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30)	35
Disability Rights Week 2025	35
European Day of Persons with Disabilities 2025	36
EU-NGO Human Rights Forum 2025	38
<b>Looking Ahead: Key Developments in 2026</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Stay Connected: Our Global Action Newsletter</b>	<b>41</b>



# Foreword by Nadia Hadad

This year, we begin our annual *EU in the World* report a little differently.

Instead of starting with figures and formalities, we begin with words. We write to you as a **team** navigating a complex and changing world together with our members and partners.

At the European Disability Forum (EDF), our mission remains clear: **to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully included in society, on an equal basis with others.** We work for the full respect, protection, and fulfilment of human rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, through **meaningful participation** in policy and financial development, implementation, and monitoring across **Europe** and **globally.**

This work is as urgent as ever.

Around the world, conflicts and crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine and the Israel-US-Iran conflict, alongside the growing impacts of climate change and nature-made disasters, are deepening inequalities. In every crisis, persons with disabilities face disproportionate risks and are continuously overlooked or neglected.

At the same time, international development and humanitarian action are under strain. Funding cuts, shrinking civic space, and growing misinformation are affecting organisations across Europe and beyond. EDF and our partners have felt this directly. Within a year, EDF's international cooperation team was reduced from seven colleagues to three. Partners have had to scale back or even stop very important programmes. And too often, persons with disabilities are left out at the **very moment inclusion matters most**.

We see this, and we choose to speak honestly about it.

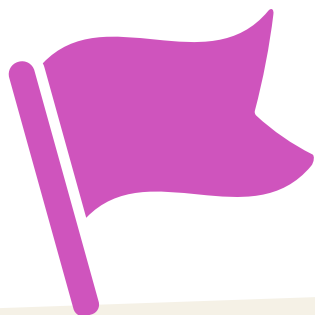
Yet we also write with determination. Despite these challenges, our movement continues to advocate, to monitor, and to push for **accountability**. We continue to stand alongside organisations of persons with disabilities and insist that rights do not disappear in times of crisis.

The work is far from over. But together across borders and communities we remain committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities are not segregated, but **included, respected** and **protected**.

**Thank you** for being part of this work.

**Nadia Hadad**

**EDF Executive Committee Member**



# Key Highlights of 2025

The 2025 *EU in the World* report highlights the European Disability Forum's (EDF) efforts to ensure that **disability rights** are **fully integrated** into the **European Union's (EU) external action activities**. This report outlines key advancements, challenges, and advocacy priorities over the past year.

## International Cooperation

- **Advancing a Disability Action Plan for EU External Action:** EDF advocated for the European Commission (EC) to introduce a dedicated Disability Action Plan within its global activities.
- **Influencing EU Human Rights Dialogues with Partner Countries:** EDF submitted targeted inputs ahead of EU human rights dialogues with partners helping ensure disability rights and the participation of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) are systematically addressed in EU-partner dialogues.
- **Tracking Disability Inclusion in EU Development Aid:** EDF published its fourth report analysing disability inclusion in EU Official Development Assistance (ODA). The findings highlighted that 63% of EC aid activities do not significantly include persons with disabilities.
- **Strengthening Capacity within EU External Action:** EDF delivered the first in-person training on disability inclusion for EU external action staff from the European External Action Service (EEAS).
- **Advancing EU Commitments at the Global Disability Summit:** Following sustained advocacy by EDF, the EC participated in the Global Disability Summit 2025 and announced commitments to strengthen disability inclusion across EU external action.

## Humanitarian Action & Disaster Risk Reduction

- **Advocating for Disability-Inclusive Humanitarian Response in Ukraine:** EDF supported its members, the National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine and the League of the Strong in engaging with EU leadership, in engaging with EU leadership to ensure persons with disabilities are actively included in humanitarian response and recovery planning.
- **Influencing EU Humanitarian Policy Frameworks:** EDF provided detailed recommendations to the EC's Communication on Humanitarian Aid, proposing concrete measures to ensure persons with disabilities are recognised as leaders and partners in humanitarian action.
- **Engaging EU Member States on Inclusive Humanitarian Action:** EDF addressed the Council of the EU's Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA), highlighting the importance of engaging OPDs in crisis response and ensuring disability inclusion in EU humanitarian policies and programmes.
- **Advocating for the Rights of Palestinians with Disabilities:** EDF raised the urgent situation of persons with disabilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with the European Parliament calling on the EU to ensure humanitarian aid, evacuation routes, and shelters are accessible and inclusive.

## Disaster Risk Reduction

- **Contributing to the EU Preparedness Union Strategy:** EDF monitored and advocated for disability inclusion in the EU's new Preparedness Union Strategy.
- **Leading a Regional Diagnostic on Disability-Inclusive Preparedness:** In partnership with the World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), EDF conducted a regional diagnostic covering 38 countries to assess how disability is integrated into disaster preparedness and response systems.

- **Promoting Inclusive Crisis Preparedness through EU Dialogue and Training:** EDF contributed expertise to EU emergency preparedness training and policy dialogues, highlighting best practices from member organisations and advocating for accessible early warning systems, and inclusive preparedness frameworks.
- **Strengthening Knowledge on Disaster Risk Communication:** EDF participated in the [PreparEU project](#) workshops on disaster risk communication, contributing to the development of training for civil protection authorities and civil society to ensure emergency communication is accessible.

## Climate Action

- **Advancing Disability Inclusion in EU Climate Policy:** EDF engaged with the Cabinet of the EU Commissioner for Climate to highlight the disproportionate impact of climate change on persons with disabilities and the need to ensure disability inclusion in climate policy.
- **Promoting an Inclusive Just Transition in EU Policy:** EDF participated in discussions at the European Parliament on the [Just Transition](#), advocating for accessibility in employment, infrastructure, transport, and social protection to ensure climate policies benefit persons with disabilities.
- **Advocating for Disability Inclusion in Global Climate Negotiations:** EDF contributed to disability advocacy at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil, supporting the work of the Disability Caucus and promoting accessibility and disability inclusion in climate negotiations and climate finance discussions with EU representatives.

# Introduction: EDF and EU External Action

The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an independent Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) that advocates for the rights of 100 million Europeans with disabilities. EDF is a unique platform that brings together persons with disabilities and their representative organisations from across Europe. It is governed by persons with disabilities and their families, ensuring that lived experience is at the centre of its work.

EDF works to ensure that decisions taken at European level, including EU external policies, programmes, and funding instruments related to international cooperation, humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction, and climate action, are made with and by persons with disabilities. To this end, EDF maintains regular advocacy channels with key European institutions, including the European Parliament, the European Commission (EC), and the Council of the EU.



# Key Policy Frameworks Guiding EU External Action

EU external action is guided by a combination of international obligations and EU policy frameworks that require the promotion of human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities.

## [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (2010)

Legally obliges the EU and its Member States to implement disability rights across all its actions, including external action.

---

Particularly relevant are Article 11 (situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies) and Article 32 (international cooperation).

## [European Consensus on Development](#) (2017)

Provides the joint EU and Member States' framework for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

---

Recognises persons with disabilities as a cross-cutting priority in development policy.

## [EU Operational Guidance on Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Aid](#) (2019)

Offers tools to ensure persons with disabilities are included in preparedness, response, and recovery.

---

Emphasises consultation with OPDs and accessible, non-discriminatory assistance.

## [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#) (2020–2024, extended to 2027)

Framework to promote human rights globally.

---

Calls for advocacy on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) implementation and removal of accessibility barriers.

**EU Gender Action Plan**

**III** (2020–2025, extended to 2027)

Promotes gender equality in external relations.

---

Includes specific attention to women and girls with disabilities.

**EU Youth Action Plan**

(2022–2027)

Guides EU youth engagement in external action.

---

Explicitly includes young persons with disabilities among priority groups.

**EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (2021–2030)

The EU's main disability policy framework.

---

Includes a dedicated commitment to promoting disability rights globally through EU external action.

**EU Guidance Note: Leaving No One Behind in External Action** (2023)

Provides practical guidance for EU staff and partners on integrating disability inclusion across external action.

---

Supports implementation of the Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan.

**Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe** (2021–2027)

Main EU external financing instrument with a €79.5 billion budget.

---

Includes references to the CRPD and persons with disabilities.

**EU Preparedness Union Strategy** (2025)

A more proactive, whole-of-government approach to crisis management, across both civilian and military sectors.

---

Improve the EU's overall resilience to both expected and unforeseen events.

# Three Major EU Opportunities to Advance Disability-Inclusion



Last year was a demanding one for European Union (EU) external action and disability rights, marked by both **significant milestones and emerging challenges**.

Three major developments in 2025 will continue to shape the landscape of disability-inclusive international cooperation and humanitarian action in 2026 and for years to come.

## European Disability Rights Strategy at Midpoint: Time for a Disability Action Plan

The **European Disability Rights Strategy 2021–2030** has [delivered important achievements](#) in its first five years, including the adoption of the legislation establishing the [European Disability Card](#) and the creation of [AccessibleEU](#). However, the Strategy is now halfway through its lifespan, and the list of concrete actions presented in 2021 only covers the period up to 2025. This leaves the second half of the Strategy without clearly defined initiatives.

[Throughout 2025](#), EDF consistently called on the European Commission (EC) to update the Strategy and introduce new flagship actions for 2025–2030, particularly in areas where progress has been limited, including EU external action.

In relation to Chapter 5 of the Strategy, “**Supporting persons with disabilities globally**,” EDF advocated for the adoption of a [Disability Action Plan in EU External Action](#). The purpose of such a plan would be to provide a structured and comprehensive framework to ensure that disability rights are **systematically integrated** across all EU external policies and instruments, including international cooperation, development programmes, humanitarian action, and external financing negotiations.

EDF argues that a **Disability Action Plan** could ensure that all EU-funded external action initiatives are fully aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), particularly **Articles 11 and 32**.

It would establish clear funding commitments, monitoring mechanisms, and measurable indicators for disability inclusion.

## Observations from the CRPD Committee: Better Disability Inclusion in External Action

On 11–12 March, the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held a **constructive dialogue** to review the EU's implementation of the CRPD. During this dialogue, the EU presented the measures it has taken to advance disability rights under the Convention.

Throughout the review, several Committee members raised questions relating specifically to Articles 11 and 32, underscoring the importance of **ensuring that EU external action is fully aligned with the CRPD**.

Ahead of the review, EDF and the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) [submitted written input](#) to the Committee focusing on the EU's implementation of the CRPD in its external action beyond EU borders. This submission built on EDF's [alternative report](#) presented to the Committee in January 2025, which outlined key concerns and recommendations for strengthening disability-inclusive EU external action as well. Many of the issues raised in these submissions were reflected in the questions posed by Committee members during the dialogue.

In April 2025, the Committee published its [Concluding Observations](#) on the EU's combined second and third periodic reports. Among its key findings, the Committee issued several important

recommendations related to international cooperation **in line with EDF's own recommendations**, including:

- Develop a comprehensive disability action plan and strengthen coordination across EU external policies to ensure full alignment with the Convention, including in international financing negotiations.
- Improve reporting on humanitarian action by introducing indicators consistent with the CRPD.
- Support the official recognition of a Disability Constituency within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

## Shaping the 2028–2034 EU Budget: Embedding Disability Inclusion from the Start

In July 2025, the EC presented its proposal for the [EU's next long-term budget for 2028–2034](#), the **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**. The proposal includes important elements related to EU external action including a new structure for external action financing through a Global Europe Instrument. This instrument is intended to streamline funding, increase coherence, and strengthen the impact and visibility of EU external action in partner countries.

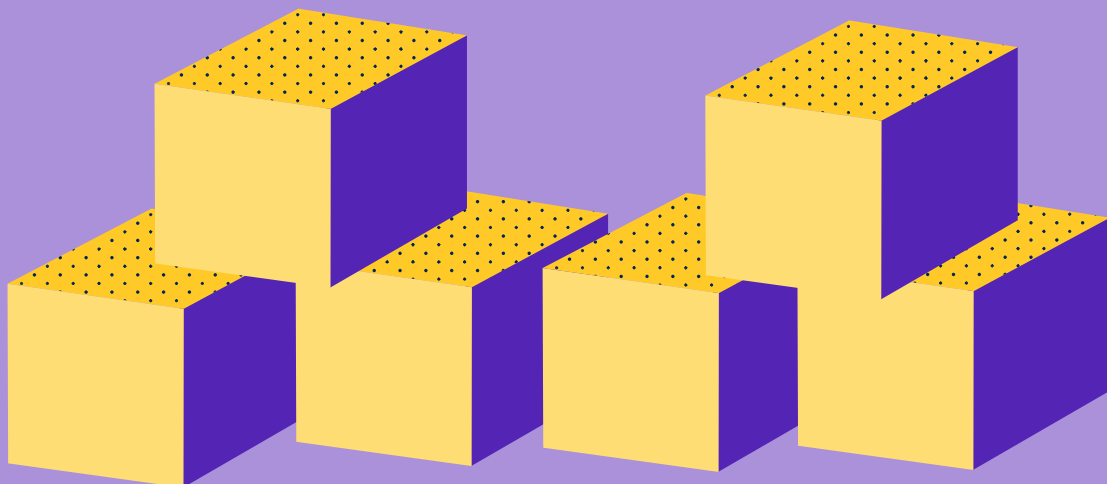
The new framework foresees a dedicated reserve **to respond to emerging crises and unforeseen needs**. The proposal also outlines continued support for **Ukraine** throughout the budget period. In addition, the budget maintains funding for Common Foreign and Security Policy actions, contributing to the EU's objectives in areas such as peace and security, international cooperation, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

Given the importance of including the rights of persons with disabilities in the final agreement, EDF mobilised early in the process to ensure **disability inclusion is embedded in the next**

**EU budget** from the outset. EDF [publicly reacted](#) to the proposal and has supported broader civil society engagement. We have advocated for detailed policy aims to ensure that **disability inclusion is systematically integrated across both humanitarian action and international cooperation funding**. In 2025, we also encouraged our members and partners to share their priorities on the next budget during [the public consultation period](#).

In international cooperation more broadly, EDF is advocating for disability to be established as a **cross-cutting priority across all external funding streams**, including with attention to intersecting forms of discrimination, such as those faced by women and girls with disabilities. In humanitarian action and crisis response, EDF is calling for disability inclusion to be mainstreamed across all EU crisis preparedness and response instruments, including the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and relevant funding under external financing tools.

EDF is also advocating for a dedicated, ring-fenced budget within the MFF for **disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and crisis preparedness**, aligned with the CRPD. We are also pushing for explicit budget lines to cover accessibility-related costs in emergency systems and infrastructure and for accessibility to be a condition for funding approval. EDF further calls for deinstitutionalisation to be embedded as a funding condition, ensuring that recovery and reconstruction instruments, including those related to Ukraine, do not finance institutionalisation and instead align with the CRPD.



# Driving Disability- Inclusive EU External Action



The European Disability Forum (EDF) is committed to ensuring that European Union (EU) international cooperation, humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction, and climate action are fully inclusive and accessible.

Below, we highlight our collaborative global action with the EU throughout 2025.

## International Cooperation & Development

While the EU has made important progress in advancing disability inclusion globally, gaps remain and more **systematic implementation** is needed. EDF plays a key role in this process at times supporting EU institutions through expertise and capacity-building, and at others reminding them of their obligations and proposing concrete solutions.

### Calling on the EU to Fund OPDs Impacted by USAID Cuts

In early 2025, EDF, together with other European disability organisations, called on the EU and non-governmental donors to provide **emergency funding to disability organisations** affected by recent US funding cuts.

[The statement](#), led by EDF and the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities and signed by four of the organisations affected, called on the EU and donors to step up with both emergency and long-term funding.

The signatories underline that these organisations were **implementing lifesaving programmes** in countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Albania and that the loss of funding will put organisations and persons with disabilities in the Balkans, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus at risk.

## Including Disability Rights in EU Human Rights Dialogues

Throughout 2025, EDF together with our partners [submitted written inputs](#) to several dialogues, including those with **Ukraine, Tajikistan, Brazil, Thailand, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the African Union**. Across these contributions, EDF **highlighted persistent barriers to inclusion**, called for stronger protection of rights, and urged the EU to engage directly with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in partner countries ahead of upcoming dialogues.

A concrete example of this approach was the [EU–Armenia Human Rights Dialogue](#), held on 17 February. Ahead of the dialogue, **Disability Rights Agenda NGO (DRA)** submitted written input highlighting the current situation of disability rights in Armenia. As a result, during the dialogue itself, the EU welcomed Armenia’s commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities while also encouraging further measures to improve accessibility and community-based services, reflecting the issues raised by EDF member, DRA. This illustrates how EDF and partner organisations work to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are not only part of written submissions but are actively addressed during the dialogue itself.

## Building EU External Action Capacity on Disability Inclusion

In October 2025, EDF Executive Committee member Nadia Hadad delivered a training on disability rights to EU External Action staff, with a focus on the **meaningful inclusion of OPDs in EU external action**. Participants included EU staff based in Brussels from the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), and the European External Action Services (EEAS), most of whom work on policy or programme-related activities. This session was the **first in-person** training dedicated exclusively to disability inclusion in EU external action, marking an important step in strengthening staff capacity on these issues.

By the end of the training, participants understood why **partnerships with OPDs matter**, learned how to **engage effectively** with them in EU external action, and recognised examples of good practice in disability-inclusive programming. EDF's contribution to this training reflects its ongoing work to **embed disability inclusion structurally across EU external action** and to ensure that EU staff have the tools and knowledge to engage with OPDs effectively.

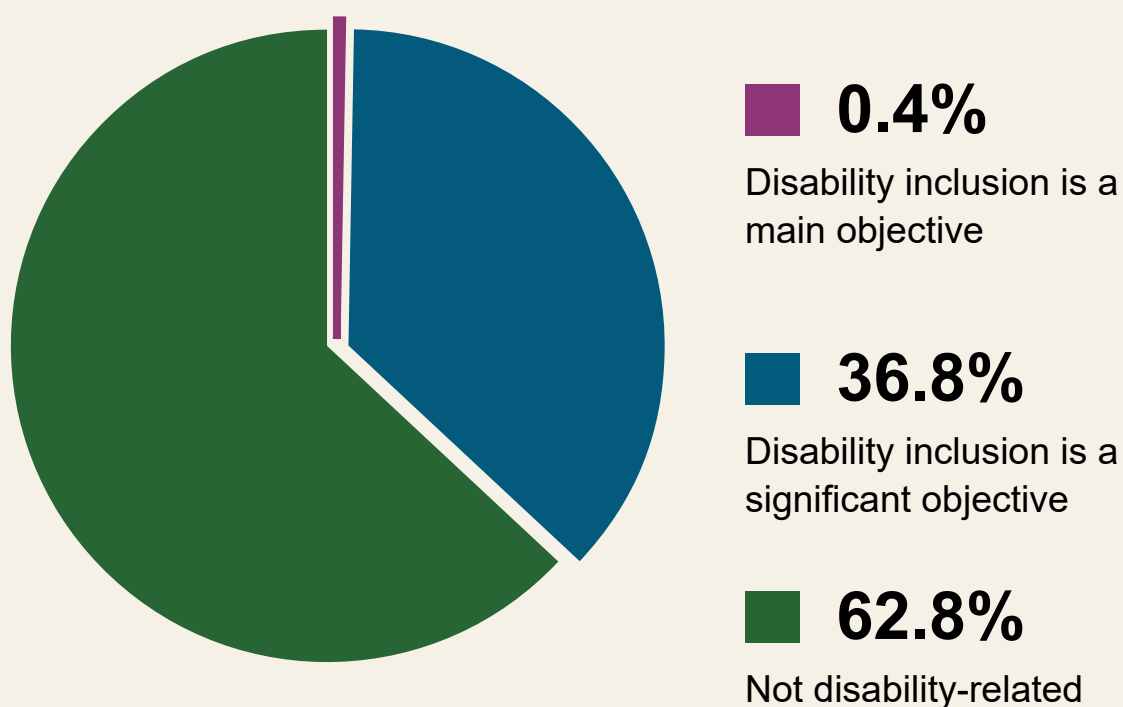
## Tracking Disability Inclusion in EU Official Development Assistance

For the last few years, EDF has been tracking how disability-inclusive is EU Official Development Assistance (ODA), also referred to as 'aid'. In December 2025 we [released our 4th report](#), which analysed the latest (2023) ODA data for two key EU institutions – the European Commission (EC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). It uses the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development-Development Assistance Committee's (OECD-DAC's) **disability marker**, which **tracks whether ODA activities have disability-related objectives**.

The report found that there are **serious disability inclusion gaps** in EC and EIB ODA including:

- In 2023, the EC reported that 63% of its ODA activities were not disability-related in any significant way.
- We estimate that, in the five years from 2019 to 2023, around 49 billion EUR of EC ODA failed to take disability into account in any significant way.

**Figure 1: Percentage of EC ODA activities reported as disability-related in 2023**



*Source: analysis of the OECD-DAC Creditor Reporting System database. The analysis uses data on the number of allocable ODA commitments.*

**The EU urgently needs to step up its work to make all ODA inclusive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities.** EDF continues to call for the EU to rapidly increase the number of ODA activities, and the amount of ODA spending that is disability related.

## Humanitarian Action

As the EU and its Member States are the [world's leading humanitarian aid donor](#), with the EC providing assistance since 1992 in more than 110 countries through NGOs, UN agencies, international organisations, and specialised Member State agencies, this responsibility carries particular weight. Disability inclusion must therefore be **embedded across preparedness, response, and recovery efforts**. EDF works to ensure that these commitments are translated into inclusive humanitarian policy and practice worldwide.

### Advocating for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ukraine

In January 2025, EDF member, the National Assembly of People with Disabilities of Ukraine (NAPD), had a meeting with Hadja Lahbib, the European Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management.

Key issues raised during the meeting included:

- Coordination in humanitarian response: low level of coordination between state institutions, humanitarian organisations, and organisations of persons with disabilities.
- Formal approach to the inclusion of OPDs: insufficient involvement of civil society organisations in the processes of developing and implementing solutions in the field of humanitarian response and recovery.

The war has caused serious economic hardship for many families. Over the two years of the war, the poverty rate in Ukraine has increased 1.7 times, which is especially critical for people who have no support from relatives and are forced to survive on minimal social transfers.

In her remarks to Commissioner Lahbib, Viktoriya Nazarenko, NAPD Director, also emphasised the importance of the **active involvement of OPDs** in humanitarian response and advocating for the principle of **targeted, needs-based assistance** for people with disabilities across all regions of Ukraine, regardless of their place of residence.

The National Assembly and the League of the Strong are EDF's partners in the [Empower Ukraine](#) project. **Empower Ukraine** is a project working towards the better inclusion of at-risk internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, veterans, older people, single-headed households, adults and children in institutions, and members of host communities with and without disabilities into humanitarian aid and into the recovery and response in Ukraine.

## Influencing the Council of the EU on Humanitarian Action

On 23 April, EDF was invited to speak at the [Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid \(COHAFA\)](#) meeting, which discussed the EU's humanitarian strategies and policies, as well as its response to humanitarian crises. COHAFA prepares the Council of the EU's work on the EU's humanitarian action and coordinates the EU response to humanitarian crises.

COHAFA's work is guided by the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and International Humanitarian Law.

The meeting explored **engagement by OPDs**, current challenges and lessons learned from current conflicts, and the situation of children with disabilities in humanitarian action. Speakers included EDF Executive Committee member, Nadia Hadad.

States representatives actively reacted and shared their experiences and commitments, **including prioritising children, and women with disabilities in humanitarian action.**

## Embedding Disability Inclusion in the EU's Humanitarian Aid Communication

In late 2025, EDF prepared a [set of recommendations](#) for the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) on the EC's Communication on Humanitarian Aid, addressed to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. These Communications are high-level strategic and policy documents that outline the Commission's vision, priorities, and direction on humanitarian aid. While not legally binding, they carry "soft law" influence and often form the foundation for future legislative acts, operational guidance, and funding decisions.

Such framework Communications can shape future DG ECHO funding priorities, influence how humanitarian principles are interpreted and applied, guide coordination with Member States under the Team Europe approach, and provide a reference point for political and operational decisions for years to come. Early-stage feedback on these documents is therefore particularly valuable, as it can be incorporated into final policy design and help prevent blind spots or unintended consequences.

EDF's recommendations focus on ensuring that the Communication on Humanitarian Aid **aligns with the CRPD** and strengthens the inclusion of persons with disabilities **across all stages** of humanitarian action.

Specifically, EDF calls for persons with disabilities to be recognised **not only as beneficiaries but also as leaders, decision-makers, and implementers** in humanitarian programming. In total, EDF made eleven concrete recommendations to DG ECHO to embed disability inclusion structurally and systematically into EU humanitarian policy and practice.

## Calling on the EU to Strengthen Humanitarian Action for Palestinians with Disabilities

On 5 June, the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with Palestine (DPAL) held an [exchange of views on the dire situation of Palestinians with disabilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory \(OPT\)](#). Discussions highlighted the **disproportionate impact of the conflict on persons with disabilities**, including the loss of assistive devices, severe barriers to humanitarian aid, and extremely limited access to essential services.

Nadia Hadad, EDF Executive Committee member, participated in the exchange and delivered a strong call to EU institutions to **take urgent, disability-inclusive action**. Specifically, EDF urged the EU to ensure full respect for human rights and equitable access to humanitarian assistance for persons with disabilities.

EDF also underlined that the number of persons with disabilities in the OPT continues to rise due to injuries and lack of access to medical treatment, making disability-inclusive humanitarian action increasingly urgent.

“ Palestinians with disabilities face a double injustice: living under Israeli occupation and blockade, while also being denied basic rights and services as persons with disabilities. Their voices are too often silenced in both the humanitarian response and the broader call for justice ”

**Nadia Hadad**

EDF Executive Committee Member

EDF further [submitted a written contribution](#) to the CRPD Committee in response to its call for inputs on the implementation of Article 11 of the CRPD, situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, in the context of the war in the OPT.

Through this submission, EDF urged the EU, as a State Party to the CRPD and a major humanitarian donor, to uphold its **legal obligations in its external action**. The analysis was informed by exchanges with Palestinian disability activists and OPDs, as well as reports from humanitarian and human rights actors, and EDF's ongoing advocacy towards EU institutions.

## Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is a critical component of implementing the CRPD, particularly in a context of escalating global crises. With increasing conflict in countries such as Gaza and Ukraine, alongside more frequent and severe natural disasters driven by climate change, both the EU and EDF are intensifying efforts to strengthen preparedness and resilience.

For the EU, as a global leader in humanitarian and external action, this means ensuring that risk assessments, early warning systems, evacuation planning, and recovery frameworks are **fully inclusive of and accessible** to persons with disabilities.

## EU Youth Policy Dialogue on Citizen Risk Awareness and Emergency Preparedness

On 26 February, Hadja Lahbib, European Commissioner for Equality and Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management, hosted a [policy dialogue](#) with young people on citizen risk awareness and emergency preparedness.

EDF joined the discussion, where Commissioner Lahbib highlighted the disproportionate risks persons with disabilities face during crises and conflicts. EDF emphasised the urgent need for **stronger disability inclusion** and **improved accessibility** in crisis preparedness and response efforts.



## Embedding Disability Rights in EU Preparedness

In early March 2025, EDF participated in a training on emergency preparedness organised for staff and partners of the EC. The training was hosted by DG ECHO in collaboration with the World Bank.

During the session, EDF shared good practice examples from its members in Latvia, Lithuania, Spain, and the Netherlands, highlighting the importance of **accessibility** and **meaningful participation** of persons with disabilities in preparedness and response activities.

The session was held ahead of the official release of the EU's Preparedness Union Strategy later in March 2025.

## Disability Inclusion in the EU Preparedness Union Strategy

On 26 March, the EC launched the Preparedness Union Strategy. The Strategy intends to support EU Member States to prevent and respond to crises. It contains specific links to climate adaptation and **refers to disability twice** in the accompanying Communication document (under [Preparedness and under Crisis Communication](#)). Specifically, Action 33 is dedicated to the development of guidelines that include **“all types of disability”** and relevant training of first responders.

During the reporting period, EDF closely followed developments related to the [EU Preparedness Strategy](#) and its [Action Plan](#), with a specific focus on disability rights and the **meaningful participation** of persons with disabilities. EDF monitored policy discussions and contributed to advocacy efforts aimed at ensuring that preparedness and response measures at EU level reflect disability inclusion.

A central output during the reporting period was the preparation of a regional diagnostic on disability-inclusive emergency preparedness and response covering 38 countries. The diagnostic was led by EDF in collaboration with the World Bank and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) under the UCPM Technical Assistance Financing Facility (TAFF), with funding provided by DG ECHO.

We assessed, how disability inclusion is included into preparedness and response systems at national and EU/regional levels. We conducted an extensive desk review and data collection process, screening approximately 700 DRR- and disability-related documents, policies, relevant reporting processes, as well as cross-cutting legislation, accessibility laws, and workshop outputs.

[consultative workshop](#)

In parallel, two online surveys were conducted between late November and mid-December with OPDs and disaster risk management (DRM) authorities. Overall, **29 of the 38 countries** covered by the diagnostic participated in at least one survey, representing a **76 per cent response rate**.

To complement the desk review and survey data, we organised a consultative workshop on 17 December. The workshop brought together 65 participants, including OPDs, DRM authorities, and other stakeholders. Discussions focused on barriers, emerging good practices, recommendations, and implementation needs, and all inputs were integrated into the diagnostic analysis. To finalise and strengthen the diagnostic, written consultations on the draft report will take place in January 2026. Feedback from OPDs, DRM authorities, and institutional partners will be reviewed and used to inform the final version of the report.

Building on the findings of the diagnostic, EDF will continue to engage with the implementation of the [EU Preparedness Union Strategy](#), advocating for disability-inclusive, people-centred preparedness systems in line with the [Union Disaster Resilience Goals](#), including accessible early warning mechanisms. Through our partnership with the World Bank and DG ECHO, EDF will contribute to the development of guidelines on how to act in emergencies adapted to all types of disability. We will also support the preparation of the training curricula of first responders.

## Climate Action

Persons with disabilities are often **disproportionately impacted by climate change**. Yet climate action seldom takes the requirements of persons with disabilities into account, and OPDs are rarely involved in decision-making processes about this work. In 2005, EDF, sought to advocate for disability-inclusive EU climate action impacting persons with disabilities in Europe and beyond.

## Meeting with EU Commissioner for Climate Cabinet Members

On 21 March 21, representatives of the EDF Executive Committee and Secretariat met with the [Cabinet of Wopke Hoekstra, EU Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth](#). The meeting addressed **increased challenges that the climate crisis** brings to the lives of persons with disabilities, both in Europe and globally.

In particular, we highlighted the fact that [persons with disabilities are still excluded from civil society participation at the highest level](#) and asked for EU support to ensure that this changes. We looked at the specific benefits of disability inclusion in aspects of the Just Transition such as employment, infrastructure, transport and population health and well-being. It was clear in our discussion that this is not only a legal obligation under the CRPD, but is an investment in the long-term, not a short-term cost.

## Centring Disability Rights in the Just Transition

On 25 March, EDF participated in the “[Centring the Just Transition in EU Policy](#)” meeting at the European Parliament. EDF Board Member, Dovilė Juodkaitė, emphasised the need for an **inclusive green transition** that considers persons with disabilities, highlighting that fairness and human rights must be at the core of EU policies. She stressed that accessibility in employment, infrastructure, and transport must be prioritised and that social protections should prevent households of people with disabilities from falling into poverty.

One key message was that policymakers must include persons with disabilities in decision-making processes and view their **inclusion as an investment** rather than a cost. EDF reinforced that a Just Transition must benefit everyone, ensuring no one is left behind in the shift to a greener future.

# High-Level EU External Action Events



Last year also featured numerous high-level events focused on disability and international cooperation, as well as events highlighting inclusive preparedness or integrating disability into climate action. Below, we highlight the key events hosted or participated in by the European Union (EU) following advocacy from the European Disability Forum (EDF) and our partners.

## Global Disability Summit 2025



From 2–3 April, Berlin became a global meeting point for disability rights as the third [Global Disability Summit \(GDS\) 2025](#) convened more than 4,500 participants from over 100 countries, including representatives from the European Commission (EC) and EDF.

One of the key outcomes of the Summit was the [Amman–Berlin Declaration](#) on Global Disability Inclusion, now endorsed by more than 90 stakeholders. In addition, the Summit generated over [800 new commitments](#) from governments, development agencies, and civil society, reflecting renewed global momentum to advance the rights of persons with disabilities.

In the months leading up to the Summit, EDF actively advocated for the EU to participate at a high level and to [make ambitious, measurable commitments](#). As a result of sustained engagement, the EC both participated in the Summit and announced a [package of commitments](#), specifically the EC committed to:

- To safeguard the human rights of persons with disabilities and promoting their social inclusion in partner countries, including under the EU enlargement policy.
- To strengthen the integration of disability rights into political and human rights dialogues with partner countries, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the EU acquis.
- To build staff capacity at Headquarters and in EU Delegations through training and guidance on disability inclusion and the CRPD.

The EC also formally **endorsed the Amman–Berlin Declaration** and its associated GDS commitments.

Further, during the summit itself, EDF Executive Committee member Nadia Hadad represented the European regional perspective and delivered a strong call to action:

“ If we believe in meaningful participation, we must prove it, not just in policy documents, but in action. Not just within Europe, but globally. GDS2025 is our moment to move from promises to progress. An inclusive world doesn't happen by chance – it happens by choice.

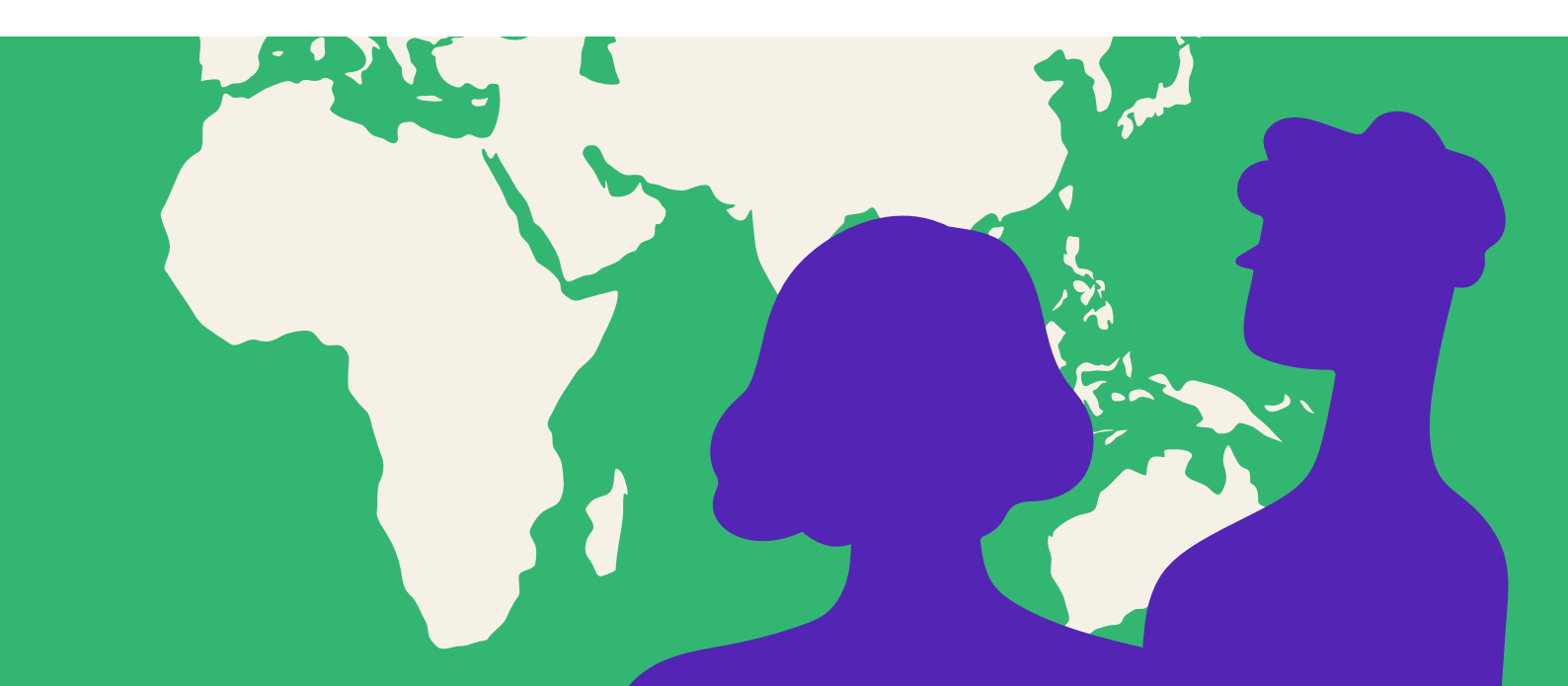
”

Deputy Director-General at the EC's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), who discussed disability inclusive humanitarian action. He emphasised the EU's role as one of the world's largest humanitarian donors and underscored the importance of **systematically prioritising disability inclusion in EU funding**. He also highlighted the **value of partnering with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)**, such as EDF, to embed inclusive practices across EU humanitarian action.

## EU–African Union Civil Society and Youth Forum

For the **first time**, EDF was invited by the European External Action Service (EEAS) to join the European Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) delegation at the [African Union-EU Civil Society and Youth Forum](#). The Forum was preceding the 7th AU-EU Summit in Angola.

This milestone reflects years of sustained advocacy towards the EEAS to guarantee that EU human rights dialogues with partner countries meaningfully include persons with disabilities. This also means **acknowledging serious human rights violations**, such as discrimination, exclusion, and violent attacks on people with albinism. EDF contributed to [Joint Declaration and recommendations](#).



## United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30)



The latest United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) took place in Brazil, from 10-21 November, in Belém, Brazil. EDF was present, with the Disability Caucus in the organisation of **two side-events** and **an exhibition booth**, as well as working to ensure accessibility and disability inclusion in negotiations. We also met with various policy makers including the EU, which remains the **world's biggest donor of climate finance**.

## Disability Rights Week 2025

The third Disability Rights Week in the European Parliament took place from 1–5 December. Initiated by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), the week brought together parliamentary committees and services to organise events aimed at advancing the rights of persons with disabilities across EU policy areas.

As part of the programme, the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) held an exchange of views titled “[Towards a Disability Action Plan in EU External Action: a state of play.](#)” The discussion examined how the EU can better **integrate disability rights** across its diplomatic engagement, international cooperation, development policy, and humanitarian response.

During the exchange, EDF’s Executive Director, Catherine Naughton, highlighted the scale of the challenge and the persistent gaps in EU external action. She stressed that disability inclusion in EU external action **remains inconsistent** and too often dependent on individual initiatives rather than **structural commitments**. She called on the EU to **adopt a comprehensive Disability Action Plan** in external action to ensure that all external instruments – including development funding, humanitarian aid, and diplomatic engagement – are systematically aligned with the CRPD.

## European Day of Persons with Disabilities 2025



The [2025 European Day of Persons with Disabilities \(EDPD\) Conference](#) took place in Brussels on 4–5 December. Hosted by the EC in partnership with EDF, this annual event brought together policymakers, organisations, and persons with disabilities to help **shape a more inclusive EU**.

As part of the programme, we hosted a dedicated panel on **preparedness and crisis management**. The session explored how the EU and its Member States can strengthen the inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency preparedness and crisis response, building on lessons learned from recent crises.

The panel was moderated by representatives from the EC and EDF and featured contributions from a wide range of disability rights advocates and experts including, Ruslan Topchan, a veteran of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and a member of the National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine, who shared a powerful message with European leaders:

“ *For me, Europe is an example of a society where human rights, inclusion, and dignity are not merely declarations but real, lived values. European standards of disability inclusion for example support, rehabilitation, and accessibility became a guiding benchmark for me after my injury.*

*Today, Ukraine is fighting not only for its own territory. We are fighting for the values that form the foundation of the European Union: freedom, dignity, and equality...And including persons with disabilities in crisis planning is a sign of a mature democracy and true solidarity...We are ready to share our experience, to learn, and to work together so that in any country, no person is left alone in a moment of danger or crisis.*

”

## EU-NGO Human Rights Forum 2025

The 26th edition of the [EU-NGO Human Rights Forum](#), held in Brussels on 9-10 December, brought together human rights defenders from all over the world alongside EU representatives for two days of debate on today's most **pressing human rights challenges**. In her opening keynote address, High Representative/ Vice-President (HRVP) Kaja Kallas reaffirmed the EU's commitment to placing human rights at the **heart of EU foreign policy**.

The EC also reaffirmed its commitment to **supporting the work of marginalised groups**. Equality and non-discrimination activists and experts examined how to uphold universal human rights norms amid mounting global pressure on democratic values and the rise of anti-rights movements.

As part of the Forum, EDF co-hosted a Strategy Lab on Disability Rights which brought together human rights defenders (HRDs), OPDs, civil society organisations (CSOs), and EU institutions to explore how OPDs and HRDs with disabilities could be **meaningfully engaged** with EU institutions and Delegations worldwide. It also outlined key frameworks for disability inclusion in EU external action while highlighting challenges, opportunities, and good practices.



# Looking Ahead: Key Developments in 2026



While this report reflects on the achievements of 2025, preparations and advocacy efforts for 2026 are already well underway.

The coming year will be significant for disability rights at both European and global levels. Negotiations on the **European Union's (EU) next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034** will continue and shape funding priorities for the years ahead, including resources allocated to human rights, international cooperation, and social inclusion. These discussions will have direct implications for the extent to which disability inclusion is mainstreamed across EU external and internal policies.

The next phase of the **EU Disability Rights Strategy** will also be a key area of focus. The EU should announce its content in May 2026. As the current strategy progresses, attention is turning to implementation, monitoring, and the potential development of more concrete instruments, including the possibility of a dedicated Disability Action Plan to strengthen delivery and accountability. Similarly, the implementation of the **EU Preparedness Strategy** will test the Union's commitment to inclusive crisis response frameworks, particularly in the context of public health emergencies, conflict, and climate-related disasters.

Internationally, the next **UN Climate Conference (COP31)** will provide an opportunity to assess whether disability inclusion is being systematically integrated into climate mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction efforts. The year 2026 also marks the **20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**. With near-universal ratification, this milestone provides an important moment to evaluate progress in implementation. Across regions, questions remain regarding effective enforcement, **meaningful participation** of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs).

Taken together, these developments will help determine whether disability inclusion is further consolidated within policy frameworks and funding structures, or whether gaps persist. Continued monitoring, advocacy, and engagement will be essential to ensure that progress is sustained and strengthened in the years ahead.

# Stay Connected: Our Global Action Newsletter



The European Disability Forum (EDF) consistently publishes its 'Global Action' newsletter, showcasing the latest news on its work on disability-inclusive international cooperation and humanitarian action. We also highlight the contributions and work of our members and partners.

In 2025, we published [10 newsletters](#), reaching a readership of 648 subscribers up from 541 in 2024.

To stay connected and receive our newsletter, [please register on EDF's website](#).

For more information on our work and projects, please contact the International Cooperation team:

[international.cooperation@edf-feph.org](mailto:international.cooperation@edf-feph.org)

**Author:** Erika Hudson

**Contributors:** Marion Steff, EDF International Cooperation Manager, An-Sofie Leenknecht, EDF Human Rights Coordinator, and Phillipa Tucker, EDF Eastern and Central Europe Coordinator

**Designer:** Rodoula Nikolaou



The European Disability Forum  
7-8 Avenue des Arts 1210  
Brussels – Belgium

[info@edf-feph.org](mailto:info@edf-feph.org)

[www.edf-feph.org](http://www.edf-feph.org)

Follow @MyEDF on social media

