



# DISABILITY INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION COP26 ADVOCACY PAPER



## Towards COP26: Enhancing Disability Inclusion in Climate Action

### 1. Introduction

This document highlights the disproportionate impact of climate change and the possible adverse impacts of climate mitigation and adaptation activities on persons with disabilities. It also proposes measures to ensure the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in climate-related decision-making.

This document was first drafted by the [Disability Inclusive Climate Action Research Program](#), acting under the Center for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism, McGill University in collaboration with a group of civil society organizations including organizations of persons with disabilities. The document was then reviewed by the [Disability Inclusive Climate Action Working Group](#) established under [Global Action on Disability \(GLAD Network\)](#) and was also endorsed by the International Disability Alliance.

Outline of the paper:

- Addresses the impact of the exclusion of persons with disabilities from climate governance;
- Outlines why a disability inclusive approach to climate change is needed;
- Highlights the contributions that persons with disabilities and their representative organisations can make to climate action; and
- Suggests a set of key priorities and recommendations for States, donors, the private sector, the civil society and OPDs at national, regional, and international levels to ensure the meaningful inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in climate action.

### 2. The Exclusion of Persons with Disabilities from Climate Governance and its Consequences

Although persons with disabilities constitute 15% of the world's population, climate action, including at the multilateral level, has neglected to fully reflect their rights. While the preamble to the [2015 Paris Agreement](#) includes persons with disabilities as one of the groups most acutely affected by climate change, they have been largely excluded from decision-making processes and outcomes under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as from States' climate change policies and plans at the domestic level.

The failure to include persons with disabilities in the world's efforts to combat the climate crisis has dramatic consequences. Due to inaccessible disaster preparedness plans, systemic discrimination, and widespread poverty, people with disabilities are left behind in relief and response efforts. The impacts of climate change – from rapid onset disasters such as typhoons and wildfires, to more gradual changes such as droughts, temperature increase, and sea level rise – have disproportionate effects on the lives, well-being, and

livelihoods of persons with disabilities all over the world. The consequences of climate change are especially severe for members of the disability community that experience intersecting forms of discrimination, including women, children, Indigenous peoples, older persons, displaced populations and other marginalized groups; for those experiencing poverty; and for underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities, such as persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities and persons with deafblindness.

Being overrepresented in low- and middle-income countries and rural areas with higher reliance on agricultural activities, persons with disabilities face heightened risks posed by climate change, which are closely interlinked with food insecurity. Existing barriers to accessing food, nutrition, and equitable participation in the food production chain will thus continue to exacerbate their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Yet only 1.7 percent of global climate finance reaches small-scale agricultural producers. It is therefore pivotal to link the climate and agriculture agenda, and target climate finance to poor rural communities, including persons with disabilities.

In addition to being more exposed to the impacts of climate change, persons with disabilities may also be adversely affected by responses to climate change. Policies to reduce carbon emissions, such as carbon pricing schemes or bans of carbon intensive products, are often designed without consideration of the rights, perspectives, and requirements of the disability community, and do not address the differential costs and burdens that these may impose on individuals with disabilities. These types of ableist climate mitigation policies create barriers for persons with disabilities and reinforce social inequities.

As the world moves forward with measures to combat climate change, it is vital that States and other actors design and implement disability-inclusive policies that enhance and protect, rather than undermine, the human rights of persons with disabilities.

### 3. Why A Disability Rights Approach to Climate Change?

The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#) specifically obliges its state parties to fulfil a broad range of human rights held by persons with disabilities, including civil and political rights, social, economic, and cultural rights, and rights that address the particular challenges they face (such as obstacles to accessibility, independent living and community inclusion, and personal mobility). In addition, the UNCRPD requires that State parties ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in the development and implementation of legislation, policies and other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities (Art. 4(3)), as well as the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters ([Art. 11](#)).

These specific obligations under the UNCRPD guide the interpretation of States' existing legal commitments in the realm of climate change, including the preamble to the Paris Agreement which recognises that 'Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights,' including the rights of persons with disabilities.

As has been stressed by the UN Human Rights Council, the [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#), and the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, States must therefore

adopt a disability-inclusive, human rights-based approach to climate governance. This includes obligations to:

- (1) assess and document the differing impacts of climate change on the rights of persons with disabilities through an approach that recognizes overlapping forms of inequality;
- (2) develop and implement evidence-based climate mitigation and adaptation policies to prevent and minimize the negative impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities;
- (3) provide accessible information on climate change to persons with disabilities;
- (4) strengthen the capacity of persons with disabilities to participate in climate decision-making that concerns them;
- (5) ensure that persons with disabilities have access to effective remedies when they suffer harm from climate action or inaction; and
- (6) support international efforts to combat climate change and enhance the climate resilience of persons with disabilities in low- and lower-middle-income countries through international cooperation and assistance.

#### ***4. How Persons with Disabilities Can Contribute to Climate Mitigation and Adaptation***

As demonstrated in many fields, such as disaster risk reduction, education, and architectural and industrial design, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations possess skills, knowledge, and resources that are vital to efforts to transform societies and make them more accessible, equitable, and sustainable. They understand the barriers that they face in the context of climate change and can identify solutions to remove those barriers. Disability-inclusive engagement is an investment that not only benefits persons with disabilities and their families, but also many other most marginalized people in society.

- As a part of every society, persons with disabilities have the right and responsibility to make climate-conscious decisions individually and as a movement, and work with all fellow human beings to save the future of humanity by efficient climate adaptation and climate mitigation strategies.
- The active participation of persons with disabilities in the design and redesign of infrastructures to meet climate mitigation targets simultaneously improves accessibility and resilience of those infrastructures.
- Inclusion of persons with disabilities in communication and storytelling about the impact of climate change and climate action ensures that genuine, legitimate and fully representative information is used for decision-making.
- Persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, especially at the grassroots level, are best-placed to support the development of information and communication systems and networking to ensure that they reach community members who are most impacted by climate change and climate activities.
- Consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the design and implementation of 'green policies' increases the legitimacy and effectiveness of these policies.

#### ***5. Key Priorities and Recommendations***

##### **A. For States:**

In line with their obligations under international human rights law, the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council, the OHCHR, and building on the efforts of the UNFCCC to integrate human rights in its

activities, States must meaningfully include persons with disabilities in all decision-making processes, thus allowing them to fully enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others.

In particular, we call on States to adopt the following measures to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are protected, respected and fulfilled in the context of the climate crisis at local, national, regional and global levels:

1. Adopt and implement ambitious measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a manner compatible with maintaining the global temperature increase below 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This is in order to limit the detrimental impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities as one of the groups experiencing the most harm caused by climate crisis;
2. Ensure the meaningful, informed, and effective participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations in climate policy-making and decision-making processes including UNFCCC processes;
3. Ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are respected, protected, and fulfilled in the design, development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all climate mitigation and adaptation policies;
4. Adopt and implement disability-inclusive climate change adaptation policies that enhance the resilience of persons with disabilities to different climate impacts;
5. Promote the role of persons with disabilities in sustainable and climate-resilient food production to achieve food security by removing barriers to land, other productive resources and financial services in law and policy;
6. Adopt and implement disability-inclusive climate change mitigation policies that do not undermine the human rights of persons with disabilities but enable them to contribute to, and benefit from, the efforts to decarbonize societies;
7. Take all measures to ensure that persons with disabilities are included in all initiatives promoting a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all;
8. Adopt an intersectional perspective towards disability-inclusive climate action that recognizes and addresses the multiple barriers faced by women, children, Indigenous people, displaced persons, minority groups and older persons with disabilities, persons with disabilities living in poverty; and underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities, such as persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities and persons with deafblindness;
9. Adopt a disability-inclusive approach to international cooperation in the field of climate change;
10. Support measures to ensure the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities and their human rights under the UNFCCC, including in the context of climate-related education, capacity-building, training, and public participation, through a comprehensive set of measures to ensure that States adopt disability-inclusive solutions to the climate crisis, aiming to adopt and implement a disability inclusion action plan by 2030.

**B. For donors:**

1. Ensure dedication of sufficient resources to identify and address gaps in inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in climate adaptation and climate mitigation policies;
2. Mobilise resources and target dedicated climate financing to enhance inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in climate action, prioritizing projects lead by organizations of persons with disabilities;
3. Include appropriate obligations and safeguards in funding processes to ensure mainstream climate action is accessible, does not undermine disability rights, and facilitates meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations at all stages of design, implementation and monitoring.

**C. For private sector:**

1. Take all necessary measures to respect and promote the human rights of persons with disabilities, including accessibility when designing and implementing climate pledges;
2. Consider making disability-specific climate pledges to ensure persons with disabilities are not left out of climate action and are enabled to play an active role in global solutions to the climate crisis.

**D. For the civil society including climate NGOs:**

1. Ensure that mainstream climate activities are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities, and that persons with disabilities are informed of and are able to participate in global, regional, national and local climate campaigns;
2. Create learning and growing opportunities for persons with disabilities, including youth with disabilities to join the climate movement and play an active role;
3. Prioritize connecting and partnering with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities in order to support and facilitate their engagement with the mainstream climate movement.

**E. For Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs):**

1. Prioritize engaging in relevant initiatives and amplify climate action messages in coordination and collaboration with other stakeholders;
2. Consider designing and implementing programs to enhance the awareness and capacity of members in order to play more efficient role in climate movement and enhancing disability inclusion and participation;
3. Establish connections with climate actors and advocates for inclusivity and accessibility of climate action at different levels.

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***Endorsements of this paper***

For a list of Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network members who have endorsed this Advocacy Paper, [please click here](#).

If you are a GLAD member and want to endorse this Advocacy Paper, please write to the GLAD Secretariat ([glad@ida-secretariat.org](mailto:glad@ida-secretariat.org)) with the subject line: Endorse COP26 Disability Inclusive Climate Action Advocacy Paper.