



House of Commons  
International Development  
Committee

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**FCDO and disability-  
inclusive development**

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**Third Report of Session 2023–24**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
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## The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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## Summary

People with disabilities<sup>1</sup> face increased barriers to participation in every aspect of society. They are more likely to face violence, poverty and discrimination, and they are less likely to find employment or to enter education. Significantly, women with disabilities struggle to access appropriate information and services relating to their sexual and reproductive health and rights and face numerous challenges to their bodily autonomy.

The Committee is pleased that the United Kingdom has led the way globally in promoting disability inclusion across its development portfolio. In recent years, the Government has launched two strategies on disability inclusion; co-founded the Global Action on Disability Network; and hosted the inaugural Global Disability Summit. However, in recent years the UK cut its development budget from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%, with devastating consequences, as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office foresaw in equality impact assessments relating to the decision.

Furthermore, we heard evidence that, despite good work, the Department has still not sufficiently mainstreamed disability inclusion across its development activities. This has two effects: the unacceptably poor integration of people with disabilities into development work; and the siloed thinking of various departmental offices, with insufficient consideration paid to disability inclusion across different strategies and targets published by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. This is compounded by the Department's poor data collection practices across its development work, with multiple commitments to collect disability-disaggregated data as yet unmet. This leaves the Department with a poor evidence base and will hinder the development of best practice.

We also heard of the Department's mixed record on the safeguarding of people with disabilities across its development work, with some witnesses describing this aspect of safeguarding as an afterthought for programme managers. The Department's multiple pledges on ending the mass institutionalisation of children with disabilities have also come under scrutiny, with little progress reported on this goal in the years since the ambition was first revealed.

The Department's engagement with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities also came in for criticism. Stakeholders note that OPDs are consulted arbitrarily and without obligation, making it all too common that policy decisions affecting people with disabilities are made without their direct input. Finally, we heard evidence that the Government does not pay enough attention to the needs of people with disabilities in its planning for humanitarian response and climate change adaptation policies.

1 In line with the sources cited, this Report refers to "people with disabilities". Other organisations, including Disability Rights UK, prefer "Disabled people". More information can be found here: [Disability Rights UK, Social Model of Disability: Language](#)

# 1 Disability inclusion in context

1. People with disabilities throughout the world—approximately 1.3 billion people, or 16% of the global population—face more barriers to equal participation in society than those without disabilities. Some 80% of people with disabilities live in low and middle-income countries, where more than half of the 65 million children with disabilities were not in education prior to the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, which worsened matters for many. In the job market, only 20% of women with disabilities are employed. Meanwhile, for those who are excluded from accessing employment, only 8.6% of people with severe disabilities in low-income countries receive any form of social protection benefit.<sup>2</sup> On average, people with disabilities experience poverty at more than twice the rate of those without disabilities and are disproportionately impacted—by up to two to four times—by climate change.<sup>3</sup>

2. An estimated 240 million children worldwide live with disabilities, with one in six experiencing significant disability.<sup>4</sup> Children with disabilities are twice as likely never to attend school, three times more likely to be underweight and four times more likely to experience physical violence.<sup>5,6</sup>

3. Furthermore, the almost one-fifth of women with a disability worldwide face significant barriers to accessing information, education and services relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights that are adequate, comprehensive and free of prejudice. They are routinely denied their right to bodily autonomy and face reproductive rights violations, including forced or coerced sterilisation, forced contraception, denial of access to contraception and forced medical procedures to control menstruation.<sup>7</sup> Women with disabilities are up to 10 times more likely to experience gender-based violence, while up to 70% experience sexual abuse before turning 18.<sup>8</sup> This is often compounded by disability-specific violence, including caregivers withholding or removing assistive devices or refusing to assist with daily living. In addition, support services for women experiencing violence tend not to be accessible for people with disabilities and are not adequately suited to their specific needs.<sup>9</sup>

4. Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities obliges the UK to ensure that international co-operation, including development programming, is inclusive of and accessible to people with disabilities.<sup>10</sup> However, as the Government notes in the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030:

2 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

3 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#), 2022

4 UNICEF, [The world's nearly 240 million children living with disabilities are being denied basic rights](#), 2022

5 UNESCO, [Inclusion and Education](#)

6 UNICEF, [Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities](#), 2022

7 Hameed S, Maddams A, Lowe H, et al. (2020). From words to actions: systematic review of interventions to promote sexual and reproductive health of persons with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries; *BMJ Global Health* 2020;5:e002903. doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2020-002903; Matin, B.K., Williamson, H.J., Karyani, A.K. et al. (2021).

8 Plan, [Factsheet: Violence Against Women and Girls](#), 2013

9 UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) [\(DIS0008\)](#)

10 United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – article 32](#)

... progress on disability rights has been too slow and exclusion is still built into our collective systems and processes.<sup>11</sup>

## Recent developments

5. There have been numerous advances in disability inclusion across development policy since this Committee held inquiries on the issue in 2014 and 2019. The UK has historically been an international leader in advancing the rights of people with disabilities internationally. Together with the International Disability Alliance, the UK co-founded the Global Action on Disability Network, a co-ordination body of bilateral and multilateral donors and agencies, public and private foundations and key coalitions within the disability movement with a common interest in achieving inclusive international development and humanitarian action.<sup>12</sup>

6. In 2014, the Department for International Development, prior to its merger with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, launched the Disability Framework, which aimed to educate staff on how to better include and centre disability-inclusive policies within the Department's wider actions.<sup>13</sup> In 2018, the UK hosted the inaugural Global Disability Summit, bringing together more than 1,000 delegates from Governments, donors, private sector organisations, charities and organisations of persons with disabilities. Of the 17 commitments that the UK made at the summit, all but four have been implemented, with progress on the remainder under way.<sup>14</sup> At the Global Disability Summit 2022, the Government made 18 further commitments aimed at helping to deliver the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy, which is covered in greater detail later in this Report.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the FCDO has provided £288,000 to fund the Global Disability Summit secretariat since 2020.<sup>16</sup> The UK also advocated the "Leave No One Behind" agenda<sup>17</sup> during negotiation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and has since re-affirmed its commitment to prioritising those who have the least opportunity and are most excluded.<sup>18</sup>

However, major challenges remain for disability inclusion, including the impacts of covid-19, global conflict and climate change, which disproportionately affect people with disabilities.<sup>19</sup>

## Impact of cuts

7. In response to the increasing fiscal pressures on the UK economy, in 2021 the UK Government reduced the percentage of gross national income committed to aid spending

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11 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

12 Global Action on Disability, [The Network](#)

13 Department for International Development, [Disability Framework](#), December 2014

14 International Disability Alliance ([DIS0011](#))

15 UK Government, [Global Disability Summit 2022: new UK development commitments to progress the FCDO's work on global disability rights](#), 16 February 2022

16 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

17 More information can be found here: United Nations, [Universal Values—Principal Two: Leave No One Behind](#)

18 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

19 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

from 0.7% to 0.5%, with significant consequences for UK development programmes and for people with disabilities across low and middle-income countries. In written evidence, the FCDO told us:

At this stage, it is not possible to provide substantial analysis of the risk of direct or indirect discrimination stemming from the ODA reduction.<sup>20</sup>

However, equality impact assessments, produced by the Department in 2021 and 2023 ahead of decisions to reduce the percentage of GNI committed to aid spending, confirmed the likely significant impact of ODA cuts on people with disabilities. For example, the 2023–24 assessment explicitly states:

It is clear that the impact of the ODA reductions on FCDO programming with a strong focus on fostering equalities is expected to be severe.

It goes on to state that:

UK humanitarian and basic services support is targeted towards those with the greatest needs ... [including] people with disabilities ... Reductions will inevitably impact on equalities and inclusion objectives.<sup>21</sup>

8. The FCDO told us of the likely negative impact of the cuts on mainstreamed programmes across the Department’s development portfolio that support people with disabilities:

Recent qualitative analysis of 21 cost centres with the largest reductions indicate a reduction in the number and size of targeted programme activities aimed at reaching those furthest behind—including women, girls and people with disabilities.

This includes consequences in Ethiopia that mean 8,000 children with disabilities will not benefit from improved learning environments; and in South Sudan, where work on disability, inclusion and mental health will cease, which will impact on the elderly and people with disabilities.<sup>22</sup>

9. FHI 360, which partners with the FCDO on aid programmes, suggests that cuts to programme budgets can reduce its ability to partner with organisations of persons with disabilities.<sup>23</sup> It also states that cuts can impact its ability to provide reasonable adjustments or perform thorough assessments to identify barriers and opportunities for people with disabilities participating in leadership activities.<sup>24</sup>

10. Other areas subject to cuts include:

- The Women’s Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme, affecting the number of women able to access sexual and reproductive health services;

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20 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

21 FCDO, [Equality Impact Assessment for ODA Allocations 2023–24](#), July 2023

22 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

23 A detailed definition of organisations of persons with disabilities can be accessed via: UNICEF, [Engaging with organizations of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action](#)

24 FHI 360 ([DIS0006](#))



- The ASCEND programme, which focused on neglected tropical diseases and directly impacted persons with disabilities;
- A protection programme with disability elements for refugees in the middle east;
- A health programme in Bangladesh with the potential to reach 140,000 people with disabilities;
- A focus on disability inclusion and mental health in FCDO’s Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience programme in South Sudan;
- A Foundational Learning for Girls opportunity that was being developed in Uganda; and
- The FCDO’s flagship Disability Inclusive Development programme, which received significant annual budget cuts from 2020 to 2024.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, our Report on “Extreme Poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals” concluded that “cuts were made with little reference to need or poverty impact, and they disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable groups”.<sup>26</sup>

11. Owing to these impacts, stakeholders in the sector are dubious about the sustainability of the UK’s role in international development going forward. For example, nearly 90% of members of the BOND Disability and Development Group—an umbrella organisation for charities working to improve conditions for people with disabilities in low and middle-income countries—recently reflected that the UK’s leadership on disability inclusion has weakened in recent years.<sup>27</sup> Even the Minister of State for Development and Africa, Rt. Hon. Andrew Mitchell MP (“the Minister”), reflected in 2022 that the cuts had negatively affected the UK’s reputation in the sector, and that

... while we used to be a development superpower, we have currently lost that reputation.<sup>28</sup>

**12. Globally, the UK has been at the forefront of advancing disability inclusion across development programmes. However, as equality impact assessments published in recent years confirm, the FCDO knew that Official Development Assistance cuts would significantly harm people with disabilities.**

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25 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))

26 [Fifth Report - Extreme poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

27 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))

28 International Development Committee, [Future of UK Aid](#), 6 December 2022, Q438

## 2 Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–30

13. The FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy 2022–2030 was launched in February 2022, following consultation with more than 100 international disability organisations, including organisations of persons with disabilities. On its release, the Government announced that the strategy

... reaffirms the UK’s commitment to act as a global leader on disability inclusion

and

... emphasises that greater voice, choice, and visibility are important for the full rights and freedoms of people with disabilities.<sup>29</sup>

14. The strategy builds on the foundations of the 2018 Department for International Development’s Disability Inclusion Strategy and the commitments made at recent Global Disability Summits. It details UK commitments on disability inclusion through its diplomatic and development activity and sets out the FCDO’s international approach till 2030, with periodic reviews anticipated in recognition of a changing global context. The strategy also includes aims to target support through disability-specific development programmes and to mainstream disability inclusion across the breadth of the FCDO’s work, including policy, diplomacy and influencing. The strategic vision is of a sustainable, inclusive and equitable future where disabled people:

... are meaningfully engaged, empowered and able to exercise and enjoy their full rights and freedoms on an equal basis with others, without discrimination and across the life-course. They are full and active members of society and decision-makers in all aspects of life, including diplomatic and development efforts.<sup>30</sup>

### Box 1: The FCDO’s key intervention areas for disability inclusion

- |      |                                                         |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| i.   | Advancing universal human rights, freedom and democracy |
| ii.  | Ensuring equitable, quality and inclusive education     |
| iii. | Achieving inclusive health for all                      |
| iv.  | Realising inclusive economic empowerment                |
| v.   | Building inclusive social protection systems            |
| vi.  | Delivering inclusive humanitarian action                |
| vii. | Emerging intervention area: inclusive climate action    |

Source: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

29 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

30 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

15. The strategy commits to concrete action towards four key outcomes:

- **Rights:** people with disabilities in all their diversity have full and equal enjoyment of all their rights and fundamental freedoms
- **Voice:** full and meaningful participation, representation and leadership
- **Choice:** people with disabilities have more choice and control in all aspects of their lives
- **Visibility:** greater visibility of people with disabilities through quality comprehensive data and evidence.

The strategy also identifies three enablers for delivering on disability inclusion across the FCDO:

- expanding the FCDO’s work on assistive technology, such as wheelchairs, prosthetics and orthotics, spectacles, hearing-aids and digital devices
- a strong disability movement, with commitments made to step up efforts to strengthen organisations of persons with disabilities
- empowering all people with disabilities, including the most marginalised and under-represented.<sup>31</sup>

## Stakeholder reaction

16. The strategy was warmly welcomed by the wider international development sector, with many stakeholders praising the Government’s continued objective of remaining at the forefront of improving disability inclusion across global development projects. The BOND Disability and Development Group noted that

... the strategy is a timely and positive progression that has potential to continue the UK’s leadership of disability inclusion.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, FHI 360 called the strategy a “strong planning tool” for implementing the commitments made at the Global Disability Summit 2022 and particularly welcomed commitments to collect disability-disaggregated data.<sup>33</sup> It also praised the increased focus on sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment in all programmes, with specific attention to safeguarding women and girls with disabilities; and the commitment to the “Leave No One Behind” principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>34</sup>

## Defining disability

17. However, the strategy was not received entirely without criticism, some of which will receive greater focus later in this Report. For example, FHI 360 suggests that the strategy

31 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

32 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))

33 FHI 360 ([DIS0006](#))

34 FHI 360 ([DIS0006](#))

could be improved by including a definition of “disability”, and by addressing specific priorities for certain groups of people with disabilities, such as people with intellectual, learning, or sensory disabilities.<sup>35</sup>

18. When asked, the Minister seemed unsure of the operational definition of disability adopted by the FCDO, adding that he does not directly define it himself:

I am not sure that I can give you a particularly brilliant definition off the top of my head, but, in a way, it is a bit like the wind. You may not be able to define it, but you know that it is there and you know its effect.<sup>36</sup>

However, the Minister later informed us that the strategy is informed by the definition of disability as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>37</sup>:

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.<sup>38</sup>

## Delivery plan

19. According to the Department, the strategy will be underpinned by a delivery plan

... that sets out initial priorities and focus, developed with meaningful participation from people with disabilities and their representative organisations.<sup>39</sup>

It further states that the delivery plan will remain in place until the end of the Government’s spending review period in 2025, at which point it will be reviewed. The Department told us that the plan is not intended as a comprehensive overview of all FCDO activity on disability, but as a tool to create momentum across the organisation and to measure progress.<sup>40</sup>

20. Because the plan is a live document and may change in response to circumstances, such as new ministerial priorities or changes in available resources, the Department has chosen not to publish it—unlike the delivery plan for the previous DFID Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development 2018–2023<sup>41</sup>—although it has been made available to an External Disability Board and members of the BOND Disability and Development group.<sup>42</sup> However, Lauren Watters, director of delivery and impact at Able Child Africa, told us that the BOND Disability and Development Group were invited only to provide top-line feedback on the plan but were not permitted to share details of the plan beyond the BOND Disability and Development Group steering group, which comprises six to

35 FHI 360 ([DIS0006](#))

36 [Q47](#)

37 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([DIS0025](#))

38 United Nations, [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), 2008

39 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

40 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

41 Department for International Development, [DFID Disability Inclusion Strategy Delivery Plan](#), December 2018

42 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

eight members.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, 100% of Bond Disability and Development Group member organisations surveyed believed that the delivery plan should be published.<sup>44</sup> As a consequence, Lauren Watters warned that the international development sector struggles to hold the FCDO to account on the commitments made in the strategy, because

... we do not have indicators. The targets are not very clear. The language that is used in the delivery plan that we saw use words like “some”, “using our voice” or “encourage”, but you cannot measure success against those types of phrases.<sup>45</sup>

21. However, Sightsavers, which has seen the plan, told us that

... the current indicators in the Delivery Plan are too vague to fully monitor progress across thematic areas and instead is a more appropriate way of highlighting examples of good practice.<sup>46</sup>

This was echoed by Lauren Watters, who told us that

... the delivery plan does not reflect the ambition of the strategy. It just does not match up. It does not align. If it was developed alongside and with people with disabilities, as was promised in the strategy, perhaps that would come out a little stronger. The ways in which the delivery plan has included people with disabilities in that conversation is not clear to us, even though there are commitments to do that.<sup>47,48</sup>

22. However, when we put these concerns to the Minister, he reiterated his belief that the progress indicators set out in the delivery plan are sufficient.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, when asked whether he would allow the publication of the delivery plan, he was clear in his willingness to do so:

Yes. I cannot see any reason why we would not do that.<sup>50</sup>

**23. The Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy provides an excellent framework for improving the disability-inclusivity of the FCDO’s development portfolio. However, major shortcomings have become apparent in the application of the strategy, which are set out in later chapters of this Report.**

**24. *The Department should publish the delivery plan alongside its response to this Report, with all subsequent iterations published on completion.***

**25. *The Department should include in future iterations of the delivery plan, and any update to the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities definition of disability, to ensure that stakeholders are clear on who the Department is targeting development spending towards, and why.***

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43 [Q23](#)

44 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))

45 [Q23](#)

46 Sightsavers ([DIS0019](#))

47 [Q23](#)

48 See also: the Leprosy Mission England and Wales ([DIS0005](#))

49 [Q50](#)

50 [Q51](#)

### 3 Mainstreaming

26. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency defines the mainstreaming of disabilities within development policy as

... a process of assessing and addressing the possible impact of any planned action on persons with disabilities. It is a way to promote inclusion and to address the barriers that exclude persons with disabilities from the equal enjoyment of their human rights.<sup>51</sup>

In that vein, the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy is clear that the FCDO's mainstreaming of disability inclusion will cover both the internal processes of the Department and its development programming:

We aim to mainstream disability inclusion across the full breadth of the global network over time, adapted to country priorities and capabilities. We will champion disability rights through internal leadership and culture<sup>52</sup>

However, the FCDO acknowledges that, at present:

Awareness and capacity on disability inclusion in many FCDO posts and departments is low.<sup>53</sup>

27. The FCDO's mainstreaming work is concentrated on seven specific intervention areas: **education, economic empowerment, social protection, humanitarian action, human rights, health and inclusive climate action.**<sup>54</sup>

The FCDO outlined to us its recent work to improve its mainstreaming of disabilities. For example, it established an Equalities Impact Unit to support the Department in delivering on equalities obligations, focusing on strengthening organisational awareness, guidance and capability on the Public Sector Equality Duty and the International Development Acts; and to undertake equality impact assessments. The unit also aims to influence FCDO's corporate processes to mainstream the consideration of equalities.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, the Gender and Equalities Department of the FCDO encourages all posts to undertake gender equality, disability and social inclusion analyses to assess equalities needs in their country. Furthermore, FCDO posts will soon be able to access a new equalities enabling fund that will provide funding for equalities work, with a particular focus on marginalisation, including disability. From 2024–25, the FCDO anticipates that this fund will support around 30 small projects each year, delivered by the UK's overseas network to enhance gender and equalities capacity and capability.<sup>56</sup>

28. The Minister informed us that the Department does not collect data on the number of staff working on mainstreaming disability across the FCDO, although there is a central Disability Inclusion Team comprising seven full-time staff.<sup>57</sup> The Disability Inclusion

51 United Nations Relief and Works Agency, [Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities](#), January 2013

52 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

53 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

54 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

55 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

56 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

57 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([DIS0025](#))

Team produces resources to raise awareness and equip colleagues to better engage with disability inclusion in policy, programming and diplomatic activities, including guidance for staff on consulting and engaging organisations of persons with disabilities. Introductory training modules on the disability movement, data collection and programming have been introduced, with staff also able to draw on a disability helpdesk for practical support, including evidence reviews, advice on programme design, programme audits or gender equality, disability and social inclusion analysis.<sup>58</sup> A series of disability technical advisers have also been embedded in policy departments, seconded from Sightsavers, who provide expert input, advice and capacity building.<sup>59</sup>

## Criticisms of FCDO approach to mainstreaming

29. A major criticism of the FCDO's commitment to mainstreaming centres on the lack of reference to disability inclusion and the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy across other departmental strategies. According to CBM UK, the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy “still lacks integration across all subsequent FCDO strategies.”<sup>60</sup> BOND Disability and Development Group notes that the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy is not referenced in the FCDO's 2023 International Women and Girls Strategy, the 2022 International Development Strategy or 2023 Integrated Review Refresh, with neither of the latter two mentioning disability or having any observable strategies on eradicating extreme poverty, which disproportionately impacts people with disabilities. Furthermore, BOND Disability and Development Group states that, while the FCDO Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23 mentions the Women and Girls Strategy, International Development Strategy and International Technology Strategy setting “a clear, long term direction for the future,” there is no mention of the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy.<sup>61</sup>

## Equalities continuum

30. We have received mixed evidence on the FCDO's utilisation of an equalities continuum within the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy, which the Department initially committed to introducing at the 2018 Global Action on Disability summit. The continuum was introduced to replace the minimum and higher standards for inclusion that the Department previously abided by, as set out in the Department for International Development's 2018 Disability Inclusion Strategy. These standards required all DFID country offices and departments—including for corporate processes, such as human resources and procurement—to review their leadership and culture; engage with people with disabilities; influence others; adapt programming; and improve data and evidence.<sup>62,63</sup>

31. The new continuum rates FCDO policy interventions from “equality aware” to “equality transformation”. According to the Department:

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58 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

59 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([DIS0013](#))

60 CBM UK (Global Disability Inclusion) ([DIS0010](#))

61 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))

62 Department for International Development, [DFID's Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development 2018–23](#), December 2018

Further detail on the content of the minimum and higher standards can be found in [annex C of the strategy](#)

63 All DFID business units were expected to meet the minimum standards one year after the publication of that strategy, with a phased approach to reaching the higher standards by the expiry of the strategy in 2023.

As a minimum, teams must comply with UK legislation and do no harm, for example through not reinforcing inequalities or creating additional safeguarding risks. As an organisation, the FCDO will progressively move towards equality transformation, empowering women and girls, people with disabilities, LGBT+ people and other socially marginalised groups.<sup>64</sup>

**Fig1: FCDO Equalities Continuum**



Source: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022-30, 2022

32. Sightsavers points out that, while the continuum could ensure application of the strategy by providing a framework for action and situating disability inclusion within broader implementation mechanism, there is a lack of clarity on how this will operate and how it will support the execution of the strategy.<sup>65</sup>

33. The Minister told us that the equalities continuum and the minimum and higher standards included in the previous strategy are “both after the same thing”, but that the continuum benefits from “transparency and openness, so that people can see what we are doing and hold us to account.”<sup>66</sup> However, on transparency, it is not clear the extent to which the equalities continuum is utilised across the Department, nor how widely it has been transmitted to stakeholders. While descriptions are offered, as seen in the diagram above, of what each step on the continuum corresponds to, little is offered in the strategy in the way of targets, meaning that it may not be possible for stakeholders, or indeed the Committee, to properly scrutinise the Department’s progress and to hold it to account on the disability-inclusivity of its work.

## Disability-inclusive spend monitoring<sup>67</sup>

34. In answer to a written question, the Minister told us that, in 2022–23, only 0.7% of FCDO bilateral ODA projects scored a 1 according to the OECD-DAC marker, while only 35.4% of projects scored a 2, meaning that only around a third of UK ODA-funded projects have any focus on disability inclusivity.<sup>68</sup> This stands in contrast to the

64 FCDO (0013)

65 Sightsavers (DIS0019)

66 Q55

67 In 2018, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee—OECD-DAC—introduced the “disability policy marker”, which allows for the monitoring of the disability-inclusivity of Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending. The marker sees all ODA-funded projects in humanitarian and development settings scored between 0 and 2. Programmes scoring 0 have no focus on disability inclusion whatever; programmes scoring 1 have a “significant” focus on disability inclusion; and programmes scoring 2 have a “principal” focus on increasing disability inclusion. More information can be found here: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [The OECD-DAC policy marker on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities](#), 10 December 2020

68 UIN 1581, tabled on 13 November 2023



Government's laudable ambitions on gender inequality across ODA-funded programmes. The International Women and Girls Strategy, published in March 2023, committed to a target of

at least 80% of FCDO's bilateral aid programmes having a focus on gender equality by 2030 (using OECD DAC markers).<sup>69</sup>

35. While the Government has made vague commitments to improving the disability-inclusivity of its development programming, it has demonstrated little in the way of concrete action to achieve this goal. Indeed, as Anna Landre, global research and response lead at the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies, told us:

In development, we have gotten a sense for the gender lens. We need to do the same for the disability lens for every project that we are doing.<sup>70</sup>

36. **Despite Government commitments, disability inclusion has not been sufficiently integrated into the FCDO's policy-making procedures: the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy receives little to no mention across other departmental strategies, suggesting that disability inclusion is not at the forefront of departmental thinking.**

37. **ODA spending on disability inclusion, as measured by the OECD-DAC markers, falls short of our expectations. Whereas efforts to improve gender equality across the Department's development programmes are assessed against measurable spending targets, disability inclusion does not receive the same focus.**

38. ***The FCDO must introduce Department-wide targets on disability inclusion, as measured by the OECD-DAC markers, by March 2025, reporting progress to this Committee by September 2025.***

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69 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [International Women and Girls Strategy 2023 - 2030](#), 2023  
70 [Q18](#)

## 4 Data collection

39. The Government has been clear in recent years on the need to improve its data collection practices, particularly as they relate to the disabilities of participants in UK development programmes. Following the Global Disability Summit 2022, the Government announced that, by 2025, the UK would work toward

... embedding results tracking disaggregated by disability across all new activities... We will collect data disaggregated by disability in programmes where this is possible<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, the Government notes in the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy that:

We recognise limited data contributes to exclusion of people with disabilities by rendering their experiences invisible. Lack of reliable disaggregated data has been a significant barrier in exposing the scale of systemic exclusion and discrimination.<sup>72</sup>

40. Rule 10 of the FCDO's Programme Operating Framework requires that

... all programmes (and policies) must consider and provide evidence on how their intervention(s) will impact on gender equality, disability inclusion and other equality considerations.<sup>73</sup>

The Minister also highlighted that rule 10

... requires programme teams and implementing partners to collect disaggregated data where relevant and possible.<sup>74</sup>

However, this appears to contradict the Department's previous statements on the issue: the Department acknowledges that its work has been hindered through a lack of understanding of the spectrum of disability, driven in part by a lack of reliable data. The Minister's suggestion that only some projects are relevant and present the necessary conditions for disaggregated data collection therefore raises questions.

41. Humanity & Inclusion UK and World Food Programme praise the commitments in the strategy on the collection and analysis of disability-disaggregated data to inform evidence-based decision-making, although the former criticises the lack of detail on monitoring and how the FCDO will measure success. This missing detail may lead the Department to lack clarity on whether its investments are advancing disability inclusion, or on how it will hold itself to account for achieving the long-term systemic change that the strategy envisions.<sup>75</sup> Disability Rights Fund adds further nuance on how to improve mainstreaming across the FCDO by suggesting the adoption of data collection practices including collecting data on disabled migrants, refugees and among the internally displaced, and including lead researchers with disabilities in research design.<sup>77</sup>

71 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Global Disability Summit 2022: new UK development commitments to progress the FCDO's work on global disability rights](#), 16 February 2022

72 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–30](#), 2022

73 FCDO, Programme Operating Framework (available [here](#)), 2022

74 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([DIS0025](#))

75 Humanity & Inclusion UK ([DIS0017](#))

76 World Food Programme ([DIS0004](#))

77 Disability Rights Fund ([DIS0007](#))

42. The Government commits in the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy to undertake disability-disaggregated data collection in order to

... better understand the gaps that disadvantage people with disabilities and what works to improve their outcomes.<sup>78</sup>

The strategy then commits to use disability-disaggregated data to design and implement effective interventions, working towards disability inclusion at scale; and to publish disaggregated data and disability prevalence data as a global public good wherever possible.<sup>79</sup>

However, two years since its publication, the laudable ambitions laid out in the strategy do not match the reality of the Department's actions. When appearing before the Committee in December 2023, Nick Dyer, Second Permanent Under-Secretary at the Department, gave some insight into the lack of progress on key targets, telling us:

I am happy to accept the challenge that we do not have sufficient disaggregation data either in the organisation or international development more broadly. That is a statement of fact; we do not.<sup>80</sup>

Mr Dyer concluded on this issue by telling us that

... telling as compelling a results story as we have done in the past is very much on my list of priorities.<sup>81</sup>

**43. The FCDO acknowledges the importance of disaggregated data collection, and has in the past made repeated commitments to disaggregate data by disability. However, as acknowledged by the Second Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCDO, Nick Dyer, this has not been undertaken. We fail to understand how the Department can properly target resources or develop and disseminate best practice across development programmes if it does not know who it is helping and where.**

**44. We recommend that the FCDO includes specific, measurable data disaggregation policies, guided by the UNCRPD definition of disability, in the upcoming iteration of the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy delivery plan, which it should then share with stakeholders and delivery partners. All bilateral ODA projects should include these targets from now on.**

78 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–30](#), 2022

79 Ibid.

80 International Development Committee, Oral evidence: FCDO Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23, HC 346, 5 December 2023, [Q148](#)

81 International Development Committee, Oral evidence: FCDO Annual Report and Accounts 2022–23, HC 346, 5 December 2023, [Q149](#)

## 5 Safeguarding

45. People with disabilities are up to three times more likely than non-disabled persons to be victims of sexual abuse and rape.<sup>82</sup> They are more likely to become infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, due to a lack of access to prevention information and services, and higher rates of sexual and gender-based violence. In conflict and crisis settings these risks are multiplied.<sup>83</sup> Data on the issue is not widely collected, but existing data suggests an estimated 40–70% of young women and girls with disabilities will be sexually abused before they reach 18 years of age; and that girls with disabilities are four times more likely to be sexually assaulted.<sup>84</sup>

46. The Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy is clear that:

Sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) is unacceptable in the aid sector... We will continue to strive to improve SEAH prevention and response in all programmes and across the wider aid sector, paying specific attention to safeguarding people with disabilities.<sup>85</sup>

47. To address safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) in the aid sector for people with disabilities, the FCDO is committed to three priority areas:

- Strengthening the capability of organisations in the aid sector and of FCDO staff to improve their understanding and management of SEAH safeguarding issues, with particular attention to people with disabilities;
- Providing guidance to improve disability-inclusive SEAH policies and programming;
- Strengthening SEAH communities of practice to share learning and encourage voice from and advocacy from and for people with disabilities.<sup>86</sup>

48. The Government has demonstrated interest in disability-inclusive safeguarding through funding Able Child Africa and Save the Children’s Disability-inclusive Child Safeguarding Guidelines and its assurance to “pay specific attention to safeguarding people with disabilities” in the DIRS. However, there is inconsistency between FCDO-funded guidance and its internal practice: the FCDO’s “Safeguarding Due Diligence” for external partners makes only one reference to disability; UK Aid grant holder guidance or reporting requirements do not emphasise reporting on the extent to persons with disabilities were kept safe in delivery; and the cost-per-beneficiary analysis that formed a crucial part of DFID’s 2019 Approach to Value for Money discouraged grantees from budgeting to fully safeguard persons with disabilities.<sup>87</sup>

82 Accessibility, [Why are persons with disabilities 3 times more likely to experience sexual assault?](#), 2022

83 MSI Reproductive Choices ([DIS0018](#))

84 Able Child Africa, Disability Inclusive Child Safeguarding guidelines (available [here](#)), 2021

85 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

86 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))

87 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))

49. The FCDO accepted most recommendations from our report on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries and has since implemented a safeguarding strategy.<sup>88</sup> However, according to Sightsavers, which has worked with the FCDO on numerous development programmes:

Through our work with governments, it is clear that inclusive safeguarding policies are not in place... The FCDO could do more to advocate for disability inclusive safeguarding policies with governments.<sup>89</sup>

50. We heard various criticisms of the FCDO's approach to safeguarding. One clear theme was the poor accessibility of safeguarding practices for people with disabilities as set out in the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy.<sup>90</sup> We also heard that the strategy lacks specific safeguarding solutions and outcome targets, in line with the International Women and Girls Strategy, that aim to advance more detailed safeguarding approaches for different groups of people with disabilities.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, anonymous respondents to a survey produced by the Committee on the safeguarding approaches taken in FCDO programmes were mixed. One respondent noted that:

Sometimes it can feel like a favour because of the power imbalance from the officials mandated to oversee the programmes, when there is power imbalance it means you cannot ask questions and only takes what you have been given even if it is not appropriate<sup>92</sup>

51. Watters also states that the cost-per-beneficiary analysis that formed a crucial part of DFID's 2019 "Approach to Value for Money" can discourage grantees from budgeting to fully safeguard persons with disabilities, as the costs associated with disability-inclusive safeguarding can be seen as expensive and therefore affect the overall efficiency of the intervention.<sup>93</sup> This point was somewhat accepted by the Minister, who was clear that value-for-money considerations should play at least some role when weighing up the extent to which people with disabilities should be adequately safeguarded across development programmes:

There is a balance to be struck there, and I have always tried to make sure that we get that balance right, but providing value for money must always be a driving ambition of Ministers who are responsible for how taxpayers' money is spent.<sup>94</sup>

52. Finally, Lauren Watters noted that UK Aid grant holders are not required to talk about or think about inclusive safeguarding:

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88 [First Special Report: Follow-up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government Response to the First Report of the of the Committee, Session 2019](#)

89 [Sightsavers \(DIS0019\)](#)

90 [The Leprosy Mission England and Wales \(DIS0005\)](#)

91 [FHI 360 \(DIS0006\)](#)

92 [Anonymous IDC survey responses \(DIS0026\)](#)

93 [Ibid.](#)

94 [Q74](#)

In Able Child Africa's DFID funded project working with youth with disabilities—we were not asked once about the extent to persons with disabilities were kept safe in delivery.<sup>95</sup>

53. When asked directly, the Minister was clear in his belief that the FCDO has a firm commitment to disability-inclusive safeguarding, although he added that

... strengthening the understanding and management of safeguarding is extremely important, as is providing guidance for disability-inclusive policies and for strengthening practice, learning and advocacy.<sup>96</sup>

## Institutionalisation

54. Some 5.4 million children live in institutions across the world, often facing violence, abuse and neglect, as well as long-term developmental harm.<sup>97</sup> Crucially, the majority of children in institutions are not orphans: approximately 80% have at least one living parent.<sup>98</sup> An estimated one in three children placed in institutions has a disability<sup>99</sup>, in contravention of the right to independent living and family life, under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>100</sup> The Government affirmed its belief in this right at the 2018 Global Disability Summit, stating that

... we are committed to ensuring all children realise their right to family care and that no child is left behind. The UK government will continue to tackle the underlying drivers of institutionalisation and work towards the long term process of de-institutionalisation.

55. Children with disabilities who grow up in institutions often experience neglect, inappropriate treatment practices and lack of oversight, which can lead to physical underdevelopment, delays to motor skills development, psychological harm and even premature death. We heard that many institutions do not provide even the most basic levels of education; as well as physical, emotional and sexual abuse, discrimination, and violence, including food deprivation, forced sterilisation and electroshock therapy without anaesthesia.<sup>101</sup>

56. The Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy builds on the Government's commitments at the 2018 Global Disability Summit, stating:

We continue to support the global commitment to shift from institutional care of children to community and family-based care... We will continue to tackle the underlying drivers of institutionalisation and strengthen protective systems for children with disabilities.<sup>102</sup>

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95 Lauren Watters ([DIS0024](#))

96 [Q73](#)

97 Chris Desmond et al., [Prevalence and Number of Children Living in Institutional Care: Global, Regional, and Country Estimates](#), The Lancet, 2020

98 Hope and Homes for Children ([DIS0016](#))

99 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))

100 Hope and Homes for Children ([DIS0016](#))

101 Hope and Homes for Children ([DIS0016](#))

102 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

The Minister further restated the Department’s ambition to “work towards the long-term process of de-institutionalisation”. In support of this, he cited the Government’s £10 million Ukraine Civil Society Fund, which has provided eight grants to organisations of persons with disabilities or organisations focused on disability rights, including those working on deinstitutionalisation or to further the rights of children with disabilities.<sup>103</sup>

57. However, according to Anna Landre, although the FCDO mentions deinstitutionalisation in the strategy, there is little substance behind it.<sup>104</sup> Hope and Homes for Children highlights the lack of clear monitoring, evaluation and funding mechanisms for deinstitutionalisation within the strategy, and notes that there has been no reporting on the deinstitutionalisation commitments since the 2018 policy was put in place.<sup>105</sup>

**58. People with disabilities are significantly more at risk of sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of exploitation, highlighting the importance of their appropriate safeguarding. However, we are not convinced that the FCDO is doing all it can to properly safeguard people with disabilities in its programming.**

**59. We have heard worrying indications that mass institutionalising of people with disabilities can have negative impacts. The FCDO should consider this in its programming, and to ensure that none of its programming perpetuates the negative impact of mass institutionalisation.**

**60. *The FCDO should review its approach to securing value for money in development programmes, to ensure that these considerations do not impact on the ability of programmes to effectively safeguard people with disabilities, reporting progress to the Committee within one year of publication of this Report.***

**61. *In its response to this Report, the FCDO should set out what steps it has taken to end the mass institutionalising of children with disabilities, as well as sharing with the Committee the metrics by which the Department measures its performance in this area.***

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103 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([DIS0025](#))

104 [Q10](#)

105 Hope and Homes for Children ([DIS0016](#))

## 6 Engagement with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities

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62. The Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy was developed with the participation of people with disabilities, representative organisations and other civil society partners, aligning with the principle of “nothing about us without us” and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>106</sup> When preparing the strategy, the FCDO conducted a series of external consultations with more than 100 organisations within the global disability movement, which “set an excellent example”.<sup>107</sup> Meanwhile, the International Disability Alliance stated that this consultation

... put diversity, intersectionality, and inclusion at the heart of FCDO’s programming.<sup>108</sup>

Humanity & Inclusion UK suggests that “good efforts” were made to engage organisations of persons with disabilities in many FCDO programme countries, in a “sincere and non-tokenistic way”, adding that the strategy

... strikes the right tone and is admirable in its commitment to hearing the voices and emphasising the rights, choices and visibility of persons with disabilities throughout.<sup>109</sup>

63. Organisations of persons with disabilities suggested the FCDO should move beyond consultations into more meaningful participation, including integrating OPDs into the programme cycle, not only as experts but as delivery partners, noting that particularly marginalised voices within the disability community often fall through the gaps, and that specific efforts must be made to include them. The strategy committed to going beyond isolated consultations towards the active, meaningful and two-way participation of people with disabilities and their representative organisations in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of FCDO policies, programmes, projects and services.

64. To enable this, the FCDO published internal guidance to help FCDO staff engage meaningfully with OPDs, including how to overcome accessibility issues, which stakeholders called “highly commendable”.<sup>110</sup> This guidance has been promoted across the FCDO global network of staff. An external version is also available and has been shared with several donors and organisations.

However, the guidance has been criticised for falling short of mandating consultation with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities regarding decisions that will affect people with disabilities. BOND Disability and Development Group concluded that “inclusion of OPDs in FCDO policy and programming is still wholly inadequate”,<sup>111</sup> while the Leprosy Mission England and Wales added that

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106 FCDO (DIS0013)

107 CBM UK (Global Disability Inclusion) (DIS0010)

108 International Disability Alliance (DIS0011)

109 Humanity & Inclusion UK (DIS0017)

110 BOND Disability and Development Group (DIS0014)

111 BOND Disability and Development Group (DIS0014)



... there is a long way go before the FCDO's can truly say OPDs are actively present in FCDO's planning and strategy.<sup>112</sup>

Furthermore, the strategy delivery plan states that engagement with people with disabilities will be done “where possible” or “where disability inclusion is relevant to the outcome of the programme”, which undermines the FCDO's commitment to mainstreaming disability inclusion and may send the wrong message to staff about when consultation or engagement is relevant.<sup>113</sup>

65. Stakeholders noted that OPDs often struggle to access FCDO funding, as the funding application process requires specific high-level technical skills that may exclude overseas partners who potentially lack the required technical and industry-specific skills, expertise or capacity. This may create barriers for active participation from people with disabilities.<sup>114</sup> Disability Rights Fund suggests that the mainstreaming of disability inclusion across the FCDO could be improved by increasing the FCDO's central disability funding annually, to ensure that mainstreaming activities across ODA portfolios are adequately complemented with specific allocations for organisations representing the diversity of people with disabilities.<sup>115</sup>

66. When questioned, the Minister told us that the Government consults widely, including with OPDs, when formulating policy. He also cited increases to the disability capacity building programme, which has used £5 million in grants to drive policy change at national and local level. The Minister rejected the charge that OPDs sometimes feel they are used as a “box-ticking exercise”:

In terms of the level of consultation, people will sometimes say, if they do not get precisely what they want, that they think that it has been a box-ticking exercise ... I am confident that we are good at listening to the people who we need to listen to<sup>116</sup>

**67. The FCDO is not adequately fulfilling its commitment to the “Nothing about us without us” campaign for engagement with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), which risks undermining support and buy-in for its development programmes from people with disabilities and OPDs.**

**68. *The next iteration of the DIRS delivery plan should be amended to ensure that Organisations of Persons with Disabilities are consulted on any policies that may affect them.***

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112 The Leprosy Mission England and Wales ([DIS0005](#))

113 Sightsavers ([DIS0019](#))

114 The Leprosy Mission England and Wales ([DIS0005](#))

115 Disability Rights Fund ([DIS0007](#))

116 [Q71](#)

## 7 Humanitarian response and climate change

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### Humanitarian response

69. In recent years, the number and intensity of global conflicts has multiplied. The most recent research from the Conflict Barometer, based at the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research in Germany, puts the number of violent crises in 2022 at 174.<sup>117</sup> People with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by conflict—while in conflict zones, fleeing conflict and in post-conflict situations. Furthermore, climate-related disasters are now more frequent and variable, with up to 216 million people needing to move within their own countries by 2050 due to the effects of climate change.<sup>118</sup> As a result, according to the United Nations, in 2022 an unprecedented 324 million people needed emergency humanitarian assistance.<sup>119</sup> Of these, it is estimated that 41 million were persons with disabilities.<sup>120</sup>

70. The Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy is clear on the importance of disability-inclusive humanitarian and climate action:

The world is at a watershed moment. Conflict, climate change, and COVID-19 are driving a rising tide of humanitarian need, forced displacement, and decline in global freedom and democracy. Crises are disproportionately affecting marginalised people, especially women and girls and people with disabilities, trapping them in cycles of poverty and vulnerability.<sup>121</sup>

71. The Government has made positive progress in this regard: the UK co-led on securing UN Security Council Resolution 2475 on Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Conflict, the first of its kind, which seeks to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to unimpeded humanitarian assistance in conflict settings.

72. However, the World Food Programme highlights limited awareness of disabled people's needs in humanitarian situations, entrenched social stigma and inaccessible infrastructure. It calls on the FCDO to:

Ensure disability inclusion across emergency services, including shelter, food provision, transportation, emergency health, safe water and sanitation services, including for continence

and to

Ensure that in-crisis adaptations to regular services are disability inclusive, ensuring that people with disabilities have continued access to regular services, including alternative education and health services, and equipment necessary for their wellbeing.<sup>122</sup>

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117 Heidelberg Institute for Conflict Research, [Conflict Barometer 2022](#), 2023

118 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Global Humanitarian Overview 2022](#), 2021

119 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Global Humanitarian Overview 2022](#), 2021

120 World Food Programme ([DIS0004](#))

121 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

122 World Food Programme ([DIS0004](#))

73. Iryna Tekuchova, a researcher at Fight for Right, an organisation of persons with disabilities that is helping people with disabilities in Ukraine following the 2022 Russian invasion, told us that the exclusion of organisations of persons with disabilities from the planning for, and response to, humanitarian emergencies is key to ensuring disability inclusivity.<sup>123</sup> She added that:

Organisations of people with disabilities are just used in order to get knowledge and expertise, but not to be involved in their project implementation process.<sup>124</sup>

74. When questioned on the FCDO's specific policies for disability inclusion in humanitarian response, the Minister gave little insight, although he was able to give vague details of the Department's response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>125</sup> However, Anna Landre, whose organisation has been involved in the effort to protect people with disabilities from Russian aggression in Ukraine, was lukewarm on international efforts in this regard, telling us only 3,000 pieces of low-tech assistive technology, including wheelchairs, shower chairs and incontinence pads, were delivered for the entire country.<sup>126</sup>

## Climate change

75. People with disabilities are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis. For example, they are less likely to have access to the financial assets needed to adapt and respond to climate shocks<sup>127</sup>; and they are more likely to be unable to afford insurance premiums, given that they experience poverty at more than twice the rate of persons without disabilities, and will therefore require subsidised support to have equal access to climate risk insurance instruments.<sup>128</sup>

76. Furthermore, disabled people are more likely to live in climate-vulnerable areas: 80% of disabled people live in low and middle-income countries, which are more likely to be severely affected by the climate crisis, including through its physical impacts and the costs associated with climate adaptation.<sup>129</sup> Disabled people are often among those most impacted by and at risk from the accelerating impacts of the climate crisis; sustain disproportionately higher rates of morbidity and mortality following climate disasters; and are frequently excluded from emergency preparedness plans.<sup>130</sup> At the same time, the climate crisis is likely to increase disability prevalence through physical injuries and psychosocial impacts because of climate disasters, food insecurity and malnutrition, and air pollution.<sup>131</sup>

77. Anna Landre told us that people with disabilities are two to four times more likely to be critically injured or killed in the event of a disaster, with the effects of climate change

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123 [Q5](#)

124 [Q7](#)

125 [Qq79–84](#)

126 [Q10](#)

127 Lee, H. et al, [Climate resilience and disability inclusion: mapping and rapid evidence review](#), 2020

128 Bond Disability and Development Group & Climate Action Network UK, [Disability inclusion in UK climate action](#), 2016

129 World Health Organisation, [World Report on Disability](#), 2011

130 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change](#), 2020

131 Lee, H. et al., [Climate resilience and disability inclusion: mapping and rapid evidence review](#), 2020

unlikely to prove any different. She added that climate change mitigation policies, such as the ban on single-use plastics, are seemingly introduced with little account taken of the needs of people with disabilities, and are not viewed through a disability inclusion framework. For example, people with disabilities may require single-use plastic straws.<sup>132</sup> Ophia Bwanali of Leonard Cheshire Zimbabwe agreed that people with disabilities are often not included in climate change risk reduction planning, and instead are seen as “charity cases”.<sup>133</sup>

78. There is limited evidence on how to effectively strengthen climate resilience policies to the benefit of people with disabilities. However, the FCDO commissioned the Independent Evaluation of the African Risk Capacity (Pilot Impact Country Study: Senegal, 2021), which recommended that ARC and its country and Replica partners should continue to explore ways to consider various marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities.<sup>134</sup>

79. The World Food Programme calls on the FCDO to support governments to embed disability inclusion into national disaster risk reduction and anticipatory action systems. Currently, an absence of disability-inclusive perspectives in disaster risk reduction results in a lack of accessible environments, information, and services.<sup>135</sup>

80. The Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy does make mention of improving its accommodation of the needs of people with disabilities in its climate change policies, noting first that:

People with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by climate change. They are more likely to be directly and indirectly severely impacted by climate related disasters, and less likely to have the information and resources available to respond and adapt to climate change impacts.<sup>136</sup>

The strategy then lists the three areas in which the Government intends to improve over coming years, including:

- Improved focus across its international climate finance portfolio on building more inclusive adaptation and resilience, sustainable and accessible physical environments, promoting locally led developments and clean energy that is accessible to all;
- Increased investment in more robust research and evidence on disability-inclusive climate action, guided by a climate justice framework; and improved internal capability to conduct fully inclusive environmental assessments and climate risk analysis, with all new programming under the disability and inclusion agenda including a climate and environment risk assessment, in line with the UK’s commitment to align all programme spend with the Paris Agreement;

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132 [Q18](#)

133 [Q19](#)

134 Oxford Policy Management, [Independent Evaluation of the African Risk Capacity. Pilot Impact Country Study: Senegal, 2021](#)

135 World Food Programme ([DIS0004](#))

136 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

- Work in partnership with key allies to accelerate global attention and action including through key funds, to institutionalise disability inclusion in their work.<sup>137</sup>

81. The Government has taken steps to improve the disability-inclusivity of its humanitarian and climate change adaption programmes. For example, the Minister informed us that the Government specifically requested disability inclusion requirements within the current Green Climate Fund.<sup>138</sup> However, and in line with recommendations made earlier in this Report, the Minister seemed to believe that current policies would cater to the needs of people with disabilities as a matter of course:

In terms of humanitarian need, where you go in to help where there has been a disaster—whether it is a flood, an earthquake or a drought—that humanitarian work will always sweep in people who are suffering from disabilities<sup>139</sup>

82. However, as laid out earlier in this chapter, that is simply not the case. It is clear that greater effort must be made to ensure that the distinct needs of people with disabilities are met during humanitarian response situations and in climate change adaption policies.

**83. Despite the increasing importance of climate change adaption, as well as the constant threat of conflict, disability-inclusive programming is not sufficiently mandated across FCDO policy documents, risking persons with disabilities being overlooked at times of crisis.**

**84. *Led by its Gender & Equalities Department and Disability Inclusion Team, the FCDO should lead Government efforts to review all humanitarian response and climate change adaption policies, ensuring that each includes stronger commitments on ensuring that disability inclusion is properly considered and funded.***

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137 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–2030](#), 16 February 2022

138 [Q80](#)

139 [Q81](#)

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### Disability inclusion in context

1. Globally, the UK has been at the forefront of advancing disability inclusion across development programmes. However, as equality impact assessments published in recent years confirm, the FCDO knew that Official Development Assistance cuts would significantly harm people with disabilities. (Paragraph 12)

### Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2022–30

2. The Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy provides an excellent framework for improving the disability-inclusivity of the FCDO's development portfolio. However, major shortcomings have become apparent in the application of the strategy, which are set out in later chapters of this Report. (Paragraph 23)
3. *The Department should publish the delivery plan alongside its response to this Report, with all subsequent iterations published on completion.* (Paragraph 24)
4. *The Department should include in future iterations of the delivery plan, and any update to the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities definition of disability, to ensure that stakeholders are clear on who the Department is targeting development spending towards, and why.* (Paragraph 25)

### Mainstreaming

5. Despite Government commitments, disability inclusion has not been sufficiently integrated into the FCDO's policy-making procedures: the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy receives little to no mention across other departmental strategies, suggesting that disability inclusion is not at the forefront of departmental thinking. (Paragraph 36)
6. ODA spending on disability inclusion, as measured by the OECD-DAC markers, falls short of our expectations. Whereas efforts to improve gender equality across the Department's development programmes are assessed against measurable spending targets, disability inclusion does not receive the same focus. (Paragraph 37)
7. *The FCDO must introduce Department-wide targets on disability inclusion, as measured by the OECD-DAC markers, by March 2025, reporting progress to this Committee by September 2025.* (Paragraph 38)

### Data collection

8. The FCDO acknowledges the importance of disaggregated data collection, and has in the past made repeated commitments to disaggregate data by disability. However, as acknowledged by the Second Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCDO, Nick Dyer, this has not been undertaken. We fail to understand how the

Department can properly target resources or develop and disseminate best practice across development programmes if it does not know who it is helping and where. (Paragraph 43)

9. *We recommend that the FCDO includes specific, measurable data disaggregation policies, guided by the UNCRPD definition of disability, in the upcoming iteration of the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy delivery plan, which it should then share with stakeholders and delivery partners. All bilateral ODA projects should include these targets from now on.* (Paragraph 44)

### Safeguarding

10. People with disabilities are significantly more at risk of sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of exploitation, highlighting the importance of their appropriate safeguarding. However, we are not convinced that the FCDO is doing all it can to properly safeguard people with disabilities in its programming. (Paragraph 58)
11. We have heard worrying indications that mass institutionalising of people with disabilities can have negative impacts. The FCDO should consider this in its programming, and to ensure that none of its programming perpetuates the negative impact of mass institutionalisation. (Paragraph 59)
12. *The FCDO should review its approach to securing value for money in development programmes, to ensure that these considerations do not impact on the ability of programmes to effectively safeguard people with disabilities, reporting progress to the Committee within one year of publication of this Report.* (Paragraph 60)
13. *In its response to this Report, the FCDO should set out what steps it has taken to end the mass institutionalising of children with disabilities, as well as sharing with the Committee the metrics by which the Department measures its performance in this area.* (Paragraph 61)

### Engagement with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities

14. The FCDO is not adequately fulfilling its commitment to the “Nothing about us without us” campaign for engagement with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), which risks undermining support and buy-in for its development programmes from people with disabilities and OPDs. (Paragraph 67)
15. *The next iteration of the DIRS delivery plan should be amended to ensure that Organisations of Persons with Disabilities are consulted on any policies that may affect them.* (Paragraph 68)

### Humanitarian response and climate change

16. Despite the increasing importance of climate change adaption, as well as the constant threat of conflict, disability-inclusive programming is not sufficiently mandated across FCDO policy documents, risking persons with disabilities being overlooked at times of crisis. (Paragraph 83)

17. Led by its Gender & Equalities Department and Disability Inclusion Team, the FCDO should lead Government efforts to review all humanitarian response and climate change adaption policies, ensuring that each includes stronger commitments on ensuring that disability inclusion is properly considered and funded. (Paragraph 84)



# Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 26 March 2024**

## **Members present:**

Sarah Champion, in the Chair

Rosena Allin-Khan

Mr Richard Bacon

Mrs Pauline Latham

Chris Law

Nigel Mills

Mr Virendra Sharma

## **FCDO and disability-inclusive development**

Draft Report (*FCDO and disability-inclusive development*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 84 read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

## **Adjournment**

Adjourned till Tuesday 23 April at 2.00 p.m.

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Tuesday 17 October 2023

**Iryna Tekuchova**, Researcher, Fight for Right; **Anna Landre**, Global Research and Response Lead, Disaster Strategies; **Ophia Bwanali**, Lower Limb Prosthetic Technologist, Leonard Cheshire Zimbabwe

[Q1–19](#)

**Sunday Isiyaku**, Country Director for Nigeria and Ghana, Sightsavers; **Kevin Sudi**, Kenya Country Team Programme Manager, CBM; **Ms Lauren Watters**, Director of Delivery and Impact, Able Child Africa

[Q20–42](#)

### Tuesday 23 January 2024

**Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP**, Minister for Development & Africa, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

[Q43–86](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

DIS numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Age International ([DIS0012](#))
- 2 Anonymous IDC survey responses ([DIS0026](#))
- 3 BOND Disability and Development Group ([DIS0014](#))
- 4 Bond Mental Health and Psychosocial Disabilities sub-group; and Network for Africa ([DIS0020](#))
- 5 CBM UK (Global Disability Inclusion) ([DIS0010](#))
- 6 Disability Rights Fund ([DIS0007](#))
- 7 FCDO ([DIS0013](#))
- 8 FHI 360 ([DIS0006](#))
- 9 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([DIS0025](#))
- 10 Hope and Homes for Children ([DIS0016](#))
- 11 Humanity & Inclusion UK ([DIS0017](#))
- 12 Institute of Development Studies ([DIS0009](#))
- 13 International Disability Alliance ([DIS0011](#))
- 14 International Organisation for Migration ([DIS0022](#))
- 15 Lauren Watters, Bond DDG co-chair and AbleChildAfrica ([DIS0024](#))
- 16 MSI Reproductive Choices ([DIS0018](#))
- 17 Protection Approaches ([DIS0021](#))
- 18 Save the Children UK ([DIS0015](#))
- 19 Sightsavers ([DIS0019](#))
- 20 The Leprosy Mission England and Wales ([DIS0005](#))
- 21 The Leprosy Mission Nepal ([DIS0001](#))
- 22 The Leprosy Mission Nigeria ([DIS0003](#))
- 23 The Leprosy Mission Trust India ([DIS0002](#))
- 24 UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) ([DIS0008](#))
- 25 VSO ([DIS0023](#))
- 26 World Food Programme ([DIS0004](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

### Session 2023–24

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	The FCDO's approach to sexual and reproductive health	HC 108
2nd Report	Humanitarian situation in Gaza	HC 110
1st Special Report	Investment for development: The UK's strategy towards Development Finance Institutions: Government response to the Committee's Ninth Report	HC 367
1st Joint Special Report	Scrutiny of Strategic Export Controls	HC 436

### Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Racism in the aid sector	HC 150
2nd Report	Food insecurity	HC 504
3rd Report	From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world	HC 149
4th Report	(Fourth Report of the International Development Committee) - Developments in UK Strategic Export Controls	HC 282
5th Report	Extreme poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals	HC 147
6th Report	Aid spending in the UK	HC 898
7th Report	Debt relief in low-income countries	HC 146
8th Report	UK aid for refugee host countries	HC 426
9th Report	Investment for development: The UK's strategy towards Development Finance Institutions	HC 884
1st Special Report	Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 152
2nd Special Report	Food insecurity: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 767
3rd Special Report	UK aid to Pakistan: Government Response to the Sixth Report of the Committee	HC 829
4th Special Report	From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 992

Number	Title	Reference
5th Special Report	Racism in the aid sector: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 956
6th Special Report	Extreme poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1177
7th Special Report	Aid spending in the UK: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1367
8th Special Report	Debt relief in low-income countries: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report	HC 1393
9th Special Report	UK aid for refugee host countries: Government response to the Committee's Eighth Report	HC 1917

### Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Assessing DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 103
2nd Report	Global Britain in demand: UK climate action and international development around COP26	HC 99
3rd Report	The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 104
4th Report	International climate finance: UK aid for halting deforestation and preventing irreversible biodiversity loss: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 730
5th Report	Afghanistan: UK support for aid workers and the Afghan people	HC 919
6th Report	UK aid to Pakistan	HC 102
1st Special Report	The humanitarian situation in Tigray: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 554
2nd Special Report	The UK's Support to the African Development Bank Group: report from the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report	HC 555
3rd Special Report	DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's First Report	HC 780
4th Special Report	Global Britain in demand: UK climate action and international development around COP26: Government response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 1008
5th Special Report	The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1021

**Session 2019–21**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1st Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya	HC 259
2nd Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings	HC 215
3rd Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI	HC 260
4th Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger	HC 596
5th Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings)	HC 292
6th Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 535
7th Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries	HC 605
8th Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts	HC 1186
9th Report	The UK's support to the African Development Bank Group: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 1055
10th Report	The humanitarian situation in Tigray	HC 1289
1st Special Report	Follow up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 127
2nd Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 658
3rd Special Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 742
4th Special Report	Effectiveness of UK Aid: Interim Report & Effectiveness of UK Aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger: Government Response to the Second & Fourth Reports	HC 820
5th Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings): Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1160
6th Special Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1198
7th Special Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries: Government Response to the Seventh Report of the Committee	HC 1332
8th Special Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts: Government Response to the Eighth Report of the Committee	HC 1351