

International Development Committee

FCDO and disability- inclusive development: Government Response

First Special Report of Session 2024–25

HC 568

International Development Committee

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Publication

This Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 17 December 2024, to be printed. It was published on 13 January 2025 by authority of the House of Commons. © Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2025.

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First Special Report

The International Development Committee published its Third Report of Session 2023–24 [FCDO and disability inclusive development](#) (HC 107) on 4 April 2024. The Government’s response was received on 12 December 2024 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Executive Summary

This report contains the Government’s responses to the IDC recommendations given in the report on FCDO’s work on disability-inclusive development.

We welcome the IDC’s report and thank the Committee for their continued leadership on this agenda. The Committee’s scrutiny and recommendations will contribute towards progress within FCDO and more widely. We are pleased that the Committee acknowledges the role the UK has played as a global leader in advancing the rights of people with disabilities internationally. We are also grateful for the Committee’s positive assessment of the framework provided by the FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy for improving the inclusivity of the FCDO’s development portfolio. We remain of the view that this is a long-term and complex agenda, requiring that we learn from, adjust and adapt our strategy as we go.

We remain committed to accelerating the pace of progress on disability inclusion globally. As guided by the definition and principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the FCDO is working hard to include disability across all our policies and programmes and deliver fully on the commitments contained in our strategy.

The strategy, launched under previous administration in 2022, was designed to provide a long-term framework for the FCDO's international approach to disability inclusion up to 2030. A review point for the strategy and delivery plan was proposed to coincide with the end of the Spending Review period in 2025. Following the July 2024 general election, FCDO Ministers have agreed to retain the approach set out in the strategy. The content will now be reviewed and updated to ensure it remains current and reflects Government priorities. The refreshed strategy will be announced at the Global Disability Summit in Berlin on 2 April 2025. It will then be published online.

Recommendation 1:

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

HMG position: **Partially Agree**

The FCDO's Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy upholds the UK's ambitions for its work for, and with, people with disabilities. The approach covers the programming, policy and diplomacy work of policy teams and posts across the organisation and includes the FCDO's internal systems and processes.

A delivery plan was developed following publication of the strategy, setting out actions policy teams will take to deliver on their commitments up to 2025. This was not intended as a comprehensive overview of all FCDO activity on disability, rather as a tool to create momentum across the organisation and measure progress. As the Committee has noted the plan, which is a live document, was not intended originally for external publication - in line with the practice for other FCDO strategies. The full document was shared with the External Disability Board and the Bond Disability and Development group steering committee to allow for full scrutiny of our progress.

The delivery plan is an ambitious and comprehensive tool which sits directly alongside the strategy to create momentum across the whole organisation, measure progress, and support posts and central teams to deliver this ambition. The updated delivery plan will be published, as per the Committee's recommendation, following completion of the strategy review process currently underway.

Recommendation 2:

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.

HMG position: **Agree**

The FCDO's Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy takes a human rights approach to disability inclusion. As the Committee notes, the strategy is informed by the United Nations (UN) definition of disability, as set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD):

“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.”

We will ensure the definition is referenced explicitly in any future iterations of the strategy and delivery plan.

Recommendation 3:

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.

HMG position: **Partially agree**

The FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy (2022 – 2030) commits to ‘mainstreaming a disability inclusive and human rights perspective’ across the work of the Department. In this context, we acknowledge the benefit of setting measurable targets in driving and monitoring disability inclusion across the FCDO programming portfolio.

The Department has made considerable progress towards mainstreaming disability inclusion. Prior to the 2018 Global Disability Summit, only 18% of DFID bilateral ODA programmes were marked ‘significant’ or ‘principal’ against the OECD-DAC disability marker. This has now increased to 35% of the FCDO bilateral portfolio.

The FCDO has supported a proposal for OECD-DAC Working Party on Statistics (WPSTAT) to introduce minimum criteria for the disability inclusion policy marker. This is modelled on the existing minimum criteria for the gender equality policy marker. Should the proposal be adopted, we would have to reassess our programme portfolio against the new criteria.

Following this, we will draw on departmental experience – and that of other donor states – to explore options for a target on disability inclusion. As WPSTAT will not have considered the proposal before March 2025, it will not be possible to complete this process by the Committee’s recommended deadline.

Recommendation 4:

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.

HMG position: **Agree**

The FCDO has signed up to the Inclusive Data Charter and is committed to increasing the number of programme indicators that are disaggregated by disability status as well as sex, age and geography.

The most recent release of statistics on the International Climate Fund and preventing gender-based violence have both been disaggregated by disability status where possible. Nevertheless, we recognise that only a limited number of programmes disaggregated their results statistics and we must do more to improve data coverage.

The current iteration of the delivery plan contains explicit references to disaggregated data, including those related to education; global health; economic development; inclusive social protection systems; inclusive humanitarian action; and disability inclusive climate action. We are in the process of securing the necessary technical resource to develop and publish a new Inclusive Data Charter Action Plan (IDCAP) to help us meet commitments to disaggregate data.

Recommendation 5:

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.

HMG position: **Agree**

Equity and safeguarding considerations are an integral part of delivering good value for money in the FCDO.

We agree that securing value for money in development programmes should not compromise the safeguarding of people with disabilities and believe the FCDO value for money policy is consistent with this. Equally, we know a strong focus on value for money is important for disability inclusive development – it ensures that UK taxpayer resources have the greatest positive impact on the poorest and most vulnerable, including people with disabilities.

The current FCDO approach to value for money already gives special attention to “Equity” and efforts to reach the poorest, most marginalised, and hardest to reach people in society. ‘Equity’ is a core element of its ‘5Es Value for Money Framework’ – alongside ‘Economy’, ‘Efficiency’, ‘Effectiveness’ and ‘Cost-Effectiveness’.

As the Committee has noted, there was a period when DFID’s approach to value for money placed particular emphasis on cost per beneficiary. At that stage, guidance followed what was termed a ‘3Es Framework’, listed as “Economy; Efficiency; Effectiveness”. This was revised to include the ‘Equity’ principle; requiring consideration of how ‘fairly’ benefits were to be distributed, and to what extent the proposed activity would reach marginalised groups. This approach was adopted by the FCDO, alongside an explicit recognition of the importance of Cost-Effectiveness, into a ‘5Es Value for Money Framework’. This was underlined in the FCDO Programme Operating Framework (ProF) rules which include the following:

“All programmes and policies must consider and provide evidence on how their interventions will impact on gender equality, disability inclusion and other equality considerations.

An approach that integrates equality and inclusion improves the value for money of programmes, through increased equity and cost effectiveness. It improves programmes’ social impact, the focus on poverty reduction, and reduces the risk of unintended consequences. It can help us to better design, deliver and target our interventions and explain who is benefitting from our activities and funding”. [FCDO ProF Rule 9 – Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion].

Whilst FCDO has inherited a strong equalities-based approach to value for money and development, it is important staff are supported to apply this across the full range of contexts in which the organisation operates. This is because the different lenses through which to view equity will vary by country, just as the characteristics and identities of people most at risk of extreme poverty, exclusion, stigma, violence and discrimination varies by context. For this reason, we intend to update the equity and value for money guide and share across our network.

We will provide an additional update by the stated deadline of April 2025.

Recommendation 6:

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.

HMG position: **Partially Agree**

The FCDO recognises that children with disabilities are at a particularly high risk of institutionalisation, including children with psychosocial disabilities. We further recognise the harm of institutionalisation to children's wellbeing and development. This is why we made a commitment at the 2018 Global Disability Summit to work towards the long-term process of de-institutionalisation. This commitment was subsequently reaffirmed in our Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy, which advocates the shift from institutional care of children to community and family-based care.

We see the institutionalisation of children as being a direct result of broader development challenges and failures in national child protection systems, such as shortages of social workers, lack of effective referral systems and lack of safe, family-based alternative care. De-institutionalisation is therefore a long-term process that requires the structures and services to be in place at both government and community levels to provide viable and safe alternatives.

The FCDO continues to work towards the goal of progressively ending the mass institutionalisation of children, including those with disabilities. We do this by focusing on the underlying drivers of institutionalisation and working to strengthen protective systems for children with disabilities, including through our social protection, education and health programming. For example, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2022, the UK was instrumental in ensuring the '*Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform*' both recognised the impact of institutionalisation on children with disabilities and contained strong language on de-institutionalisation. In Ukraine, through our £10 million Civil Society Fund (2022–24), we have provided eight grants to organisations of persons with disabilities, or organisations focused on disability rights, which includes those working on de-institutionalisation and the rights of children with disabilities. In Moldova we have just assigned a small grant to a local organisation that supports children in care and foster families. The FCDO also publishes guidance on our Travel Advice pages aimed at preventing exploitative 'voluntourism', for example with orphanages and other children's facilities.

There is a lack of current, robust global data on the number of children with disabilities living in institutions. This presents challenges when setting performance metrics. Recognising however the need to improve monitoring and evaluation of our work on de-institutionalisation, the FCDO will consult on related actions for inclusion in future iterations of the delivery plan. The FCDO will also explore further advocacy, policy and programme work to support de-institutionalisation and children's social care reform globally.

Recommendation 7:

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.

HMG position: **Agree**

As the Committee notes, the FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy was developed in extensive consultation with people with disabilities and their representative organisations, including Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). This led to a strategy which is committed to going beyond isolated and extractive consultations, towards active, meaningful and two-way participation of people with disabilities and their representative organisations.

We agree that OPDs should play an active role in the design, implementation and evaluation of FCDO's work on disability inclusion. This includes policies, programmes and projects which may impact upon people with disabilities. To that end, we have published internal guidance to help FCDO staff engage more meaningfully with OPDs. An external version has also been made available to interested donors and organisations.

The current iteration of the strategy delivery plan contains key actions aimed at both improving consultation with OPDs and building their capacity. We will actively consider additional commitments as part of the upcoming delivery plan review.

Recommendation 8:

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.

HMG position: **Partially Agree**

The FCDO agrees that humanitarian response and climate change adaption policies must properly consider disability inclusion, to be confident that activity will have a positive impact on those most disproportionately impacted and at risk. However, the cross governmental scope of the role envisaged by the Committee goes beyond the capacity of the FCDO Disability Inclusion Team, which is currently comprised of a full-time resource of 7.5 officials.

As the Committee notes in its report, the FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy recognises the importance of disability-inclusive humanitarian and climate action. Inclusive climate action was listed as an 'emerging area' of the strategy on publication in February 2022 and will now be upgraded as part of the strategy review. From a broader humanitarian perspective, the FCDO sits on the UN Disability Advisory Group (DAG), which has strong representation from key agencies and partners co-ordinating humanitarian responses. The DAG, supported through FCDO's humanitarian core funding to the UN, includes OCHA, WFP, UNHCR, IOM, WHO and Humanity & Inclusion as members.

Teams in other government departments leading on resilience planning or aspects of climate adaptation policy are working to ensure that disabled people's voices inform policy moving forwards. This includes work being taken forward by the Cabinet Office's Disability Unit and Resilience Directorate, to ensure that disabled people are properly engaged as part of the UK's Resilience Review.

The FCDO continues to take a 'twin track' approach to disability inclusion. In addition to providing targeted support to people with disabilities, this approach seeks to mainstream a disability and human rights perspective across all areas of the department's work. In practice, this mainstreaming work is concentrated on specific intervention areas, which include humanitarian and climate action. The concept of mainstreaming recognises that responsibility for delivery lies across the whole organisation, not simply with the relevant central policy team.

Towards this goal, we are carrying out a programme of work across the FCDO to build capability on equalities and inclusion. We support Posts and HQ Directorates to explore and develop new approaches to mainstream equality and disability inclusion issues into their work, for example through training, guidance, evidence products and advisory support. We also raise awareness on the importance of considering the Public Sector Equality Duty in all our work, for example in our programmes and business plans. This requires ensuring that before decisions are taken, decision makers have considered equality impacts, i.e. the need to eliminate discrimination, victimisation and harassment (as well as other conduct prohibited under

the Equality Act 2010), advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.